# Consuming Rural Goods and Services
A Consumer-oriented Comparative Analysis

Hans Dagevos
Greet Overbeek
Janneke Vader

RURBAN

QLK5-CT-2002-01696
Building Rurban Relations - D7

Project code 62823

June 2004

Report 7.04.08

LEI Wageningen UR, The Hague

LEI WAGENINGEN UR

LEI Wageningen UR is active in a wide array of research which can be classified into various domains. This report reflects research within the following domain:

- ☐ Statutory and service tasks
- ☐ Business development and competitive position
- ☐ Natural resources and the environment
- ☐ Land and economics
- ☐ Chains
- ☐ Policy
- ☑ Institutions, people and perceptions
- ☐ Models and data

Consuming Rural Goods and Services; A Consumer-oriented Comparative Analysis
Dagevos, Hans, Greet Overbeek and Janneke Vader
The Hague, LEI Wageningen UR, 2004
Report 7.04.08; ISBN 90-5242-917-0; Price € 12,25 (including 6% VAT)
62 p., fig.

This comparative analysis is part of a European research project that focuses on building new relationships in rural areas under urban pressure (Rurban). Consumers and consumption receive special attention in this study. The analysis incorporates the identification of trends and motives related to consumer demand for rural goods and services (RGS) and consumer willingness to pay for RGS. Because consumption and consumerism are key words in the development rural areas are going through, it is all the more important to study this transformation more specifically and comparatively from the consumer perspective.

Orders:
Phone: 31.70.3358330
Fax: 31.70.3615624
E-mail: publicatie.lei@wur.nl

Information:
Phone: 31.70.3358330
Fax: 31.70.3615624
E-mail: informatie.lei@wur.nl

© LEI, 2004
Reproduction of contents, either whole or in part:
☑ permitted with due reference to the source
☐ not permitted

The General Conditions of the Agricultural Research Department apply to all our research commissions. These are registered with the Central Gelderland Chamber of Commerce in Arnhem.

# Contents

# Preface

An important challenge facing the European rural areas is to provide facilities related to the diversity of green landscapes, and to supply other services than the production of food and materials for urban areas. This suggests that the opportunity for rural areas to provide complementary facilities within the urban-rural partnership needs more emphasis. It may be suspected that a rise in the demand for rural goods and services (RGS) related to the green landscape, such as more quality and health products, accessible nature and leisure activities, forms an integral part of what is currently known as the quality of life.

These issues are also addressed by the Rurban project, a European research that focuses on building new relationships in rural areas under urban pressure. The aim of the Rurban project is to analyse the influence of urban processes on rural areas and to study how the development of RGS can contribute to the preservation of the natural and the cultural landscape of those rural areas. The project has several themes of interest at its core, viz., the context of the study areas, the role of consumers, intermediate actors and producers, and the opportunities for building new relationships between rural and urban areas (see www.rural-urban.org). The project is funded by the European Commission (QLK5-CT-2002-01696) and started in December 2002. The Rurban project is coordinated by LEI Wageningen UR and includes research teams from the following participating countries:

- Finland: Swedish School of Social Science (University of Helsinki, Helsinki);
- France: Laboratoire Dynamique Sociales et Recompositions des Espaces (University Paris X, Paris);
- Hungary: Institute for Political Sciences (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest);
- The Netherlands: LEI (Wageningen University and Research centre, The Hague);
- Spain: Department of Geography (University of Valencia, Valencia).

After the previous analysis of the context of the study areas, coordinated by the Spanish research team, the analysis of consumers and their demand for RGS is the second theme. This research theme is coordinated by the Dutch participants of LEI Wageningen UR. Each research team has analysed consumers and their demand for RGS in its own country during the summer and autumn of 2003. The present comparative analysis takes the research outcomes of all five countries together and searches for similarities and differences between the countries. We hope that this report will contribute to discovering the rural consumption issues of today and tomorrow that are relevant for sustainable rural development.

Prof. Dr. L.C. Zachariasse
Director General LEI B.V.

# Summary

The objective of the present research is to analyse the behaviour and motives of consumers related to their demand of rural goods and services (RGS) as well as consumers' willingness to pay for RGS. The most important RGS of the Rurban research areas can be categorised under the headings of respectively housing, tourism/leisure activities and gastronomy/local foods. The result is a comprehensive picture of various (future) visions of consumption and consumers in the rural areas based on interviews with 'consumer minded' experts in five different European countries (Finland, France, Hungary, the Netherlands and Spain). Therefore, this comparative analysis is not a representative overview of collected data of the local population and its visitors in each study area.

The framework is structured around the triple T of Trends, Typologies and Themes. The study looks for Trends in consumers' demand (macro-level), Typologies of consumers (micro-level), and Themes in consumer demand of RGS (meso-level).

*Trends*

With respect to trends, the research concentrates on the Trends that are as close as possible to the research theme in the study areas. The trend *A flight from the beehive* indicates a push factor with people trying to escape from the large (and expensive) cities, into thinly populated areas to live in roomy houses with a yard, whether as a new resident in the M-areas or as a tourist or pensioner in the T-areas.

Relevant trends within rural areas are *The grey invasion*, which signifies the impact of the ageing population of Europe, *Tantalising tourism,* indicating the rise of tourism and the diversification in the demand, and *White-collar farming,* indicating the response of farmers to commodify rurality in regional foods and facilities.

The other trends *The segregation between red (built) and green (nature) areas* and *The particularism of rural areas* indicate a sharper

division between nature and (consumer) culture areas and more individual efforts and rights to realise this.

*Typologies*

The trends are connected to the Typologies of consumers, a framework that explains four consumer images with two dimensions: the materialistic - non-materialistic dimension and the individualistic - collectivistic dimension.

*Calculating* consumerism is characterised as materialistic and individualistic: self-interest is the main factor, and personal gain dominates. *Traditional* consumption also has a materialistic dimension, while it attaches more importance to collective traditions and customs. Continuity is preferred over change. *Unique* consumption is the complete opposite, specifically seeking change and variety. *Responsible* consumption differs from the unique consumer image, because individual pleasure and personal prestige do not have the upper hand. Instead, moral principles or concerns about the (future) consequences of possible consumer choices are involved in the decision-making process. The same consumer can be found in different quadrants with respect to different activities.

If we consider the trends for the RGS that are central in the research, housing, tourism and gastronomy in relation to the typologies of consumers, we see the dominance of individual perspectives in the demand for houses. Sometimes, the consumer demand is predominantly of a calculating nature (e.g. more metres for the same price), at other times or circumstances unique aspects determine consumers' wishes and choices (e.g. a prestigious house in a beautiful scenery).

Tourism in the rurban perspective, thus the hinterland behind the coast, seems to attract the consumers who are searching for authenticity and tranquillity. After fulfilling the conditions to get an efficient and accessible tourist offer, predominantly the traditional and the responsible consumer demand get attention.

Within the gastronomy, the unique consumers are dominant, also because food consumption tends to become more an event in a specific atmosphere and a way to escape from daily life. In particular people who do not have their roots in the regional cuisine are attracted by this gastronomy, because they are offered a contrasting experience.

*Themes*

The trends are linked also with the themes of the RGS defined in four dimensions. The *natural (physical)* dimension of RGS refers to the variety and beauty of the landscape, to fresh air or silence, etc. The *social* dimension of RGS is appreciated by consumers for reasons such as sense of community, social ties, sense of security, or prestige (social distinction). Aspects of the *cultural* dimension of RGS are gastronomy, rural lifestyle, rural idyll or the (re-)affirmation of local or symbolic values. The attraction of the *economic* dimension of RGS stems from the investment possibilities, cheaper houses, time-efficient packages of tourist services, availability of daily services, etc. Looking at RGS in a 'dimensional' way makes us realise that RGS frequently are not one-dimensional but multi-dimensional.

Sometimes the push aspects of the cities are more important than the pull aspects of the RGS. In particular the search for a house in the rural areas near a metropolitan area (M-areas) is motivated by the willingness to leave the city, because of economic reasons (high prices), social reasons (neighbourhood) or a lack of a green environment. Hence, the economic, social and natural aspects of housing are expected to be better in rural areas, even if the newcomers are not always familiar with the social culture in the new residence area. In the rural areas nearby a tourist zone (T-areas) the push aspects are less important than the pull aspects of the RGS.

RGS in tourism have an economic dimension in the sense of multipurpose activities, but also the longing for nature and culture is relevant. Tourists are attracted by the nostalgic rural hinterland, looking and longing for culture and authenticity.

Gastronomy and local products get mainly a more cultural dimension. Regional slow foods and dishes match with consumers' desire for authenticity, integrity, purity and quality.

*M-areas and T-areas*

If we combine the trends, typologies and themes in the M-areas and the T-areas, we see dynamic M-areas in Hungary, Finland, Spain and to a lesser extent also in the Netherlands developing with a conscious segregation between red (built) and green areas in the rural hinterland. In those M-areas the calculating and unique consumers are buying houses, while in France, the M-area is rather stable with efforts being made to exclude others and to keep the existing environment and landscape as well as the identity of the region intact. Here traditional consumers are dominant. The same analysis can be made for housing in the T-areas, where we find the most dynamic ones, and the calculating and unique consumers in Hungary and Spain.

In the M-areas of Finland, France and the Netherlands, recreation activities are nearby and consist of day trips during the year, while gastronomy is less attractive. The opposite holds for the M-areas in Hungary and Spain. The T-areas generally are tourist oriented and more marked by experiences to provide an escape from daily life. Especially in the aforementioned dynamic T-areas consumers are characterised by experiences and the desire for nature and culture with a traditional or responsible feeling. Gastronomy may become more relevant in the T-areas than in the M-areas, because the conditions to offer contrasting experiences are fulfilled easily (e.g. the foreign consumers who are interested in regional food).

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Welcome to the Consumer Society

Consumerism is pivotal in today's world. We are living in a consumer society and consumption and consumers are central to socio-cultural as well as economic life. It is recognised that in order to understand the contemporary social and economic world, it is important to focus on consumption at various levels of analysis. That is, from a global level - e.g. the development of consumerism in relation to globalisation - to the level of individual behaviour - e.g. the importance of consumer goods in relation to people's identity. This has resonated the last two decades in the growing academic interest in contemporary consumerism and consumer culture.

As true as it might be that there is a tendency in (post)modern society to shift from production to consumption, this does not imply that the 'productivist' bias and deeply-ingrained traditions of taking production as the backbone of socio-economic life, do no longer exist or are unimportant. Neither does the current attention paid to consumption imply that the (un)attractiveness of consuming rural goods and services (RGS) from a consumer-centred perspective is extensively investigated. On the contrary, the unavoidable existence of today's blossoming consumer society, has only recently been staged in academic studies on consumption in relation to the topic of the amenities of non-urbanised areas - which, by the way, concentrate particularly on tourism.

These issues are also of relevance to the Rurban project, a European research that focuses on building new relationships in rural areas under urban pressure in Finland, France, Hungary, the Netherlands and Spain. The analysis of consumers and their demand for RGS is the second theme of the Rurban project. Although we had to find our way into this terra incognita, the researchers in question share the conviction that paying attention to consumption and consumers is worthwhile in a world that is characterised as a consumer society, in which consumer-mindedness is a much-devoted buzz word and in which rural areas are often better typified as a domain of consumption than of production. Besides, as far as the amenities of rural goods and services are a focus of academic interest, 'consuming rurality' is hitherto pretty much concentrated on the consumption of 'nostalgia' in the form of the rural idyll or local (food) products. Our intention is to expand this scope and take also into account rural goods and services that are, so to say, directed at the present and the future. The attention is turned, then, to amenities of contemporary life, such as (second) homes, golf courses, marinas, restaurants, amusement parks and the like.

