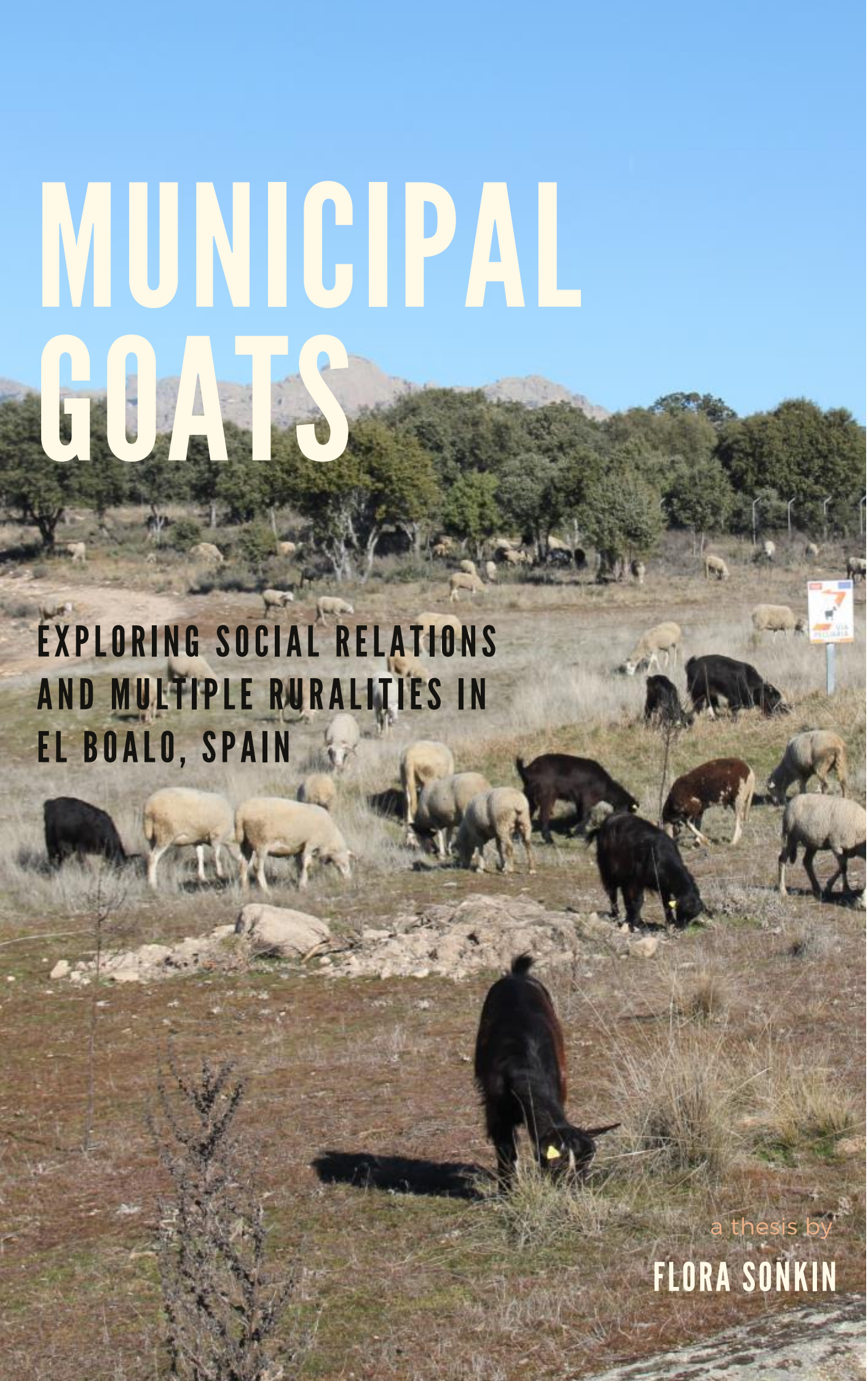

MUNICIPAL GOATS

EXPLORING SOCIAL RELATIONS AND MULTIPLE RURALITIES IN EL BOALO, SPAIN

a thesis by

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MUNICIPAL GOATS
Exploring social relations and multiple ruralities
in El Boalo, Spain

Master thesis submitted as part of the study program:
Master International Development Studies (MID)
Wageningen University and Research
Chair group: Rural Sociology (RSO)
RSO – 80436

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November 22nd, 2017

Abstract

This thesis presents the results of three months of ethnographic fieldwork in El Boalo, central Spain. Using the municipal goatherd project as an entry-point I discuss here the diverse and contested practices and meanings of rurality, through the lens of relational theory. By paying attention to the political context in El Boalo and its relations to the fertile ground created by the 15M movement for the rise of municipalist politics, I attempt to connect these intertwined trajectories as being part of the rural development projects implemented by the municipality, especially the municipal goatherd. To focus on the radical potential of rural spaces as sites for practicing renewed traditions, such as herding municipal goats in common lands, can contribute to a more sensitive and holistic view of rurality, emphasizing the multiplicity in rural spaces and their heterogeneous actors' creative experiments of life towards social and environmental resilience, local autonomy, and participatory democracy.