## 1.2 Focal Points of Research

The analysis of the nature and scope of processes going on in areas under urban pressure is central to the Rurban project. In order to avoid that we lose ourselves in definitions of what this 'urban pressure' means, the term refers in general to the tendency that rural areas transform from the domain of agricultural production, in which farmers are the main inhabitants, into a domain of 'urban' and tourist consumption that inhabits all kinds of people with different backgrounds, professions and interests. In brief, this general trend shows a gradual shift from what once were rural areas to what are nowadays 'rurban' areas. The Rurban project concentrates on this transition from rurality to 'rurbanity' and tries to understand the intricacies of this process of 'rurbanisation'.

The present comparative analysis is part of the Rurban project. Consumers and consumption receive special attention in this study. We focus on the identification of trends and motives related to consumer demand for RGS and consumer willingness to pay for RGS.

Taking consumers and consumption as focal point to this part of the Rurban research project does not mean that this study is based upon the results of an empirical survey in which consumers themselves are asked all kinds of questions about the (un)attractiveness of rural goods and services. This should be very clear from the outset. The available time and money of the project do not leave room to question consumers about their desires and dreams. Rather than a survey or focus groups as primary sources of information, the research takes the output of interviews with experts as its research input. As a consequence, in this qualitative study we are talking *about* consumers, not *with* consumers.

In each of the five participant countries forty persons have been interviewed. The selected interviewees are (four) representatives of regional/local public authorities; (four) representatives of interest groups/public providers (nature/culture organisations, musea); (eight) representatives of landowners/private providers (estate agents, directors of theme parks, holiday resorts/hotels, yachts, campsites, farmers with tourism, gastronomy) and (four) representatives of resident collectives and tourist groups. Thus, our selection includes actors from various sectors that are relevant with respect to the provision of RGS to consumers. Having contacts and knowledge of consumers were, understandable enough, selection criteria. We aimed to talk to representatives who are 'consumer-minded' in interest and expertise. We have selected interviewees who are both able and willing to express their ideas and opinions about rural goods and services in relation to the demand side of the market. The consumption of RGS is our focus after all. We aim at a better identification of consumer demand for RGS (see appendix 2 for the questionnaire that served as a guideline for the interviews).

This consumer-oriented approach has two study areas as research domains in each of the five countries. The first one is the Metropolitan area (M-area): the rural area near a metropolitan area. The second one is the Tourist area (T-area): a rural area that is further away from the M-area's adjoining big city and that represents a tourist zone at the seacoast or, in the case of Hungary, on the shores of a lake (see figure 1 for an overview and appendix 1 for a map). The composition of the group of interviewees takes the division into a M-area and a T-area into account by selecting 20 interviewees from each region. The outcomes of each individual country have been reported in separate national reports. For more details, the reader is referred to these reports (see Andersson et al., 2003; Csite et al., 2003; Esparcia Pérez et al., 2003; Hucy et al., 2003; Overbeek et al., 2003).

| Country | Metropolitan study area | Tourist study area |
|---|---|---|
| Finland | Helsinki area | Åboland |
| France | Vexin Français | Pays de Caux |
| Hungary | Budapest area | Veszprem + Balaton |
| The Netherlands | East of South Holland | Islands of Zeeland |
| Spain | Camp de Turia/Valencia | Marina Alta/Alicante |

*Figure 1 Overview of Participating Countries and Study Areas*

Based on the information that is provided by 200 interviewees, the next chapters are devoted to the consumption of RGS in the five countries and its scope of a M and a T study area. A comparative analysis, by definition, focuses mainly on general similarities and differences between the countries and M and T-areas in question. The framework of analysis that is elaborated upon in the following chapter will be used to structure the comparative analysis about the consumption of RGS in chapter 3. In close relationship with the empirical realities of the study areas, each section of chapter 3 concentrates on the relevancy of one or two trends such as distinguished in chapter 2. Chapter 4 analyses the connection between typologies and themes, in particular two topics of main interest. The first one is about the ways to interpret consumers and their variety. It is possible to find unity in the diversity. The second topic deals with what is valued by consumers. It appears to be the case that consumption is of a nonmaterial nature to a large extent - even if consumers do not admit this or are unaware of it. In closing, chapter 5 combines the trends, typologies and themes in order to compare the dynamics of consuming RGS in the M-areas and the T-areas in the participating countries, and examines the impact of consumers and consumerism in general on processes in the areas involved in the Rurban research. The influence of consumption turns out to be both a burden *and* a blessing.

# 2 Framework of Analysis

## 2.1 Triple T

To guide our explorative expedition in the realm of consumption, a framework of analysis has been developed. In order to keep it as simple as possible, and more importantly, in order to be usable and informative to the participating interviewees, the framework is structured around the triple T of Trends, Typologies and Themes.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Macro | | Meso | | Micro |
| *Trends* | → | *Themes* | ← | *Typologies* |
| Dynamics | | RGS | | Consumers |

*Figure 2 Framework of Analysis*

## 2.2 Trends

The triple T-structure also refers to three levels of analysis. Trends are located at the so-called macro level[1] as they focus upon changing conditions or circumstances in the consumer society in which the study areas are embedded. Trends are first of all about dynamics in the social context. It is self-evident that the relevancy of a trend to our research is equivalent to the influence it has on phenomena in the selected research areas (see section 2.4). While we concentrate on

[1] Although we use the terms macro, meso and micro level somewhat loosely, they refer to a longstanding tradition in sociological research. As many Rurban researchers are sociologists, this triple T-structure fits the disciplinary perspective of this report.

trends that help to describe or explain certain developments in the metropolitan or the tourist rural areas that are under research, this does not imply that such trends are isolated entities. One of the things trend analysis learns is that trends should be seen in connection with each other. A trend on one level can be the source of another, which in turn may influence a third. For instance, the increase in women's participation in the labour market is a consequence of the process of emancipation and paired with the 'megatrend' of individualisation. Convenience foods, microwaves, lack of time and increasing material welfare all influence each other, while they are trends at different levels. In brief, closer scrutiny sooner or later reveals that trends are part of a larger whole, interrelated by positive or negative feedback relationships. Connections which are neither always easy to detect nor automatically result in logical and consistent outcomes. Counter-trends, interruptions of trends, inertia and constants may lead to changes into unexpected directions. What makes things even more complicated is that a plethora of distinct trends - as well as accompanying counter-trends - of all sorts have been identified. It is hard to see the wood for the trees if one is confronted with characteristics of today's (and tomorrow's) world ranging from globalisation to individualisation, from intensification and acceleration on the one hand to downshifting and back to the basics on the other, from privatisation to communitarianism, and in which experience, excitement and adventure rule supreme while people are said to long for authenticity and contemplation at the same time.

To keep things as clear as possible, we will define trends as close as possible to the topic of consumption and consumers of rural goods and services in our study areas. That is to say, neither do we focus too much on general 'megatrends' nor do we concentrate on trends featuring a short life span. Short-term trends are frequently called hypes to make a distinction. The merchandising around a new The Lord of the Rings film or the release of a new volume in the Harry Potter series are examples of a hype. Contrary to a hype that fades away after a boost and is usually related to a specific product or phenomenon, a trend is characterised by a development that is of a more abstract nature and has significance for a longer period of time.

Partly based on information about the state of the art of our study areas that has been collected in a previous stage of the Rurban research project (see Esparcia Pérez, Buciega Arévalo & Trick, 2004) and partly on premises about the kind of driving forces that might be important in order to understand the (un)attractiveness of various rural goods and services from a consumer perspective, a couple of trends have been selected.

The *first* one is called *A flight from the beehive*. This trend refers to the development of counter urbanisation and out-migration. People escape from the 'beehive', that is, large cities, into thinly populated areas. They search for their very own piece of land to live their life in individualistic freedom. What are their motives to do this? Is it explained by economic reasons (cheaper costs of living), socio-economic reasons (migration to the countryside as a token of success and prestige) and/or quality of life reasons (living space, tranquillity, fresh air, privacy)?

The *second* trend under investigation is coined *The grey invasion*. This signifies that the ageing population of Europe has a direct impact on our study areas. European baby boomers and pensioners buy land and real estate in other countries than their native country. They search for the best spots in Europe (sunny weather, mountains, sea, beach). This invasion of the pensioners manifests itself through Germans buying properties in the Netherlands or Hungary, British settling down in France, Dutch 'pensionados' in Spain and Swedes in Finland. What is the significance of this trend? What are emigrants searching, and consequently, paying for?

The *third* trend is entitled *Tantalising tourism*. The rise of mass tourism is paramount in Europe. What are the effects of this trend on our study areas - especially the T-areas? Due to economic prosperity many more people can afford to enlarge their capacity of consumer expenditures generally, and to spend more money on tourism particularly. What kind of tourist activities can be found in the study areas? What kind of demanding consumers are attracted by what is offered to them?

The *fourth* trend is called *White-collar farming* and refers to dis-agrarisation or de-agriculturalisation of rural areas. This can be defined in an absolute and relative sense. The first interpretation is about the tendency in which farmers sell and leave their land, resulting in a gradually diminishing amount of arable land. Relatively speaking, farmers develop consumer-oriented activities next to or instead of farming as such. From the angle of consumption it is interesting to know what kind of new functions and sources of income farmers are searching for. How do they 'commodify' rurality? Is it through growing local products, producing artisanal products, or do they take a venture in the tourist business? How successful are 'white-collar' farmers to get in touch with consumer's wishes and needs?

*The segregation of 'red' and 'green'* is the *fifth* trend that is presupposed to be of interest. This trend refers to the idea that a sharper division emerges between nature and (consumer) culture areas. Are we witnessing a segregation of 'green' and 'red' enclaves which manifests itself through natural parks or landscape parks on the one hand and residential parks, leisure parks, tourist parks and suburbs on the other hand? Do the preservation of nature as well as the proliferation of mass consumerism support a tendency, which might be called the 'enclavitisation' of Europe?

A *sixth* and final trend is called *The particularism of rural areas.* This trend is close to the fifth trend with this distinction that 'The particularism of rural areas' refers to segregation as the notion is normally used, i.e., in social and cultural terms, while *The segregation of 'red' and 'green'* concentrates on special segregation. The sixth trend, then, puts emphasis on the tendency that a sorting out of collectivistic functions in rural areas is taking place in favour of *individualistic* motives and concerns of consumers. Is it true that new inhabitants and tourists are primarily interested in the residence, tourist service or gastronomy service? Conversely, is it true that they are less interested in the *collective* motives and concerns regarding the development or preservation of the local scenery or regional cultural? In other words, does the 'urban pressure' on rural areas in fact mean a loss of cultural traditions or customs as well as an irreversible change in the rural landscape as we know it?

## 2.3 Typologies

Typologies are situated at the micro level. Typologies are about characterizing consumers, so they are located at the level of individuals. Portraying people and classifying consumers in different categories have long-standing traditions in the social sciences. It is beyond our scope here to go deeper into these matters. We can only be explicit about our considerations that are taken into account when developing a framework of analysis that concentrates on the second T of typologies.

One of the things that can be learned from modern studies about consumption and consumer behaviour is that it seems to be the case that the more important consumers have become in understanding the modern world, the more inscrutable they have become. Consumers are fickle persons (the butterfly consumer) whose choices, wishes and wants are unpredictable (the unmanageable consumer). In order to find new ways to understand these whimsical creatures, it is recognised that modern consumers defy traditional segmentation by age, gender or income. Classical criteria to distinguish different homogeneous groups of consumers with corresponding behavioural intentions and patterns have lost explanatory power. Hence, consumer behaviour can no longer be understood by 'straight' and measurable segmentation criteria only. To meet the complexities of modern consumer behaviour, we are in need to search for new perspectives. In reaction to this, it has been proposed to add supplementary variables of a socio-cultural origin to the socio-demographic (e.g. age, gender) or socio-economic (e.g. income, occupation) criteria that are traditionally used. People's values, lifestyle or self-image influence their intentions, motivations and choices as a consumer, too. Consumers are multi-faced creatures; driven by a variety of motives and needs. For this reason it is not very reasonable to put consumers in firm segments. Therefore, it is more realistic to realise that consumers of flesh and blood can be potentially every type of consumer. A corresponding analytical framework is a *continuum* of typologies instead of a framework focusing on ways to pigeonhole consumers into rigid categories.

In an attempt to find a modus operandi that meets these challenges, a framework of consumer typologies based on two dimensions is introduced. The first dimension is the materialistic - nonmaterialistic one and the second one is the individualistic - collectivistic dimension.

The first dimension is inspired by two distinct approaches of contemporary consumerism. On the one hand, consumerism is thought to be ruled by such materialistic objectives as high product quality and value for money. Stated succinctly, consumption is all about owning more stuff. An upscaling of spending that is rather motivated by the wish to surpass the Joneses than keeping up with them is paramount. On the other hand, nonmaterialistic aspects of consumerism and consumer behaviour are emphasised. The attraction of consumption and consumer goods in this perspective stems from intangible aspects, such as authenticity, uniqueness, identity and integrity, fun and fantasy. These are prime to understand the needs and wishes of individualised consumers, according to this perspective. The materialistic pole, subsequently, refers to a consumer orientation on price and product characteristics, while nonmaterialism stresses the emotional or ethical value of goods or services for consumers.

The second dimension is inspired by the well-known dichotomy between the independency and individuality of man (homo economicus) versus the characterisation of man as inherently involved and social (homo politicus). The individualistic pole stresses the independence and self-orientedness of the consumer, while the collectivistic pole refers to the fact that consumers are other-oriented, that is, in their intentions, wishes as well as the choices they actually make, they take the social and/or physical environment into account.

Founded on these two dimensions, four consumers images are defined and grouped in a four-quadrantic continuum of typologies. The four consumer images are characterised as calculating, traditional, unique and responsible, respectively.

As figure 3 shows, *calculating* consumerism is characterised as materialistic and individualistic: self-interest is the main factor, and personal gain dominates. Calculating consumption is aimed at effectiveness and efficiency: quantity is more important than quality and these 'McDonaldised consumers' have a preference for standardisation and convenience.

*Traditional* consumption is comparable with calculation consumption in its materialistic dimension, on the understanding that monetary savings (price) weigh heavier than time savings (convenience). Traditional consumption attaches importance to collective traditions and customs. Choices are constrained by established mores, modes or motives. Modernisation and change are only embarked upon with caution, at the very least. Continuity is preferred over change.

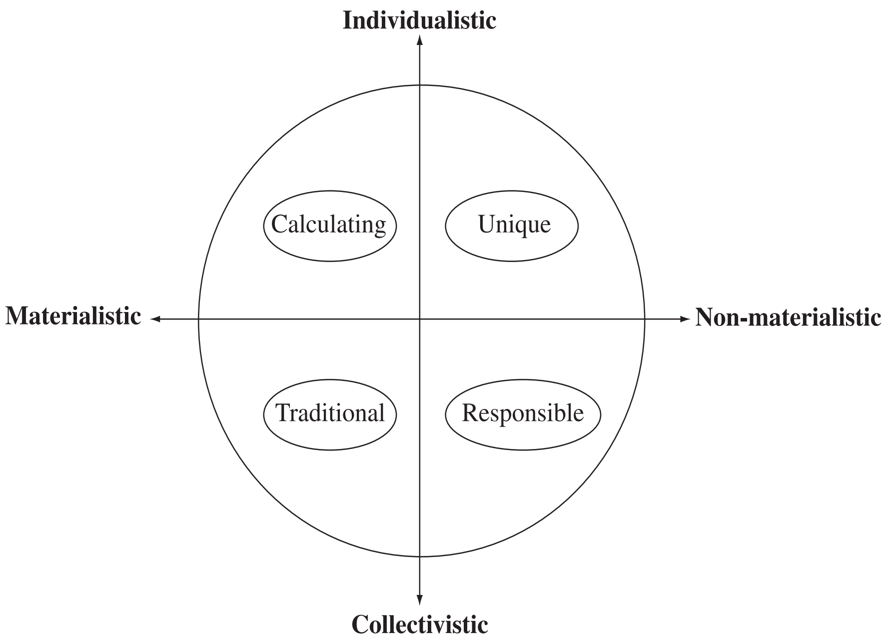



*Figure 3 Consumer Images*

*Unique* consumption is the complete opposite, specifically seeking change and variety. Unique consumers take the lead where new or different products or consumption patterns are concerned. We are dealing here with the trend-setting vanguard that is highly responsible for (fast-moving) changes in today's and tomorrow's consumer culture. Small wonder that much attention of marketers and trend-watchers is given to these 'alpha consumers'. Comparable with the calculating consumer image is the self-centered attitude that is given prominence. Both images are distinctive as far as the importance of functional, utilitarian or instrumental features (use value and exchange value) of consumer goods and services is concerned. To calculating consumers such features are key, while unique consumers attach great importance to consumption for the sake of experience (identity value and symbolic value). Unique consumption is a particularly good representation of modern consumerism in which the key words are hedonism, style over substance and experience. Experience is also important to the image of responsible consumption.

*Responsible* consumption differs from the unique consumer image in that consumption-related aspects such as individual pleasure or personal prestige do not have the upper hand. Instead, moral principles or prosocial concerns about the (future) consequences of possible consumer choices are involved in the decision-making process.

After this sketch, some characteristics of the consumer images are summed-up in figure 4 to finish this brief introduction.

| | **Materialistic** | **Nonmaterialistic** |
|---|---|---|
| **Individualistic** | CALCULATING | UNIQUE |
| | Rational | Conspicuous consumption |
| | Mainstream | Fun & Impulsive |
| | Efficient & Effective | Variety |
| | 'Keep up with the Joneses' | Status & Distinction |
| | Convenience | Neophilia |
| **Collectivistic** | TRADITIONAL | RESPONSIBLE |
| | Conformism | Involvement |
| | Cost-conscious | Altruistic |
| | Self-discipline | 'Keep down with the Joneses' |
| | Neophobia | Informed |
| | Community-oriented | Environmentally aware |

*Figure 4 Consumer Images in a Few Catchwords*

The continuum of consumer images has been used as background information during the interviews (see section 2.4). This means that the typologies framework is not used as a topic to be discussed with the interviewees in order to investigate its validity, but it is used as a *frame of reference* to interpret their ideas about consumers. In this context, the research on typologies concentrates on collecting information by raising several questions about what kind of consumers the interviewees have in mind when they are talking about consumers in their region, about their opinions on what kind of rural goods and services are attractive to consumers at this moment as well as in the foreseeable future, or about how they think consumers are provided with rural goods and services which have appeal to consumers. In addition to clear-cut characteristics of consumers in terms of gender, age or socio-economic status, the framework of the consumer's images gives us the opportunity to recognise and locate the individualistic or collectivistic motivations and (non)materialistic mentalities of consumers that are put forward by the interviewees.

## 2.4 Themes

Rural goods and services (RGS) are located at the intermediate meso level of analysis. The RGS are the central themes of this part of the Rurban research project and may be seen as the *trait d'union* between trends and typologies. The relationship between themes and trends is simply that RGS are signs of the times. They embody and exemplify the social developments that are selected and defined in section 2.2. Themes can also be connected to typologies through the fact that RGS manifest what is attractive in the eyes of the consumer. RGS are in fact the 'stuff' that is 'brought into action' to attract consumers' attention. It is also in this consumer perspective that we reflect upon RGS. We are first and foremost interested in rural goods and services with respect to consumer demand. Our focus is on the linkage between the apparent attraction of particular RGS to consumers. That is to say, the analysis of RGS is not so much about the presence of particular RGS as such (previous research concentrates on this - see Esparcia Pérez, Buciega Arévalo & Trick, 2004), but studying RGS is given a 'consumerists turn', so to speak. Consequently, the concentration is on 'consumer RGS', implying that, for instance, water storage or energy production by windmills do not form part of this study.

RGS linked to consumer demand provides a framework of analysis in which RGS are indicators of consumers' wishes and needs. RGS, which are popular among consumers express what kind of activities, attractions, atmosphere or assets they search, long and pay for. Once there is an idea about what kinds of RGS find favour in consumers' eyes, it is possible to go one step further and raise the question why particular RGS make consumers tick. At this stage the various motivations and mindsets of the consumer images are used as points of reference.

So, RGS are studied from two different angles. Firstly, the research concentrates on rural goods and services that receive increasing consumer attention lately. As already mentioned in section 1.2, our research is based on the information provided by interviewees' answers on questions focusing on consumers' most popular RGS and ways in which RGS are brought to the notice of (potential) consumers. As a result, an array of RGS will pass in chapter 3, ranging from (first and second) homes to all kinds of activities and amenities. Looking at RGS *from the consumer's perspective* inevitably leads to looking at walking, canoeing, fishing, nature conservation, rock climbing, mountain biking, festivals, gastronomy, creative courses and ecological services, etc. This summing up already shows that RGS have different 'dimensions' of consumer appeal. In order to bring RGS in closer contact with their attractiveness to consumers, which is our second angle, it is thought to be instructive to look at RGS in a 'dimensional' way.

Four dimensions are defined: the *natural*, the *social*, the *cultural* and the *economic* dimension of RGS. The *natural (physical)* dimension of RGS refers to such aspects as the variety and beauty of the landscape, to fresh air or silence, etc. The *social* dimension of RGS is appreciated by consumers for reasons such as sense of community, social ties, sense of security, or prestige (social distinction). Aspects of the *cultural* dimension of RGS are gastronomy, rural lifestyle, rural idyll or the (re-)affirmation of local or symbolic values. The attraction of the *economic* dimension of RGS stems from the investment possibilities, cheaper houses, time-efficient packages of tourist services, availability of daily services, etc.