Acknowledgements

Knowing I will lack words to express my gratitude, and that I will risk forgetting many names, I would like to start by offering a broad self-managed acknowledgement: wherever you feel represented by my thankfulness, please feel my love and appreciation for your existence and support.

My deepest gratitude goes to my thesis supervisors in Wageningen, Joost Jongerden and Jessica Duncan. Your unwearying support and patience throughout this whole process was very important to me. Your precious advice and inspiration were not only critical for completing this thesis and contributing to my academic learning process, but also for creating a feeling of team work that hopefully we can carry on in future collaborations. I would like to thank my field supervisor, Elisa Oteros-Rozas, for opening up doors and presenting me to the case study of this research. This project would not have been possible without your valuable insights and encouragement, as well as support through the REVERDEA research project.

To all the people I have encountered in El Boalo and Mataelpino, I am so grateful for your openness to share your lives with me during this first experience with extensive field work. Especially Javier, Pili, Jose, Dionisio, Loli, Maria-Jesus, Alejo, Miguel, Monica, and Sure, thank you for contributing your time and perspectives to this research. I would also like to thank Noemi and Angel, for welcoming me into their family and sharing many special moments.

Special gratitude to my family, who has always supported my dreams, even if they took me across the ocean. Vocês estão sempre no meu coração. Aida, Michael, Gael, Nini, Rei, Filipe, Cacau and my extended families too. You are part of who I am.

Thank you to my friends and communities spread all over the world, specially to those who participated directly or indirectly with me in this masters' adventure: Chris, Maria, Matteo, Noor, Luc, Anne, Joanne, Claraluz, Guilherme, Tim, Margot, Boerengroep and all the inspiring people I had the chance to meet during my studies. I will always carry with me the beautiful moments and ideas we shared. I also would like to thank the great professors I had in Wageningen, especially Dirk, Monique and Ina.

Finally, I would like to thank Jordan, for keeping me grounded through moments of doubt and anxiety, and for his endless patience, love, and support from beginning to end of this process. Thank you for inspiring and co-creating adventures with me. Finishing this thesis is a shared victory, and I dedicate it to you.

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Preface

Coming from the city of Rio de Janeiro, and working towards a masters' degree in the Netherlands I found my tune in both harmonious and dissonant notes. First, my perspectives on what development meant or how its meaning is politically negotiated, were shaped by life in a country with deep social inequalities and emerging international capital interest. Questions about who gets to decide what, where, and how to develop; who gets displaced; what forms of governance assure real participation in development and policy-making; what epistemologies value nature over capital; or how to support livelihoods of those directly dependant on the land, were some of the boiling issues that led me to pursue an academic path in development studies.

In the classrooms at Wageningen, discussions about "the *field",* a supposedly parallel world that exists in countries of the global south and deserves to be studied and criticized, made me a bit uncomfortable. But at the same time, theoretical debates about the unboundedness of space and time, and a hopeful approach to a diverse and open sense of place, made me truly motivated and inspired. Before starting the masters', I spent a summer in Romania, where I experienced very rich discussions about self-sufficiency and community, consumerism and commons. It was during that time that I also had the most direct contact with the European *south.* Walking on mountain pastures and visiting abandoned rural villages, staying with young people who were trying out life 'back in the countryside', I realized I didn't have to look far to critically engage with *development* and its many facets. In fact, it was always the relations between peoples and their living environment and the diverse meanings they attached to it that puzzled me the most. Meanings and values that transcend dichotomies between *developing* or *developed* countries, *nature* and *society*, *rural* and *urban*, relationships that are at the core of human life in a more-than-human world, and that are not limited by nation-state boundaries.