Looking at RGS in a 'dimensional' way makes us realise that RGS frequently are not one-dimensional but multi-dimensional. For instance, buying a (second) home is often more than buying stones and a piece of land. Consumers also 'buy' a nice environment, status, privacy, etc. In other words, we become aware that there might be more that the physical characteristics of a consumer good or service as such. A rural good or service can also attractive to consumers for reasons that are intangible, i.e. its identity or symbolic value. In other words, a walking tour, a day of fishing or a hotel room with a view are to a large extent also 'feel goods'. Quite often it will not be easy to detect what dimension has the highest priority to the consumer. Do we fish or walk for functional reasons? Is the economic dimension decisive to our decision to buy a (second) home? Often this may not be the case. However, other dimensions are often more difficult to detect because consumers do not pay directly for them, because consumers are not aware of other dimensions being at stake or they cannot express their feelings about why a good or service actually appeals to them. A 'dimensional' approach to RGS does not solve this complexity, but it recognises that a mix of straightforward and subtle factors influences consumers' needs and desires. The 'identity' of a good or service might be more important than its instrumental features - whether or not consumers recognise this. Thus, one should not be surprised when consumers' willingness to pay for aspects belonging to one of the dimensions of a good or service does not mean that this willingness also accounts to other dimensions of the very same good or service. For instance, consumers might be willing to pay for a guided tour around a natural park but are not willing to make a contribution to the preservation of this park.

In bringing this section on RGS to a close, it is noted that looking at RGS in a 'dimensional' way also helps us to analyse RGS from the perspective of the consumer. The four dimensions represent elements that are dominant in each of the consumer images. To put it roughly, the natural dimension relates to responsible consumerism; the social dimension is part of the traditional consumer image; the cultural dimension is close to the unique image and the economic dimension of RGS fits in the calculating consumer image.

# 3 Trends and RGS in the Study Areas

## 3.1 Differences and Similarities

It is a matter of fact that a selection of study areas in five different countries results in regions that vary.[1] Although the research areas are similar in general terms, i.e. the metropolitan areas are in the immediate vicinity of a main city, while the tourist areas have in common that water recreation is a central characteristic, they differ from each other in topographical characteristics, climatic circumstances and cultural traditions. Such differences are naturally of importance with respect to consumer demand because the terrain, the weather conditions or cultural specifics may have a large influence on what a region is able to offer to consumers. Simply put, for the Islands of Zeeland in the Netherlands it is hard to meet consumers' wishes to climb mountains; when you like to visit a spa it is better to go to the Balaton region than to Pays de Caux or Marina Alta; the Finnish archipelago is not particularly famous for its history or museums but for its impressive natural resources in the form of forests, lakes and islands.

Since all T-areas are located at or near the waterside, boating, fishing, swimming or sunbathing are automatically major attractions of such regions. In this respect, similarities are also important to take notice of. What is more, despite the differences in the unique selling points and salient characteristics of the T-areas as well as the M-areas involved in this study, it appears that all regions have three categories of rural goods and services (RGS) in common. The most important RGS of the Rurban research areas can be categorised under the headings of respectively housing, tourism/leisure activities and gastronomy/local foods. These three groups of RGS prove to be central as the attention is focused upon what draws consumer attention. In

[1] Not to mention differences in terms of socio-cultural background or socio-economic development of a region or the political system of governance that exists.

the next sections we pay attention to the main RGS and relate them to several of the trends mentioned in section 2.2. In doing so, other differences and similarities of the countries and selected areas will be reviewed.

## 3.2 A Flight From the Beehive: The Building-Up of the Study Areas

In essence, cities are made out of bricks, cement and concrete. In this respect, it is remarkable to discover that a major manifestation of what we call here 'urban pressure' is the consumer demand for houses. Urban pressure may be taken quite literally as soon as it becomes clear that we are dealing with an overall process of urbanisation in the study areas that are taken into account in the Rurban project. Particularly with respect to the M-areas a development is going on in which rural areas slowly but steadily turn into what could be defined as 'green cities'. The building-up of the study areas symbolises the ongoing transition from rural areas into 'rurban' areas.

Several developments are in favour of the increasing interest of many people to move out from the city centre to the outskirts or to the country. A relevant development has to do with modern information and communication technology that makes it easier to work more frequently at home and to live further away from your working place. The radius of action, so to speak, increases and distances diminish (while, on the other hand, distances are more difficult to cover due to traffic jams). Among other things, this causes a blurring of boundaries between working time and leisure time. This brings us immediately to a second point that is relevant in this respect, viz., the exacting nature of contemporary life. Many Europeans have to cope with all sorts of fast-moving changes, have to deal with a stressful family life and, last but not least, with much-demanding jobs. Of interest here is the phenomenon that in reaction to all this, people are searching for contrast during leisure time. They look for relaxation, harmony, contemplation and security. As a consequence, consumer demand for goods and services that supply this need thrive. From the perspective of a demanding and accelerating world, a rural environment is perceived as a 'safe haven'. The general idea, then, is that this haven of refuge is a safer place to be than the 'perverted' cities and protects better against the insecurities of the modern risk society. These and similar reasons are alive all over Europe and motivate Europeans to 'escape' from the bustle in the cities.

Next to this push factor of a socio-cultural origin there is a push factor of an economic origin. The fact that the cost of living in cities is becoming too expensive for many people is a third development that enhances the flight from the beehive. Irrespective of whether we are referring to Helsinki, Budapest, Valencia, Paris or the 'Randstad' (i.e. the cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague in the Netherlands) the real estate market of all these cities is characterised by prohibitive prices. Many people cannot afford the sky-rocketing costs that go with owning or renting a roomy house in an attractive area of big cities. The other side of the coin is clearly a pull factor: the ability to buy a bigger house and more living space for the same amount of money than one can afford in urbanised areas. In other words, for all those to whom a detached house with a garden is much more attractive than a balconied apartment, the real estate in suburban and rural areas generate better value for money than what is for sale or for rent in city centres. In many cases the pull factor - the desire to leave the city - seems a starting point for moving to the countryside, also because an increasing number of people are not familiar with the rural residence area.

In all the countries of research we noticed that (second) homes are major RGS in both the M and T-areas. Generally, differences between M and T-areas are that the first is mainly populated by natives who live there permanently, and in case of the latter we are also dealing with foreign newcomers and second-home owners. In the T-areas of Spain and Hungary this is particularly true. Many British 'pensionados' have their own property in Marina Alta and in the Lake Balaton region German-speaking real-estate owners are not difficult to find. But also in the Dutch and French T-areas non-local natives as well as foreigners resemble the phenomenon that Europeans appear to be people adrift. German families are eager to buy a second home in Zeeland, and on the French coast of Normandy, Dutch and British people have settled. With the exception of Swedes, Finland has hitherto not been invaded by large amounts of foreigners: the Finnish tradition of owning a summer cottage as a second home is still a Finnish affair.

Undoubtedly, the second-homes business has been triggered by a combination of rising wealth and available leisure time. Also the grey invasion trend is of special interest in this respect because in particular the elderly emigrate (semi)permanently to other countries or they move to rural regions in their own country as soon as they have retired. With the proportional increase of the ageing population in Europe, it is more than likely that this trend has not reached its peak yet.

Whatever the country of origin or the age of consumers, the housing business as one of the preponderant RGS results in a focus of the *economic* dimension of RGS. Correspondingly, *calculating* consumerism is usually encountered. However, before it is concluded that rationality and value for money reign supreme, it is relevant to make two additional remarks to the presumed dominance of the economic dimension.

Firstly, we should not lose sight of the fact that the expensiveness of living in cities as a (push) factor to leave the city and move to the countryside, does not imply that houses outside the city are automatically cheap. On the contrary. For instance, cottages in the Finnish Åboland are very expensive and the prices of second homes in the Dutch T-area are often hardly lower than the housing prices in the M-area that in its turn is generally an expensive area with respect to buying real estate. In other words, the price-factor is often a minor pull factor for people to move from the city to the countryside in the Netherlands and in Finland. Also in the French T-area the real estate market is, similar to Finland's T-area, not a dynamic one because of the scarcity of houses for sale. Consequently, if a traditional Normandic house is on the market, buying it is an expensive affair. In other words, in economic terms it is not entirely 'rational' to buy some property in various study areas. In other areas involved, circumstances are different. For instance, the housing prices are less exorbitant in the M and T-areas of Hungary and Spain due to the availability of houses built under the conditions at hand in which high priority is given to real estate as an engine of economic development. Besides, houses in

Hungary's and Spain's T-areas are comparatively cheap to many wealthy foreigners from the North-European countries.

Secondly, the idea is stressed that the importance of land consumption for the sake of buildings is not only driven by strict economic factors but also by other triggers of consumer behaviour. Consumers do also take *social* and *natural* dimensions of RGS into consideration. Nowadays, moving out of the city is frequently also a sign of upward mobility. It shows that you are well-to-do and can afford to buy yourself a (second) home outside the city. Such considerations are rationalistic ones too. They are especially relevant for M-areas. In countries such as Hungary, France or Spain much pressure on the outskirts of cities comes pre-eminently from natives who want to leave the city. In all the European countries it can be witnessed that the M-areas are not particularly cheap but their attractiveness is rather caused by the possibilities to buy more square metres for the same amount of money. An element of prestige is also at stake here: people can buy another - and more prestigious - type of house for a similar sum of money than the (less prestigious) types which are available and affordable inside the town boundaries. In sum, consumers are not only calculating creatures but their choices are also influenced by motivations that fit into the mind-set of the *unique* consumer.

This also holds true for the living environment of a house. The surroundings of a house are important too. The economic value of a house depends also on such aspects as the accessibility and availability of infrastructure, services and facilities. Small wonder then that the study areas - particularly M-areas - show all kinds of activities, as soon as the urbanisation has reached a certain level, to improve the quality of life of the regions by building roads, shops, restaurants or schools in order to be as attractive as possible to its (new) residents (Finland, Hungary and Spain). But the surroundings influence the emotional and even aesthetical value of real estate as well. Security, tranquillity and beauty are key words in this respect.

Another similarity that has been found in our study areas - particularly in T-areas - is that the *natural* dimension of RGS is also an important point of attraction to consumers. In the next section we return to this point that also preludes the idea of direct and indirect consumption - a topic to be discussed in section 4.2. For now it suffices to note that rational considerations directed at a particular consumer good, such as a house, do not always or automatically erase natural or socio-cultural dimensions of RGS which often go beyond the physical product or service as such and not for sale either in a direct way.

## 3.3 Tantalising Tourism: The Disneyisation of Society?

It is nowadays not difficult to hear or read the message that tourism is booming business. Tourism is a main economic power many countries and cities in the world heavily depend on. Present-day consumers spend large amounts of money and time in the tourist *industry* and they are continually invited to do increasingly so. This is done rather successfully: tourism is tantalising to consumers.

The draws of the tourist areas of this study have in common that they are first of all related to water in one way or another. The Islands of Zeeland in the Netherlands are famous for their watersports (sailing, surfing, diving). The greatest assets in both the T-areas of the Netherlands, Spain or France are simply summarised in terms of sea, sand and sun. Fishing, canoeing and boating are pillars of the popularity of the Finnish archipelago and Lake Balaton provides a nice scenery for a stay in this part of Hungary. In short, with water close at hand, we are obviously talking about swimming, sunbathing, shell-picking, marinas, etc. as tourist attractions.