All these experiences happened in sequence of, and were fuelled by, a transnational solidarity with social movements' resistance to failed democracies and the commodification of many aspects of life (including nature). Movements like Occupy Wall Street, the Spanish 15M or *indignados,* and the Turkish occupation of Taksim square and Gezi Park, gave a lot of hope to our street occupations as a student movement back in Brazil in 2012, resisting the commodification of education in our public university system. These occupations of public spaces were at the same time concrete demarcations of collective power in action, but also fluid in terms of their political lines and geographic boundaries. They were rooted in and supported by a history of social movement building, and responded to very real issues lived on the ground they occupied. But at the same time, these rhizomatic movements[1] that emerged in over a thousand cities and towns worldwide were somehow interconnected, constantly learning from each other and sharing mutual support. We felt part of a global wake-up call for change. Experimenting with direct democracy within student assemblies, I became hopeful while enacting those forms of governance, and with the possibility of having a voice in decision-making through grassroots collective action. At the same time, internal disputes and little

[1] Borrowing Manuel Castells' (2012) term for the Spanish *Indignados,* as a "rhizomatic revolution". The rhizome metaphor, derived from Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, emphasises the openness and fluidity of social movements and the capacity of protests to jump between localities and scales without overarching coordination (Woods et al. 2013).

response from elected government representatives led to disappointment with the reproduction of the same power asymmetries that exist in other scales of representative democracy.

For my masters' thesis in rural sociology, I chose to do research on a case which intertwines many of the interests and questions mentioned above. By taking upon sociology's task of being the 'science of living together' (Latour, 2005), I pay attention to both human and non-human relations, mainly the ways different actors cohabit and negotiate their diverse practices and meanings attached to place, or what sort of collective associations are coming to life. To answer these questions, I chose to focus on the European *south* – Spain – where debates about different forms of governance such as radical or direct democracy recently mushroomed, and so did movements of young people going "back-to-the-countryside". Having an entry point in the case of a mountainous rural village with a fast-growing population, experimenting with public assemblies and participatory democracy, and promoting new forms of relating with nature through a municipal goatherd, I found the case of El Boalo, a rural town near Madrid, to be suited for my ethnographic exploration. My research thus sheds light on socio-ecological and socio-spatial relations, going both to the roots and the rhizomes of the practices and discourses surrounding the municipal goatherd in El Boalo. The municipal goats' project, centre of this study, is both rooted in local traditional practices and characteristics of the territory with the recuperation of an endangered and indigenous goat breed, but open to people, practices and discourses traced from 'outside', such as agroecology and circular economy. Here I will discuss the openings and challenges of experimenting with such innovative practices from a political institution. By bringing the perspectives of local livestock farmers, new peasants[2] and municipal council members to the forefront, I attempt to unravel the multiplicity of place in this rural town while taking the municipal goatherd project as an entry point for their (political) negotiations.

Setting the Scene

22.11.2016

It was the first day I would go out goat herding alone. After a short ride down the highway from Mataelpino towards El Boalo, neighbouring village part of the same *mancomunidad*/municipality, I followed the small dirt road between the high school and the river to get to the goats' barn. At 11.00 AM the grass and oak tree branches that still had leaves were unfrozen. It was another cold but sunny winter day, and Juan, mayor of El Boalo was in front of the goat's barn to welcome me. I had arrived in Mataelpino a few weeks before, and was supposed to help with herding goats in exchange for housing at the municipal *albergue*[3]. I

[2] In this thesis, the concepts of new peasants, new rurals, new rural movement and back-to-the-countryside movement will be used interchangeably and will be defined in chapter 1.2.
[3] Mataelpino has a sort of mountain hut to host travellers and pilgrims that pass through, especially in the summers, as part of the *Camino de Santiago de Compostela*.

was becoming a part-time goat herder like the mayor, who had since then recently taken up every sort of task to take care of the 75 *cabras de guadarrama* acquired by the municipality the month before (October 2016). From birthing to milking, herding and feeding. Everything was learned on the job. Despite coming from a family of cattle owners, he did not have previous daily professional experience with farm animals.

The day would always start with checking whether there were any new-born kids (i.e. baby goats), to make sure they were healthy and together with their mother. Later we would take the feed outside. Buckets of whole grains went into the troughs we had put together some days before. Then I could open the door of the shelter and the goats would all run outside as fast as they could. They would be very anxious to get out of the shed after having spent the whole night inside to escape from the cold. Igor, municipal councillor of public events and festivities, would also be there every other morning to feed the goats and check on the kids when the mayor had meetings. Every week since I arrived there would be something new being added and improved in the *finca*[4]. New fences, water containers, shed roof extension, milking equipment, dogs, and the list goes on. The municipal goatherd project was very new, and just like me, most of El Boalo's inhabitants were just getting to know the goats. The new goatherd was presented to the community at the main village square the month before, and I heard the ceremony became especially memorable when one of the goats unexpectedly gave birth on the middle of the crowd.

Figure 1: Municipal goatherd being presented to the village in front of the town hall (October 2016), photo by the Ayuntamiento of El Boalo

[4] *Finca* translates as "rural property", "country estate" or "ranch" (Oxford English Dictionary); it was the main word used by farmers and local inhabitants to refer to farms or pieces of land – used to farm or not.

Back to the daily goat caring routine; after giving their first dose of protein and vitamins, it was time to take them out to the hills for grazing. The farm was located right by a *via pecuaria*, a common grazing area. In Spain, *vias pecuarias* or drove roads, are traditional and essential for the mobility of pastoralists and their practices of extensive grazing and transhumance. Those routes form a large network of common grazing areas interconnected all over the country, and have been used by herders for centuries[5]. Taking the goats out seemed easy. It was their favourite time of the day. But I learned the hard way that Juan's idea that it was possible to leave them eating for an hour or two and then bring them back was not very doable in practice, at least for me. Usually shepherds from the village would take their herds up to the mountains for a whole day and then come back at sunset, as I heard from some of the elders and former *cabreros*/goat herders.

For my first time herding alone, I took them across the river and up the nearest drove road. It was their most familiar path, and they went up grazing everything on their way. Herding those goats on my own was not as simple as expected. The younger and healthier ones ran up the hill very fast, looking for the tastiest acorns. Meanwhile, a couple of old ones lagged behind and I had to keep running back and forth to push them forward together with the rest of the herd, otherwise they would get stuck and not join the rest at all. I tried to be back in 2 hours, but of course the goats didn't want to go back inside. So as I was trying to herd them home, they started running towards the highway and it took me a lot of effort and slight desperation to contain them.

In a common weekday as that Tuesday, while walking with the goats I would see a few people coming and going up the drove road running, or walking their dogs. In the weekends, mountain bikers were maybe the main users of those paths. But that day, it was a group of school children and their physical education teacher that saved me. After I had finally gathered the goats all together to go back into the *finca*, a large group of 11 or 12 year olds passed through. Excited with the novelty it was to see a goatherd right by their school backyard, some of the kids started to run after them, trying to touch the goats. A few children were scared. In that dance around their new non-human friends, all my work to bring the goats together far from the highway was lost. Luckily a P.E. teacher was there to help, and we managed to organise the children in a half circle to go around the goats and bring them all in safety back to the barn.

The village and its mountains were home to goat herds for centuries, but the last herder retired about twenty years ago. Now El Boalo and Mataelpino, 60 kilometres away from Madrid, are shaped by complex fluxes of people, ideas and practices. The same mountains are appropriated by a variety of actors for different functions and practices, which are sometimes contradictory, sometimes simultaneous. This vignette exposes some of the multiple uses of the mountains and some of the ways in which different actors relate to each other. The municipal goatherd project, as it will be further described and analysed in this thesis, intertwine these diverse practices and meanings given to rural space in El Boalo, being both a site for creative practices and conflicts in terms of social relations.

[5] For an account on transhumance's traditional ecological knowledge and its strong relation to the use of the drove roads, see Oteros-Rozas et al. (2013).

Figure 2: Municipal Goats' barn (November 2016)

1. Introduction

The *rural* has never been static. But in recent decades, perhaps rural change is happening with more intensity (Halfacree, 2007) and interconnectedness (Woods, 2005), European countrysides have experienced different forms of restructuring. As expression of the crises that followed the extended period of agricultural modernisation (Ploeg and Roep, 2003), several rural regions in Europe have shifted from higher population density and primary sector-based activities, especially agriculture, to scarcely populated and multifunctional spaces of production and consumption (Silva and Figueiredo, 2013). In these post-productivist, transformed rural spaces, agriculture is combined with other functions and economic activities linked in particular to nature conservation concerns, and/or to the tourism industry (Cloke et al. 2006 ; Halfacree 1997, 2007; Marsden et al. 1990; Woods 2005, 2011; in Silva and Figueiredo, 2013) or what Ploeg and Roep (2003) called *broadening, deepening* and *regrounding* of agricultural practices. Nevertheless, these processes of rural transformation and development did not appear simultaneously in all regions and sectors of European countrysides, existing in parallel to processes of industrialisation of agriculture and re-peasantization (Ploeg, 2008). Industrialisation and intensification of agriculture in fertile areas is concomitant with deactivation of agrarian production systems, often in areas close to expanding cities where land speculation becomes more attractive than agricultural production (*ibid.*). According to Van der Ploeg (2008), agriculture has been materially reshaped in accordance with the large modernization processes that took place on a world scale during the period of 1950 to 1990. Meanwhile, re-peasantization is described by him as a process of revitalization of peasant ways of farming, and reconnection or 're-embedding' of agricultural practices in a closer relation

between humans and nature. It can occur in different forms, including for example through an inflow of urban migrants into agriculture (*ibid.)*.