However, the vicinity of the sea or lakes is not the only source of attraction. In all the countries under investigation, change is on the rise. T-areas are trying to spread their wings, so to speak. This implies, to begin with, that stronger (emotional) bonds are created with the nostalgic rural idyll. This manifests itself in the cultivation of romanticised images that voices the idea that rurality and rural life is honest, pure, simple, safe, etc. The countryside symbolizing 'la dolce vita' and 'the good old days' relates directly to the feeling already mentioned above that many people think or feel that they are no longer willing or able to keep pace with the speed of modern life. From their perspective, rural life contrasts contemporary life and they preferably persist in the belief that Arcadia is still to be found somewhere outside. It also appeals to the people (residents, tourists, professionals) who have an increasing interest in green issues and love for the countryside - a tendency to be observed in both Finland and France as well as in the Netherlands and Spain. Consumers long for experiences that embody 'rurality' through authenticity, back to the basics, peace and quiet or commitment. They search for a sense of responsibility - be it for themselves, their relatives or the natural environment. After section 2.3 we recognise in here elements of the *responsible* and the *traditional* consumer images.

More specifically, this cultivation of authenticity or originality arises through a 'thematisation' of historical events and cultural traditions. The historical heritage of a region is taken as a starting point to attract tourists or to create some sort of identity for the locals. Examples of this are found in Finland's M-area, where initiatives go back to the times of a medieval route between Helsinki and St. Peterburg (the King's Road), or the Russian occupation of the Cape of Porkkala after the Second World War (the Parenthesis-project). In the French T-area similar small-scaled activities are undertaken. This time the focus is on attempts to link the Pays de Caux to the 19th century 'impressionistic' landscape or promote the (culinary) history of these parts of France via a sea museum and a chocolate museum. In the Dutch and the Hungarian T-areas the significance of museums, churches, castles and rural architectural heritage as attractions, is starting to be discovered. Especially in Hungary there is clear evidence of the 'staging' of folk music and dance as well as cultural events, of which the annual Valley of Arts is eye-catching because this is a big festival that goes on for a week in various villages of the Veszprem region. In the Dutch T-area a museum that was originally devoted to the history of the Delta Works has recently transformed itself under the fashionable new name of Delta Plaza into an amusement park that aims to grow from the current 320,000 visitors to half a million visitors annually.

While the Valley of Arts festival and Delta Plaza are two clear examples which fit to the late ideas of modern mass tourism in the age of the experience or entertainment economy, they are exceptions to the rule as far as the Rurban study areas are concerned. It cannot be concluded now that the T-areas have been transformed into a theme-park at large. This, however, does not imply that it is wise to dismiss that the success of the commodification of goods and services derives largely from the extent in which such real goods are qualified as 'feel goods' by consumers. Tourism is undoubtedly tantalising because of the fact that consumers are attracted to accommodations or activities which convey such intangibilities as authenticity, luxury, uniqueness, etc.

Thematisation and staging of RGS are certainly important issues in the selected study areas. Clear evidence of this is to be found in all sorts of attempts to give added value to exhibition centres and music festivals or to local history or local food products (see the following section). But the broad range of examples has in common that they refer to relatively small-scaled projects and promotion activities. In this respect they only give limited support to the idea that we are facing a process of the Disneyisation of society as a whole. However, we would throw away the baby with the bath water if we would conclude from this that Disneyisation is hardly of interest to us. As it happens, Disneyisation also refers to efforts to attract consumers by combinations of forms of consumption. For instance, shopping, eating out, sports, entertainment, edutainment, and the like.

This phenomenon appears to be of particular interest in understanding what is going on in the study areas of the Rurban project. Providing variety is an important issue to draw consumers' attention. Modern consumers are very demanding because they like to do different activities during the day. We like to go to the beach and enjoy the sea, sand and the sun for a couple of hours and after that we like to spend some time hiking or cycling before we go sightseeing. Additionally, we like to taste some history and have a taste of the local dishes, have a boat trip and visit a recreation area, a sports centre or a shopping centre, etc. The 'nomadic' behaviour of contemporary consumers is only fully satisfied by a tourist infrastructure that is able to meet all sorts of consumer wishes. Variety and flexibility are key. In this respect, it is worth noting that a diversity of tourist accommodations and activities are available - particularly in the T-areas. Accommodations to house and serve tourists range from simple campsites to posh hotels and from 'authentic' cottages to hypermodern villas. The Dutch Islands of Zeeland and Spain's Marina Alta are clear examples of areas in which something for everybody is to be found. Correspondingly, a broad array of outdoor recreation activities is mentioned by the interviewees: diving, surfing, yachting, horse riding, playing golf, hiking, bird watching, berry picking, cycling, fishing, etc.

It is also remarkable that this diversification process goes hand in hand with a search for your very own 'niche'. Striking cases in point are the future plans of the Hungarian T-area to become the place to be for health tourism. The intentions are to attract senior tourists from all over Europe. Hungary's unique selling points are the thermal springs and the spas. The (re)construction of health clinics in the coming years is another part of this process that bets on the adage of 'health sells' - especially relevant in times when Europe is confronted with a rise in the ageing population. It would be a mistake, however, to think that this is a well-coordinated action of suppliers working together. In this respect, Hungary is equal to the other four countries. Hardly any joint actions to speak of to attract visitors by integrated projects and initiatives appear to exist. It is customary that tourist attractions or accommodations are promoted individually. The regional diversity of tourist activities is rarely geared to one another by providers. Neither in terms of promotion nor in terms of making plans for the future. In the tourist business it is every man for himself rather than close cooperation in order to accomplish improvements of the tourist infrastructure, for instance along the lines of a master plan that is supported collectively.

### 3.4 'White-Collar' Farming: Regional Foods and Facilities

The idea of rural areas under urban pressure is interpreted here mainly in terms of a process of transformation in which rural areas turn into 'rurban' areas and in which consumption surpasses production in socio-cultural and economic significance. Bit by bit arable land is sold that is cleared for the building of houses, roads and the like. For farmers it is neither always easy to resist to this development nor always easy to resist to the temptation to sell their land for profitable prices. However, in this section our focus is not on the pros and cons of 'rurbanisation' for farmers, but what kind of coping strategies some of them use to get in contact with consumers. The relationship between farming and food is close of course. For this reason it is obvious to explore 'white-collar' farming by linking it for a start to local food products and regional gastronomy. As said before, next to houses and tourist services, this is the third category of main RGS we distinguish in this analysis.

Partly as a reaction to the omnipresence of fast food in today's consumer society, a broad range of 'slow food' products attract consumer attention recently for various reasons. Regional 'slow' foods and dishes match with consumers' desire for authenticity, integrity, purity and quality. Regional products have at their advantage that consumers perceive them indeed as safer and healthier than conventionally produced foodstuffs. Consumers might be interested in the whereabouts of the food they buy and eat. Consumers might also be interested in products produced with care and craftsmanshift or willing to support local products and services. These and other reasons motivate consumers to show sympathy for regional 'slow' foods. Against this backdrop it is interesting to see that in the selected study areas regional gastronomy and food products are regarded as opportunities for rural providers - farmers as well as restaurateurs - to find (new sources of) income and employment. In addition, regional products and menus are increasingly acknowledged for having cultural significance and described as markers of regional identity.

Despite all kinds of positive aspects of regional slow foods, we have to face the fact that 'slow' food products from a regional and/or ecological origin take a relative marginal position in the food market as a whole. But such niche markets are definitely not negligible. Agricultural produce of regional origin is of importance to our study areas - both economically and culturally. Admittedly, the current commodification of culinary traditions via local food products and regional menus in restaurants is a development in its infancy. It is also true that, for instance, in the Netherlands or Finland endogenous food is only an observable phenomenon if one looks carefully. This does not alter the fact that in the Netherlands and Finland interest in local food products is growing and in both the Finnish and the Dutch T-areas a relative small group of producers, shopkeepers and restaurateurs operate actively on this small-scaled market. In Åboland a regional brand has been established (Skärgardssmak, i.e. A taste of Archipelago) for several fish and bread products. This brand name also serves as a quality mark and is marketed with success in the region itself as well as 'exported' to the mainland of Finland. In the Netherlands food products such as Zeeland's mussels (T-area) are presented as part of the traditional local culture at culinary or folk festivals. It is worth mentioning that particularly the Belgium tourists are devotees of the gastronomy of 'the Dutch archipelago:' they are, so to say, the culinary connaisseurs of the local seafood dishes. Taken together, these examples prove that local food products have added value - especially when they are brought to a regional market where such products have a clear identity for outsiders. In such cases, consumers (predominantly non-local and foreign tourists) are offered something special. In this respect it is more difficult for M-areas to develop a market for gastronomic activities and products than for T-areas. T-areas have more opportunities to offer tourists food products or festivals that surprise and excite them for they are unfamiliar with the regional food and culinary traditions. Natives are accustomed to such comestibles and customs which are, consequently, not particularly special or surprising to them. To local residents, the speciality of regional foods stems first and foremost from quality aspects or identity values.

At first glance, one would expect that the 'identity-factor' of food in the consumer culture of countries such as France and Spain results in a bigger market share for local food products than in Finland and the Netherlands. Though eating and drinking is certainly not unimportant to many Finnish and Dutch people, the food culture in North-European countries lacks the profound traditions of other parts of Europe. However, a closer look soon reveals that neither in France nor Spain many people can make a living of producing and selling regional products. Despite the fact that many French are inclined to be in favour of regional products, it is noticeable that in the French M-area of Vexin Français the significance of gastronomy and direct marketing of local farm products is marginal. This is hardly surprising because the situation in this region is that farmers are not in the least forced economically to sell their land or to transform their agricultural activities away form large-scale agriculture and mass production.

Having noticed this in combination with having the famous French cuisine in mind, it is reassuring to detect that in Normandy (T-area) the local gastronomy is better developed. Different sorts of cheeses, calvados or seafood represent examples of successful regional products. Similar tendencies are traceable in Spain: the marketing of food products with a regional label is only but little developed and the sise of the market on which local products are sold is insignificant compared to agricultural produce that is exported. Nevertheless, restaurants serving regional dishes prepared with high quality local foods, are quite easy to find as well as quite popular with both locals and tourists. All in all, promising potentials do exist, but so do structural problems (e.g. low prices, buy-out of farms, lack of capital expenditures for innovations) that form a hindrance for a further expansion of regional food markets.

Whatever the food culture, in all countries involved it appears to be the case that producing local food products is rarely enough to earn a living, irrespective of whether it is wine, honey, almonds or olive oil, etc., and irrespective of whether products are sold directly from the farm or to a distributor or restaurant owner. Often such activities generate an extra amount of income for farmers. This additional source of income might be of great importance however if it offers a farmer the possibility to survive economically. For instance, in Spain's T-area various vineyards survived because of the fact that their cooperative succeeded in attracting many consumers to pay a visit to a wineshop this cooperative is running. The success of the wineshop to attract lots of (foreign) consumers to buy wine, has kept Spanish winegrowers in business. This also accounts for other 'white-collar' farming initiatives related to agri-tourism, such as creating possibilities to book B&B services, rent (a part of) a rural house or pitch one's tent on a camping site in the farmyard. However much this sort of small-scaled accommodations and activities are of limited importance from the perspective of the amount of money going round in tourism, it may be interesting enough for farmers to be involved in agri-tourism. Numerous examples in the Zeeland archipelago demonstrate this. Not as manifest as in the Dutch case, but more modestly, rural tourism has recently received some interest in Spain's T-area. This manifests itself in the appearance of several rural houses, campings and B&Bs. It is expected that a form of accommodation such as a rural house has a bright future because it is in many aspects the opposite of the well-known forms of mass tourism on the Spanish 'costas'. A rural house in Marina Alta is paradise to the unique consumer if visitors are treated with personal attention as well as privacy, high service, a beautiful environment and a classy accommodation.