Relating the broad academic observations mentioned above to the context of the Mediterranean ecoregion, rural areas are experiencing diverse trends in terms of population dynamics and land-use change, which are relevant to the case studied in this thesis. Regarding land-use, different rural areas face contrasting processes, namely abandonment of mountainous and less productive areas, and land-use intensification of fertile areas (Caraveli, 2000; García-Llorente et al., 2012). Moving to the context of Spain, a widespread emigration from rural areas toward large urban centres has occurred since the 1960's, which led to both land-use and demographic changes (Camarero, 1993). In terms of population, almost half of all Spanish municipalities in 2016 were reduced to 500 or less inhabitants[6], risking disappearing by rural exodus. At the same time, in some regions the migration movement is reversed, what Spanish rural sociologist Luis Camarero (1993) describes as urban exodus.

In metropolitan areas of large cities such as Madrid and Barcelona, young families especially have contributed to a process of counter-urbanisation. According to the INE (National Statistics Institute in Spain, 2015), between 2012 and 2015 the city of Madrid lost over 91.000 inhabitants, 2,5% of its population, while several smaller towns in the region had large population increases. After a global economic crisis that hit the country during the last decade, with especially high numbers of unemployed youth, several rural and peri-urban towns have received an influx of new inhabitants coming from urban areas (Camarero, L., F. Cruz, M. González, J.A. del Pino, J. Oliva y R. Sampedro, 2009). Some people for instance migrate as a contestation of urban life (Rivera-Escribano and Mormont, 2006), while others look for a less individualistic experience of living within a smaller community (Halfacree, 1997). Initiatives aimed at the revitalization of land or abandoned towns have been appearing all over Spain, particularly in mountainous regions, as part of a back-to-the-countryside or new rural movement. Some authors also refer to 'amenity migration' as the movement of urban or suburban populations to rural areas for specific lifestyle amenities, such as natural scenery, proximity to outdoor recreation, cultural richness, or a sense of rurality, and acknowledge that this migration implies substantial social and ecological transformations for the receiving landscapes (Gosnell, H. and J. Abrams., 2009). Other people decide to move to rural areas because of the higher purchasing power in these areas in comparison to the cities. This economic motivation lies behind the migration of different profiles with low or no income groups: from elders that move after their retirement, to unemployed (particularly young) people and, most frequently for migrants from abroad (Camarero et al., 2009).

Linking these trends to the political context in Spain, it is key to highlight the experiences with participatory democracy and remunicipalisation of services that gained strength in municipalist councils across the country. In this thesis, municipalism is understood as a politics of active citizen participation through direct democracy at the municipal scale (Bookchin, 2007; 2015)[7],

[6] For a recent analysis of national statistics in terms of rural depopulation in Spain, see the study by the Comisión de Despoblación de la FEMP (2017), retrieved at: http://agricultura.gencat.cat/web/.content/de_departament/de02_estadistiques_observatoris/27_butlletins/02_butlletins_nd/documents_nd/fitxers_estatics_nd/2017/0189_2017_DR_Reequilibrament-poblacio-Cat-Esp-municipis-2016.pdf

[7] Municipalism, understood in the terms of Murray Bookchin (2007; 2015), is as a political strategy enabled by a decentralization of power and enacted by citizen direct participation, which takes the

while remunicipalisation is understood as the passage of public services from privatisation in any of its various forms – such as private ownership of assets, outsourcing of services and public-private partnerships (PPPs) to public ownership, public management and democratic control (Kishimoto, S., Petitjean, O. and Steinfort, L., 2017). These political practices trace back to recent reactions against the failures of bipartisanism to represent people's basic needs such as housing and employment, and the social upheaval against austerity and privatization measures, expressed countrywide by social movements since the 15M (also referred to as #spanishrevolution or *Indignados*)[8]. The 15M or *Indignados* movement spread all over Spain just before national elections in May 2011 and after severe austerity measures followed the global economic crisis of 2008. The budget cuts on social services, paired with a deep-seated crisis of legitimacy of the Spanish executive power and a wave of housing evictions, fuelled a wide variety of social groups to occupy the streets. In parallel with other global movements such as the Occupy Movement, the *indignados* were asking for, but also enacting, a citizen-led governance and social organization (Castells, 2012). Using large neighbourhood or municipal assemblies, the 15M created new representations of the public space, as a place to reclaim autonomy through self-government and direct decision-making, reimagining politics from the grassroots[9].

In May 2015, the new *platformas ciudadanas* (citizen-led platforms or "non-parties", e.g. Podemos, En Comu, En Marea), formed after the 15M won mayoral elections and parliamentary seats all over Spain, including in some of Spain's largest cities such as Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia and Zaragoza (TNI and P2P, 2017). They built on political traditions of self-management and direct democracy, while also drawing influences from other movements such as degrowth, commons, ecology and food sovereignty. Building their support through local assemblies and neighbourhood groups, those municipalist coalitions have included agroecology, food sovereignty and remunicipalisation of public services in their programs, being part of a global turn towards rethinking (food) policy from the municipal level (e.g. Milan Urban Food Policy Act). Making use of these wider participatory spaces within certain Spanish public administrations, initiatives promoting sustainable natural resource management and agroecological practices as pillars for natural resource autonomy at the municipal level are fast-growing in both urban and rural contexts (e.g. Madrid Agroecologico, Red Terrae, Red de Ciudades por la Agroecologia, Llaurant Barcelona). And as it will be further explored in the following chapters of this thesis, the case of the municipal goatherd of El Boalo is related to both these rural development processes and political changes.

Following this introduction, I will present the case study and go more in-depth into the context of the research. I will then expose the problem statement and knowledge gap, leading to the research objective and research questions. In **Chapter 2**, I give an overview of the relevant literature used as background for this study. In **Chapter 3**, I explore the theoretical underpinnings of this research, and in **Chapter 4**, the methodology and research methods used

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municipality as a *locus* for social change. This concept and practice will be further explored in the Theoretical Framework (Chapter 2).

[8] For in-depth crowdsourced information about the 15M, from 15M participants, read in Spanish the free encyclopaedia of the movement: http://15mpedia.org/wiki/Portada

[9] I take the 15M as clear kick-off moment for a new political 'climate' in Spain. But I would like to stress the importance of historicizing and contextualizing its repercussions within the long history of activism and political organising by some of the groups that worked for decades before the most visible street occupations happened in 2011.

for both for data collection and data analysis. In **Chapter 5**, I present the results of the data analysis. Later, the analysis is confronted with the theory and literature during the discussion, in **Chapter 6**. Lastly, I summarize the findings and discussion in the conclusion, **Chapter 7**. The thesis is closed with recommendations for further research and a final reflection on my process of learning to be a researcher.

1.2 Case study

Fieldwork took place in Mataelpino and El Boalo, villages located in the Sierra de Guadarrama region, 60 km northwest of Madrid (Spain). A mountainous area (ca. 800-2500 meters), characterized by oak forests, 'dehesas'[10] and grasslands where extensive livestock raising (mostly cows, but also a few remaining goats and sheep herds) takes place. The area is protected under the "Parque Regional Cuenca Alta del Manzanares" (since 1985), the "Reserva de la Biosfera de la Cuenca Alta del Rio Manzanares" (since 1993), and the "Parque Nacional Sierra de Guadarrame" (since 2013). The current main land uses are animal husbandry and recreation, as this area also has intense population fluxes in and out from the largest city of Spain, Madrid. The population in the villages has been increasing both in absolute terms and in peaks during the weekends, with inhabitants and visitors that have different degrees of connection to and/or dependence on Madrid. This ranged from new rurals[11] who emigrated from the city to start agricultural projects in the mountains and who are integrated full time in the village life, to those who live in the village but commute every day to work in Madrid.

The *mancomunidad*[12] comprises of three villages: El Boalo, Cerceda and Mataelpino, but for this research I chose to focus on El Boalo and Mataelpino because of their livestock farming activities and the physical location of the municipal goatherd. Moreover, the research feasibility, having already contacts in those places and a limited amount of time and limited public transport between the villages, led me to select those two villages.

The municipal goats' project was chosen as an entry point because of its multifunctionality and complexity, as it relates to several recent rural transformations: politico-economic (remunicipalisation of public services, participatory democracy), socio-ecological and socio-spatial (changes on land-use, i.e. intensification or abandonment of livestock farming, conservation, urbanization).

[10] Dehesas are agro-sylvopastural systems mostly present in central-west Spain. The *dehesa* landscape is a result of longstanding human-nature interaction, shaped by livestock extensive grazing in woodland pastures (Olea, L. and San Miguel-Ayanz, A., 2006).
[11] New rurals will be defined together with the other main actors involved in this study in the next section.
[12] The oldest legal entity for inter-municipal cooperation in Spain, refers to a group of municipalities under the same municipal government and working towards common goals (Figueras, P.R., 2005). This administrative association of villages is voluntary and a common practice in Spain, oftentimes to respect cultural or natural affinities between neighbour communities and join forces and budgets towards a common public administration (*ibid.*).