## 3.5 Segregation and Exclusion: Living Apart Together

In the foregoing sections we have addressed the first four trends mentioned in section 2.2. In this section we concentrate on the fifth and the sixth trend in this section. *The segregation of 'red' and 'green'* supposes a sharper division between nature and (consumer) culture areas. While this trend focuses on regional differences and distances in spatial terms, the sixth trend of *The particularism of rural areas* concentrates on cooperation and conflict in social and cultural terms. Both trends are taken together in this section to explore their relevancy in the context of the study areas.

In many cases mass tourism enforces intra-regional divisions between 'green' and 'red' functions. The French or Dutch T-area are cases in point. It is typical for these areas that the seaside, with its marinas, hotels, restaurants and popular towns visited by tourists is sharply divided from the hinterland that is used mainly for agriculture. In such cases the 'red' functions of tourist sites are clearly distinct from 'green' activities of the local farming population. Next to such imaginary boundaries, it is also possible to point at 'green' areas, which are really separated from other 'red' ones. The Rurban study areas incorporate four of such protected zones: the natural parks in the Dutch M and T-area, and in the French and Spanish M-area.[1]

All in all, segregation is also influenced by history (the way a region is structured in the course of time) and by law (the protection of nature), not only by the rise of the consumer society. Having said

[1] It may be discussed to what extent natural parks are a conditio sine qua non to preserve green areas in a land market dominated by private owners. In Hungary and Finland the preservation of many green areas may be facilitated by the public ownership of large woods.

this, increased consumer demand for houses, services, facilities or roads in the M and T-areas of the countries involved, is the driving force behind the growing of 'red' regions at the cost of 'green' areas. The proliferation of residential parks, suburbs and holiday parks are manifestations of urban pressure that is not easy to reduce or stop. Particularly not, because it is very tempting to municipalities to give opportunities to profitable 'red' activities (such as industry parks, residential development, golf courses, hotels). Especially in the case of Hungary's M-area and the Spanish M and T-areas this tendency is very clear. Supporting such activities is vital for municipalities to raise serious money and to create changes for the local population (farmers are able to sell their land for a good price, employment is generated for the local population or business opportunities arise for shopkeepers). In such cases, it is hard to keep negative environmental impact on top of the political agenda. As a result, the objective of economic prosperity frequently prevails and the distortion of the scenery caused by building houses and roads is regarded unavoidable or qualified as collateral damage.

This blurring of boundaries between 'red' and 'green' is not taken for granted as soon as political or social support exists to restrict the growth of building on. In this respect, it is interesting to see that in Finland, the Netherlands, and particularly in the French M-area, citizens form a countervailing power to 'rurbanisation'. Residents of the Vexin Français advocate the protection and preservation of the status quo with heart and soul. It is intriguing to notice that also newcomers champion the idea of leaving the rural idyll intact - *after* they have settled in. The interesting phenomenon that newcomers belong to the adherents of preventing new residents to enter into a region and keep the situation as picturesque as possible is not exclusively relevant for the Dutch, Finnish and the French M-areas. Also with respect to the Spanish and the Hungarian M-areas interviewees indicate that once people have left the crowded city, they give priority to leave nature as much as possible undisturbed and undamaged.

In the French M-area, however, efforts to exclude others and keep the existing environment and landscape as well as the identity of the region intact, is most clearly at hand. Preservation is prime to the people living in the Vexin who use the Regional Natural Park as a 'barrier' to the strong urban pressure their region is facing. This pressure comes from many people living in the immediate surroundings and Paris (a drive from downtown Paris to Vexin Français takes less than an hour), who like to settle in the M-area. This urban pressure functions as a catalyst for cooperation in the M-area in France. Local politicians, farmers living in this region for centuries (and who own the majority of the land) and (new) inhabitants take a unanimous stand in which the protection of Vexin's rurality has top priority. As a consequence of this conservative approach in which the preservation of the countryside takes centre stage, new activities of whatever sort are evaluated to the extent that they maintain or reinforce the rural character of the region and its corresponding rural way of life. This results in keeping urbanisation at a distance, preventing an invasion of city-dwellers, resisting (mass) tourism and safeguarding the authentic landscape and lifestyle.

In other cases, another 'clash of cultures' can be found. For instance between environmentalists and real-estate agencies: the latter like to build houses or hotels, roads, golf courses, and the like, while environmentalists being cautious about harming the existing environment and express their concern with respect to attempts to attract increasing numbers of visitors (T-area) or inhabitants (M-area). In the Netherlands, this situation is well-known, both in the case of South Holland and Zeeland. Such examples also illustrate that change rather than consolidation is beneficial to newcomers. Their interests, wishes or ways of living do not always correspond with the locals'. In such cases, segregation rather than integration between locals and new residents or passing tourists is to be found. In several study areas this is recognizable. For instance, in the Dutch T-area of Zeeland locals make complaints that they do not recognise their villages anymore due to changes in the landscape and social structure of their living environment as a result of tourism. In one municipality the share of second homes is a quarter of the total number of houses and a couple of vacation parks can be regarded as gated communities for having a barrier and permanent control at the entrance of the park. In the case of the Finland's Åboland, second-home dwellers remain outsiders to the resident population in spite of the fact that the latter form a minority because the number of second homes is much larger than the amount of first homes. While such examples are quite innocent, in Hungary and Spain the situation is more delicate.

In Hungary's M-area different mentalities and lifestyles do not mingle because local inhabitants feel patronised by newcomers. New residents are blamed for holding on to an 'urban mentality'. Immigrants from Budapest to the adjacent municipalities only take part in village life to a limited extent because available services fell short in their eyes. This causes many newcomers to do their shopping in the capital and take their children to schools in the city. Alongside all this, segregation is strengthened by differences in social class and ethnicity between the autochthonous and the allochthonous population as well as by the fact that immigrants in the Budapest area in many cases also literally cut themselves off by having a fence around their house. Likewise, gated private property is relevant too in the case of the Spanish 'residencias' which accommodate houses and gardens owned by foreigners. Such residencies are clear examples of the particularisation of landownership: inhabitants are primarily interested in their private properties and 'greens'. Partly through this, most foreign residents are not very interested in integration with the local society. The poor assimilation between locals and newcomers is strengthened by the large number of foreign residents in Marina Alta. In different parts and places of the Spanish T-area foreigners even outnumber the local Spanish population. In such cases it seems to be that a reinforcing drive behind 'enclavitisation' is that the higher the concentration of newcomers, the less the inclination to make contact with locals.

What all this indicates is that the transformation of former rural areas into 'rurban' areas does not only imply multifunctionality but also that such areas are becoming more multicultural. Various groups of people have to find ways to live together in peaceful co-existence. A modus vivendi that has been found is some sort of 'living apart together'. In several study areas it can be observed that different groups merely tolerate one another without having much mutual contact nor much interest in each other's language, culture, etc. Although conflicts fought out in public are rare, complaints and tensions do exist nevertheless. In Hungary's M-area and the T-area in Spain social tensions between newcomers and local inhabitants are motivated by locals who are annoyed by the lifestyle of newcomers. Moreover, in

Marina Alta it arouses the locals' suspicion that foreigners who are buying second homes often follow the tracks of investors and constructors, who are also often outsiders. Their businesses and the money they make before they leave the area to go to another project, can also stir up bad feelings among locals even before the new residents have arrived. Coalitions between such building companies or foreign investors and the local authorities may reinforce this phenomenon when the local population has the impression that the compliance of their representatives means in practice a sell-out or even a destruction of their living conditions.

All in all our study learns that it is an exaggeration to talk about an 'enclavitisation' of the countryside, although several colonies of foreigners or native newcomers are apparent. On the other hand, however, segregation and exclusion in the selected study areas are only partly understood by such visible things as gates and fences to distinguish insiders from outsiders. Living apart together is generally a less visible and more subtle affair.

# 4 Typologies of Consumers and RGS

## 4.1 Consumers and Variety

In the previous chapter we have used the trends mentioned in section 2.2 to structure our analysis of the RGS (themes) in the selected study areas. Figure 2 also makes another link: between themes and typologies. Much less research input is delivered by the interviewees with respect to this relationship. It has become clear that interviewees generally have more knowledge of the desires and demands of consumers than insight into what kind of people they are dealing with. In this respect, our discussion partners are consumer-oriented via product-related matters. As far as they are consumer-oriented in the sense of consumer typologies as such, central points of reference are 'classic' variables and broad categories. That is, consumers are characterised in terms of gender (male or female), age (youngsters, pensioners), socio-economic status (lower, middle, or upper class) or household composition (couples with(out) children) as well as in terms of broad categories of combined features, like: 'buying real estate in this M-area is very popular among young families with children' or 'this T-area is visited by many elderly couples from abroad'. It appears to be much more difficult for interviewees to characterise consumers in socio-cultural qualifications and typologies. Insofar as they do so, their consumer profiles derive from homespun philosophies rather than profound analysis. So, it is not a matter-of-course to interpret the interviewee's answers to our questions in terms of the consumer images that are basically of a socio-cultural origin.

The consumer images as a frame a reference is useful though, because consumers may not be typified directly in socio-cultural terms, this is actually done indirectly, i.e., via the social, cultural and natural dimensions of RGS. In this respect interviewees have a sense of consumer subtleties because RGS are not solely defined in strictly monetary terms. Attention is also paid to all kinds of nonmaterial aspects of consumption. The interviewees refer to experiences influencing consumer demand that range from snob-appeal (prestige) and eye-appeal (beauty) to authenticity, security, intimacy and fun. The fact that interviewees do not only point at socio-economic and demographic characteristics of consumers or economic dimensions of RGS is notable enough if it is taken into consideration that calculating consumerism dominates frequently as a result of the preponderance of real estate. As soon as (second) houses are main consumer goods, it would not have come to us as a surprise when the reflections of the people we have interviewed on modern consumers had contrasted sharply with scholarly consumer studies in which unique and responsible consumer behaviour receive much attention because both are regarded prototypical for consumers and consumerism in the (post)modern era. Given the outcomes of our interviews, it is rather surprising that relatively much notice has been taken of the so-called dematerialisation of consumption. This matter is raised in the context of thematisation, staging or branding of rurality in general or specific RGS in particular. Its importance for drawing consumer attention is clearly illustrated in a variety of ways as a result of references to image building, picturesque pictures, nostalgic craftsmanship, regional gastronomy or historic heritage. We also come across this as soon as luxury or pampering are mentioned or specific remarks are made about connecting RGS to several promising perceptions of the qualities of life in the countryside: feeling energetic, living at a slower pace and being outdoors (gardening, riding on horseback, etc.), escaping various dangers belonging to the modern risk society (crime, air and noise pollution).

Another feature of the consumer images is relevant, too. In section 2.3 it has been emphasised that every consumer is a multifaced person whose wishes and wants are fickle. For this reason the consumer images form a continuum. Such a framework is all the more realistic when we are confronted by the phenomenon that today's consumers are very demanding. Section 3.3 makes it abundantly clear that consumers like variety. The preferences and motivations of 'nomadic' consumers are heterogeneous and liable to change. On the other hand, however, if we look at the level of RGS, it is also possible to reach homogeneity. As true as it is that consumers are ceaselessly searching or longing for new activities or accommodations, they simultaneously want more or less the same as others. From the angle of a selection of prime RGS (real estate, tourist infrastructure and food/gastronomy) changeable consumers' choices are seen as variations on a theme instead of entirely new themes. Further, the organisation of the RGS provision is a relevant condition for calculating consumers who would like to have everything accessible in a convenient way.

Perhaps it is also a possibility to make things even less complicated. That is, maybe we could give an interpretation similar to what is said about the three most important aspects of a successful retail store or restaurant: location, location, and location. To paraphrase, to the three most important aspects to attract consumers, leads us to: more, more, and more. Then our conclusion is simply that contemporary consumers want more trees, more houses, more silence, more roads and transport facilities, more freedom and living space, more luxury, more services, more golf courses, more walking tracks, more mountains, more places to eat, etc. Although this simplification is meant ironically in the first place, it is serious in showing that consumers' desires and dreams easily lack compatibility and in reminding us of the fact that consumers are choosy, which implies, among other things, that it is important for providers to renew their vacation parks, hotels or restaurants constantly to keep them up-to-date in order to surprise the jaded consumer.

## 4.2 A Room with a View: Direct and Indirect Consumer Expenditures

In sections 1.2 and 3.2 some explicit references are made to consumers' willingness to pay for RGS. It has been suggested that analysing different kinds of consumer motives will be helpful to answering the question if and to what extent consumers are willing to pay for RGS. More specifically, are they prepared to pay only for RGS, which contribute directly to individual profit or pleasure, or also for the identity or symbolic value of RGS?

As a starting point we imagine that a tourist is asked what he is paying for if he checks out of a hotel. Presumably his reply is that it is the room he pays for, not the view. This tourist's reply would be similar to all those consumers who are reluctant or even ashamed to overtly admit that they also pay for intangibilities such as a wonderful panorama. So, even in the case of a room with a view, which is a real delight and a preferred option to many consumers, and even if this tourist is fully aware of the fact that in the very same hotel the rooms with a sea view do have a higher price than the rooms at the back overlooking the car park, the concentration is on the direct costs. What this tourist takes into account is the price for tangible goods or services he has consumed personally.

This example is illustrative for the responses of our interviewees to questions about the willingness of consumers to pay for RGS. They too concentrate on the individualistic and tangible aspects of the goods and services provided. In other words, the direct costs of a house, a tourist attraction or a meal are emphasised, not the amount of money people are willing to pay for the scenery, the atmosphere or the sense of place. Of course, at first glance it is certainly true that we are unaccustomed to pay, for instance, a fee for walking or cycling in the countryside. Such kind of unwillingness or unfamiliarity is not only absent in such places as Finland, where nature is available and accessible in abundance, but also in the other countries with less nature and private rights of access. Likewise, paying an entrance fee for a natural park is generally not perceived to be equal to paying an entrance fee for a museum or a festival - even if this museum is state-owned or a festival is organised in a street or square that is open to the public.

Rather, it is commonly believed that what is offered by nature, is for free. In all the countries of the Rurban project similar responses are given: it would be felt as an affront if we where expected, for example, to pay for taking a look over the sea or a lake. Enjoying a beautiful landscape, be it mountains or polders, is a collective good that is not paid for in a direct way. Indirectly, however, consumers - or rather: citizens - pay for these kinds of collective goods via taxes or membership fees of natural organisations. From an individualistic perspective, the willingness to pay for direct consumption of nature or other aspects of the rural idyll is a phenomenon that is hardly recognised. The usual reaction is: How could it ever be possible to oblige consumers to make direct payments for hearing the silence, taking a breath of fresh air or enjoying the trees in bloom? Such a reaction is understandable enough. Naturally, tradition and legislation cannot be ignored in understanding people's willingness to pay for RGS - not to mention the tyrannical aspects that would go with making people pay for a breath of fresh air. Luckily enough, Europe has no tradition whatsoever of charging people for swimming in the sea or sunbathing on the beach. In Finland, the public right of access to wander through the forest and pick berries or collect mushrooms also makes it impossible to make people pay for such RGS. It is a lawful public right to enjoy such kinds of RGS freely.

Leaving different kinds of constraints and consequences aside, the discussions about the willingness to pay were initiated to provoke the interviewees to think about what is valued by consumers. An important result of these deliberations was that it is recognised by the interviewees that it is a striking feature of contemporary consumption that consumers are increasingly willing to pay for all kinds of intangibilities. Evidence of this can be found in the higher prices consumers are willing to pay for a high quality dinner in a fancy restaurant, a well-appointed summer cottage, an adventurous guided tour, a thrilling amusement park, a well-situated camping site or a hotel room with a view. In brief, an additional price is paid for an experience of luxury, authenticity, exclusivity, well-being, self-esteem, excitement, freedom, and the like. Moreover, this (hedonic) price factor is indirectly included in the bill and is paid for without a murmur or a blush. There is really nothing strange or ridiculous about it. Even more, the commodification of RGS depends highly on the association of material goods and services to nonmaterial characteristics. Nonmaterial qualities, which add to the quality of life, are valued and (more easily) paid for - not as such, however, but through the consumption of a tangible good are service. For capitalizing nonmaterial aspects a tangible good or service is an indispensable 'carrier'.

These considerations give opportunity to think further on the (im)possibilities of direct payments for such collective goods as a beautiful landscape in combination with the individual consumption of tangible RGS and intangible experiences. This problem asks for reflections on the (im)possibilities to unite the perspective of people as a consumer - traditionally characterised as materialistic and individualistic - and as a citizen - traditionally characterised as nonmaterialistic and collectivistic. From the consumer-images perspective we presuppose that both are in principle united but it remains food for thought to what extent and under what kind of conditions we are dealing with citizen-consumers in practice.

# 5 Concluding Remarks

## 5.1 Consuming RGS in the Study Areas

In the previous chapter we have analysed the trends, typologies and themes. We will combine them in order to compare the dynamics of consuming RGS in the M-areas and the T-areas in the participating countries. The result is that we see dynamic M-areas in Hungary, Finland, Spain and, to a lesser extent, also in the Netherlands developing with a conscious segregation between red (built) and green areas in the rural hinterland. In those M-areas the calculating and unique consumers are buying houses and commuting back every day to the cities for employment, while adoring the (last) farmers commodifying rurality with recreation and nature development. Predominantly economic perspectives, but sometimes also the availability of more nature and to a lesser extent also the social perspectives are relevant. But in France, the M-area is rather stable with efforts being made to exclude others and to keep the existing environment and landscape as well as the identity of the region intact. Here traditional consumers are dominant.

A similar analysis can be made for housing in the T-areas, where we find the most dynamic ones, albeit often small-scaled or scattered, and the calculating and unique consumers in Hungary and Spain. The 'pre-dynamic' T-areas with few building movements and traditional consumers have been found in France and Finland, while a 'post-dynamic' one with several types of consumers can be found in the Netherlands.

In the M-areas of Finland, France and the Netherlands, recreation activities are nearby and consist of day trips during the year, while gastronomy is less attractive. The opposite holds for the M-areas in Hungary and Spain. The T-areas generally are tourist oriented and more marked by experiences to provide an escape from daily life. Especially in the aforementioned dynamic T-areas consumers are characterised by experiences and the desire for nature and culture with a traditional or responsible feeling. Gastronomy may become more relevant in the T-areas than in the M-areas, because the conditions to offer contrasting experiences are fulfilled easily (e.g. the foreign consumers who are interested in regional food).

If we consider the M- and T-areas in the participating countries, we have to take into account that all countries have regulations to deal with urban pressure, but that some countries are characterised by the implementation of restrictions that are more in favour of economic development than of the preservation of nature. Supporting building activities is vital for municipalities to raise serious money and to create changes for the local population. As a result, the objective of economic prosperity frequently prevails and the distortion of the scenery caused by building houses and roads is regarded unavoidable or qualified as collateral damage. This holds in particular for Hungary and Spain, and to a lesser extent for Finland, that have less spatial restrictions implemented than France and the Netherlands. In the latter countries the individual consumer motives are more in tandem with common perspectives, while the economic aspects of RGS are more often accompanied by the desire for more nature that becomes scarce in those countries.

Consumers are willing to pay for the product or service they expect to get. They are willing to pay more when it is distinctive from other goods. They concentrate on the individualistic and tangible aspects of the goods and services provided. In other words, the direct costs of a house, a tourist attraction or a meal are emphasised, not the amount of money people are willing to pay for the scenery, the atmosphere or the sense of place. Therefore, the commodification of RGS depends highly on the association of material goods and services to nonmaterial characteristics. Nonmaterial qualities, which add to the quality of life, are valued and (more easily) paid for - not as such, however, but through the consumption of a tangible good or service.

Consumers are hardly willing to pay for the use of landscape and nature and for the preservation of it without RGS. Commonly it is rather believed that what is offered by nature, is for free. This is striking because nature and landscape are an important pull factor for the newcomers and visitors. However, the emotional ties and desires for a green and quiet space are hardly discussed. It is taken for granted as long as there is no scarcity of those places. The exceptions are places near densely populated areas, where urban pressure has created their scarcity. In such cases, as in the M-area of the Netherlands, gradually new relations between rural residents, farmers and municipalities emerge to resist to the urban pressure. In the next themes of the Rurban project it may be asked to what extent the new local coalitions are a forerunner of developments in urban pressure. Further, if those coalitions are a symbol of rural resistance against urban pressure or a forerunner of a new rural vitality to respond to the urban demand.

## 5.2 Whither 'Rurbanisation'? Vitalisation and Valorisation

The transitional phase our study areas are going through points into the direction of rural areas becoming 'rurban' areas. A vital characteristic of this process of 'rurbanisation' is a shift from agricultural production as the most important asset of rural regions to the consumption of rural goods and services. Both economically and socio-culturally consumerism and consumers cannot be neglected if we want to understand the changing 'identity' of rural areas under urban pressure. For this reason it is all the more important that consumer-oriented analysis forms a part of the Rurban project. This comparative analysis, then, employs a consumer perspective to focus on the relevancy of consumption to the changing state of the selected study areas. Although it is not our aim of research to determine the impact of consumers in terms of hard facts and figures, the foregoing chapters indicate that two processes are pivotal to the transformation of our research areas under pressure of the consumer society. We are referring to the two ongoing concerns of vitalisation and valorisation. Both indicate the influence of consumers on the 'rurbanisation' of the study areas. Consequently, they should be relevant to answer the question of whither 'rurbanisation'?

Vitalisation and valorisation are two opposite manifestations of the influence of consumers on the study areas. Both tendencies are directly linked to the dilemma of preservation and maintenance versus progress and modernisation. Roughly put, vitalisation favours change and valorisation cherishes the status quo. While vitalisation is directed at the modernisation of the socio-economic structures of a region, valorisation concentrates on bringing the cultural and historic idiosyncrasies of a region to the fore.