Figure 3: Map of the mancomunidad of El Boalo-Cerceda-Mataelpino and the selected case study areas

Municipal goats

The municipal goatherd project was implemented by the municipality of El Boalo in October 2016, initially framed by the municipal council as a *herramienta/*tool to promote sustainable rural development.

The rationale of the initiative to acquire a goatherd for the municipality was connected to the following pillars, as described by the mayor and the municipal goats' website[13]: 1) bio-waste repurposing, by feeding the municipal landscaping prunnings to the goats; 2) safety net for other goat farmers in case of wolf attacks, by having a herd ready to give goats as reposition for animal loss; 3) environmental education to school children, local community, and for visiting urban dwellers; 4) prevention of forest fires by goats eating overgrown shrubs; 5) artisanal cheese-production; 6) revitalization and maintenance of the traditional goat herding practice, especially with the indigenous species *cabra del guadarrama*. Overall, the project aims to (re)connect people with the land - especially young people coming from the city -, and to serve as a pilot of innovation and sustainability in (agroecological) natural resource management.

[13] Announcements and reports on the goatherd project are publicised here: https://cabrasbcmblog.wordpress.com

The first pillar is the link between the goats and the new municipal waste plan (*Nuevo Plan de Residuos*), which was implemented in 2016. After reaching the end of a contract with a private company, the council chose to remunicipalise waste management as a public service. The new plan includes nodes for community composting, door-to-door collection of organic waste, offer of material and training for home composting, community chicken compost systems, and the municipal goats. This new waste management strategy was framed by municipal councillors and the mayor as a way to foster more local autonomy in terms of control of *what* is done with their waste, but also a way to decide *how* waste is managed, aiming towards *zero waste* and more active community participation in the process. Through this new waste plan, the government integrated principles of agroecology and circular economy, such as closing nutrient cycles, to the everyday practices of the municipality and its inhabitants.

Figure 4: Municipal goat and composting tools part of the new waste plan, communication tool by the municipal council of El Boalo

Political context

The case studied for this thesis was also influenced by the political processes described above, being governed by a coalition of left wing parties and "non-parties". The municipal council currently in power was elected in 2011 and then re-elected in 2015, with even more seats for citizen-led platforms. Its representatives are affiliated to independent grassroots groups such as BCM en Común (local group related to the catalonian BCN en Comú[14]), Juntos por El Boalo, Soy Vecino, and the more traditional PSOE. Fuelled by 'real utopias'[15] performed during the 15M movement, these citizen-led groups are currently expanding their political discourse and practice from the *calle* (street) to the *gabinete* (government): re-shaping municipal policy in attempt to reclaim local-level autonomy while promoting more transparency and participatory decision-making. Recently, the municipal council of El Boalo signed the Aalborg Charter and

[14] The En Comú platform was created by active citizens previously involved in the 15M.
[15] This idea is described by E.O. Wright in his work (2006; 2010) when exploring different strategies used by social groups when attempting to leverage collective power and create transformative change, or enact other futures in the present.

was in the process of developing its participatory local Agenda 21[16] as the main thread for all its government actions.

In El Boalo, practices of citizen participation and remunicipalization of public services are also paired with agroecological principles. The municipal council of El Boalo is an active member of Red Terrae, a network of municipalities working towards an agroecological transition through rural municipalism[17]. Echoing the network's vision, the municipality of El Boalo supports a local development strategy based on fixing population by supporting activities which are strongly connected to the land, relating practices to the characteristics of the natural environment, such as what is attempted to by promoting pastoralism with the municipal goatherd.