Sections 3.3 and 3.4 have shown that the (re)valorisation of the countryside has nostalgia as its breeding ground. Valorisation attempts to draw the attention of consumers by presenting them goods and services from a world, as we *knew* it, so to speak. The natural and cultural dimensions of RGS are stressed first and foremost and particularly traditional and responsible consumerisms are served. In general, nature is a stronghold of valorisation. Putting emphasis on the added value of 'green' goods and services is illustrative for accompanying marketing strategies. Valorisation thrives on a clear-cut distinction to the world of bricks and concrete in which natural sceneries become scarcer by the day. All the countries involved in the Rurban project give evidence of consumers to whom the presence of a distinctive natural environment is perceived as one of the most valuable assets of the study areas (to T-areas the scenery is of prime importance, to M-areas it is mostly somewhat less important), and is often a decisive factor in their choices with respect to the appeal of staying there for a short or long period of time.

Consumers, however, are also interested in other aspects. Contrary to valorisation, vitalisation focuses primarily on economic and social dimensions of RGS to improve the consumer's quality of life. Sections 3.2 and 3.5 are of special interest in this respect. Vitalisation is a driving force behind all kinds of activities and policies to 'rurbanise' the countryside instead of keeping the rural idyll alive. Vitalisation opts for creating an attractive living environment for consumers through the promotion of building houses and the development of an infrastructure of shops, schools, hospitals, (rail)roads, recreation parks, etc. All involved countries have in common that powerful actors - ranging from local municipalities to (foreign) investors, constructors and real estate agencies - are frequently adherents of this process of vitalisation. As a result, infrastructural and tourist projects are often of a large-scaled and capital-intensive nature (literally and figuratively: big business). There is no intention to negate the significance of the valorisation process as it is concluded that valorisation is a modest, not to say marginal, phenomenon in comparison to vitalisation. Vitalisation, in its turn, is mainstream. Obviously, its impact differs: vitalisation has reached another stage of development in the case of the Dutch M-area than in the Finnish T-area. Especially under circumstances, which are between these two extremes, vitalisation is less resisted and restricted. The Spanish and Hungarian study areas present evident examples of vitalisation that gains importance because there is much power behind the forces pushing it while the forces opposing it are far-off or far too weak.

From the angle of valorisation, an ever-growing consumer demand for houses, sports facilities, tourist attractions and the like, might be regarded as devastating to preserve a region's nature, local customs or culinary traditions. From the point of view of many shopkeepers, restaurant owners, tourist or real estate agents and farmers, however, increasing consumer demand for all kinds of RGS is crucial to survive economically, and welcomed as a consequence. Vitalisation in this perspective is regarded essential to prevent regions falling into decline. Symptoms of a region that will gradually come to a standstill are youngsters who are unable to find a job, businesses that go bankrupt and shops that are forced to close down due to a lack of customers (with great purchasing power) or social life that evaporates as a result of depopulation. Although such a scenario can be realistic to peripheral areas, it is less relevant to the study areas of the Rurban project. Fearing ghost towns and stagnation is way out of proportion, but opting out vitalisation is nonetheless easily qualified as a choice for pushing a region into this dreaded direction.

The preceding considerations on vitalisation and valorisation lead to a final remark. They indicate that consumers and consumerism in general should not be automatically or always characterised as either a blessing or a burden. The implications of 'rurbanisation' pose tremendous threats, but it also creates enormous opportunities for rural areas under urban pressure. An entrance into the world of consumption causes problems and generates possibilities; brings both economic prosperity and ecological damage to the regions. Consumers are simultaneously vital as well as vicious actors with respect to the dynamics of rural life in late modernity. Taking the pros and cons of consumers and consumerism into account is helpful to avoid one-sidedness. Besides, this approach is in tune with the challenge modern consumer studies are currently taking up. Correspondingly, it is a permanent challenge to find a balance in assessing the role and impact of consumers and consumption pressure with respect to developments 'rurban' regions undergo in today's consumer society.

# References

Andersson, K., E. Eklund and Minna Lehtola, *Consumers in the Finnish Regions: Åboland & The Helsinki Region*. Helsinki: Swedish School of Social Science, University of Helsinki. 2003.

Csite, A., B. Csurgó, E. Jokuthy, I. Kovàch, L. Kristóf and I. Nagy, *Consumers in Hungary: Budapest Agglomeration & Lake Balaton Region*. Budapest: Institute for Political Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences. 2003.

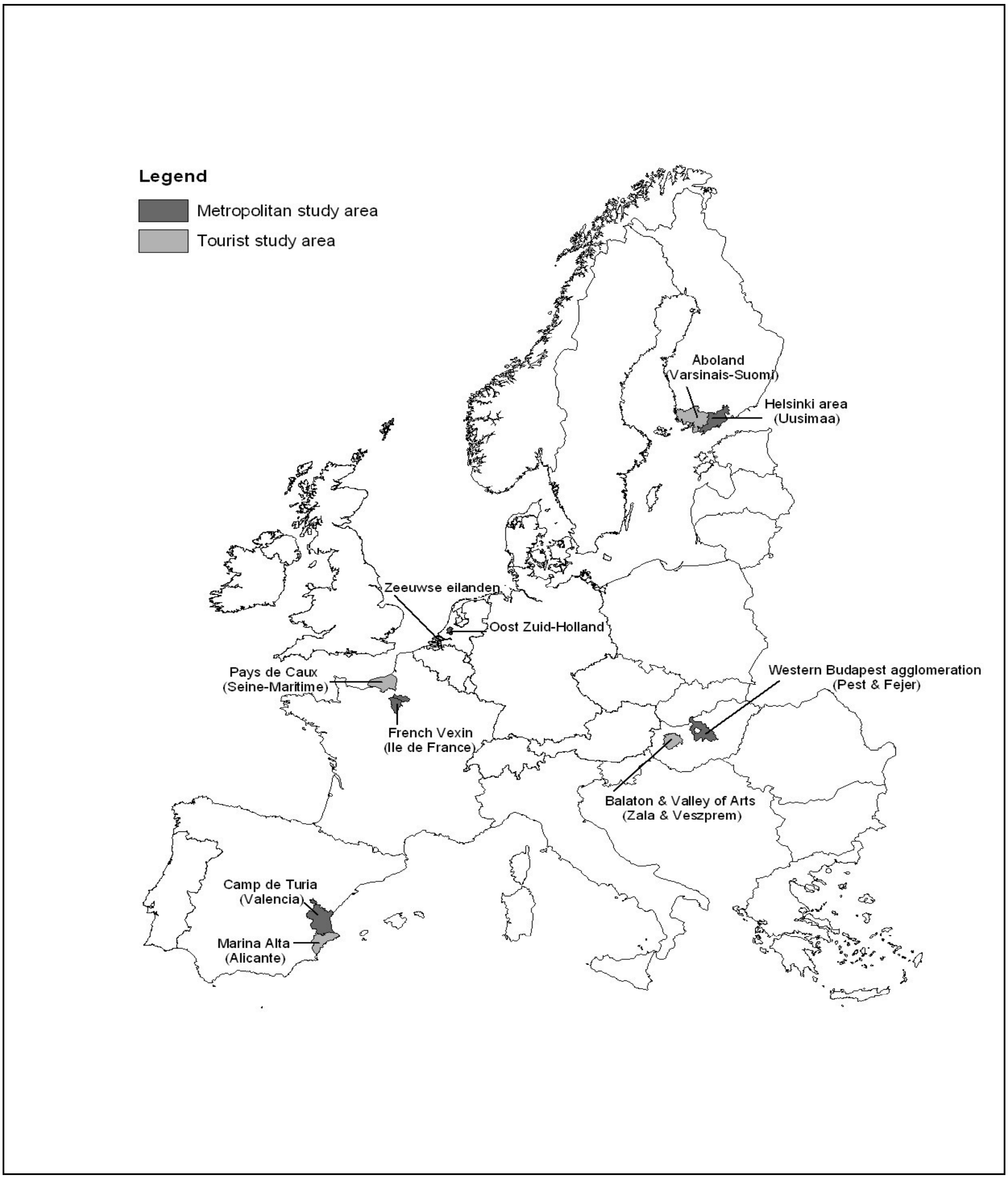
Esparcia Pérez, J., A. Buciega Arévalo and N. Trick, *Consumers: Camp de Túria & Marina Alta*. Valencia: UDERVAL, University of Valencia. 2003.

Esparcia Pérez, J., A. Buciega Arévalo and N. Trick, *Comparative Analysis of the Rural-Urban Contexts in Europe: The Netherlands, Spain, Hungary, Finland and France*. Valencia: UDERVAL, University of Valencia. 2004.

Hucy, W., V. Lafond, N. Mathieu, M. Berger and R. Raymond, *Consumers in the French Case Studies: Vexin Francais & Pays de Caux*. Paris: UMR, LADYSS, CNRS, University of Paris. 2003.

Overbeek, G, J. Vader and H. Dagevos, *Consumers in the Netherlands: East South-Holland & The Islands of Zeeland*. The Hague: LEI Wageningen UR, 2003.

# Appendix 1 Map with Study Areas



# Appendix 2 Framework Questionnaire

**TRENDS**

- What are the main trends concerning the demand for RGS (houses, tourism, gastronomy) in the region. Note that the trends mentioned are motivated in terms that have a clear connection to consumers' wishes, motives, values, etc.

**TYPOLOGIES**

- What idea(s), description(s) or definition(s) do you have in mind when you think about consumers and consumerism in your area?
- What do you think is attractive to consumers: Who buys what, where, when and how? (both from the socio-economic characteristics of consumers and the consumer typologies)
- What is your opinion about consumers' willingness to pay for RGS: What kind of consumers are willing to pay for what kind of RGS - which might be hitherto for free?
- What is your opinion about consumers' willingness to pay for RGS taken into consideration the geographical involvement of consumers (residential area, local area or regional area)?
- Do you focus upon the individual profit or pleasure RSG have for consumers? (both from the socio-economic characteristics of consumers and the consumer typologies)
- Do you focus upon the collective profit or value RSG have?
- What do you think of consumers' willingness to pay for RGS in relationship to nonmaterial aspects (such as: excitement, adventure, authenticity, organic, etc.) of rural goods and services? (both from the socio-economic characteristics of consumers and the consumer typologies)
- What kind of expectations do you have about the individual & collective interests and the material & nonmaterial interests of consumers? What consequences have this for the development of RGS and the green landscape?

**THEMES**

- What are the most important RGS in your region?
- What are the most important 'dimensions' of each RGS in your opinion?
- In what way are consumers informed about the RGS and the landscape the study area can offer (e.g. about which dimensions are they predominantly informed?
- How are consumers informed about RGS, e.g. are they persuaded by offensive marketing, are they informed via the Internet, via tourist organisations, etc.
- How and to what extent are traditional images of the four dimensions reformed and commercialised to the wishes or dreams of consumers? How authentic are the so-called 'rural values and lifestyles'?
- Is it monitored or evaluated to what extent consumers are (dis)satisfied with the RGS being available/offered?
- Do RGS strengthen or weaken the 'identity' of a region and how is the demand of consumers for particular RGS changing the character of the study areas? Are consumers a threat to preserve the four dimensions, such as 'the quality of rural life' (cultural) or do consumers bring new opportunities to the study area (e.g. employment or heterogenisation of values and styles of life)?
- How are RGS and their consumption affected by rules, laws or traditions?
- What is your vision of the future, in terms of the most important RGS - that is: are RGS changing and if so, into what direction(s)? A specific question in this respect is for example: what's the 'consumption capacity' of a study area in the near future? In other words: how large or small is the capacity to 'absorb' more people and what are the restrictions/constraints?