Red Terrae

When exploring social relations within the municipality of El Boalo and its goatherd, it is important to understand the influence of Red Terrae. The network functions as a platform for knowledge sharing and mutual learning amongst rural municipalities that are committed to supporting agroecology[18] as practice and politics (the network currently has around 50 members). It started in 2010, and attracted more partners since 2012 by creating a land bank, and mapping underused public lands that could be leased to new rurals looking for a place to establish agroecological farming. The idea of the network responds to a movement of re-peasantisation previously mentioned, as it attempts to work together with local rural actors (mainly municipal councillors or officials) to offer solutions for those new rural migrants to establish themselves in the countryside while making sustainable use of natural resources. It later expanded to different kinds of training of "local agroecological dynamisers" to be the interface between citizens and government in the process of agroecological transition. As mentioned by Van der Ploeg (2008), the process of expansion of peasant ways of farming[19] can be led both from the outside or from within, and the Terrae network works with integrating both. As described by one of its co-founders, Franco Llobera, Red Terrae acts as a broker or connection in-between the "left hand" (social movements) and the "right hand" (municipal governments). This network developed in parallel to several local-level platforms for advancing sustainable practices in different cities across Spain (e.g. Madrid Agroecológico, Llaurant Barcelona; Europe, e.g. Red Europea de Ciudades por la Agroecología; and the world, e.g. Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, Sustainable Cities Platform and Basque Declaration, Aalborg Charter and Commitments).

Main actors involved

In order to explore social relations in El Boalo and Mataelpino, creating categorizations of some sort is needed for understanding the heterogeneous actors that take part in them. For the purpose

[16] The Local Agenda 21 is a UN instrument for public policy planning at the local level, which involves government and civil society in a broad and inclusive process of consultation about local socio-ecological and economic issues, and participation to co-create solutions for a local sustainable development. For more information on the Aalborg Charter, refer to: http://www.sustainablecities.eu/the-aalborg-charter/

[17] Municipalism is here understood in the terms of Murray Bookchin (2007; 2015), as a political strategy enabled by a decentralization of power and enacted by citizen direct participation, which takes the municipality as a *locus* for social change. This concept and practice will be further explored in the literature review (Chapter 2).

[18] As it will be further described in the literature review (Chapter 2).

[19] Peasant ways of farming are considered here to be one of the pillars of agroecology, being related to traditional farmers' knowledge.

of this thesis, the diverse actors studied will be categorised as follows, but it is important to bear in mind that these categories are not homogeneous within themselves:

Livestock farmers: mainly people who were born and raised in the village, whose families have been farming livestock for generations. Most of them are currently farming cattle for meat, but a few still produce milk. Coincidently or not, the only goat and sheep farmers are 'new' to farming, having had other previous jobs that do not relate to animal husbandry in the past. But those were also born in the village. I do not want to threat farmers as a separate breed, or homogeneous group. But in this case, they often echoed similar arguments, and as will be presented in chapter 5, ended up having a collective voice in the political sphere.

New rurals: For this research I will consider as new rural or "neo-rural" any person that: 1) lives in a rural environment although he/she was not born in the countryside (Cattaneo, 2005); 2) is actively involved in one or more initiatives or networks that influence land uses and land management; 3) when migrating, had an ideologically defined intention (Méndez Sastoque, 2012); and 4) previous to migration, had some kind of inconformity with what he/she considers "urban" (Roverra-Escribano and Mormont, 2006). This is also the same definition adopted by the REVERDEA research project. The reasons for moving vary, but most of them have in common a search for closer contact with nature.

Migrants: Migrants here are a broad category which involves both in-country migration between rural and urban areas as well as migration from abroad. This category also includes here what some authors refer to as 'amenity migration', as previously mentioned, a movement of urban or suburban populations to rural areas for specific lifestyle amenities, such as natural scenery, proximity to outdoor recreation, cultural richness, or a sense of rurality (Gosnell, H. and J. Abrams., 2009). Migrants are also people who move to rural areas for economic motivations, such as the higher purchasing power in these areas in comparison to the cities or more flexible working conditions which allow for relocating to the countryside (Camarero et al., 2009).

Municipal councillors: Elected councillors form a mix of first-time politicians and professional ones. Members of citizen-led platforms are mostly new to politics, but often have a history of political activism in other forms of civil society organisations or have strong ideological beliefs, often connected to socialist backgrounds.

Locals: People who were born and raised in the village and were either former livestock farmers themselves or came from farming families. They were important in offering a historical perspective on the main transformations experienced in the villages in terms of land-use and cultural practices.

Goats: The municipal goatherd project could not exist without the goats. The project started with a herd of 75 *cabras guadarrameña*s, an indigenous breed from the Sierra de Guadarrama. Those goats were acquired by the municipality from a farmer in a different region, and the breed is currently endangered.

Red Terrae: This inter-municipal network described above played an important role in shaping the discourse and practices of rural development in the municipality of El Boalo. The mayor and local councillors took part in trainings about circular economy, agroecology, and sustainable

waste management and the chicken compost systems and municipal goat's project are also related to the learning generated through the network.

***Urbanizaciones*:** in English, "urbanizations", those were housing complexes built in the mountains that formed entirely new neighbourhoods, often with tract houses. They were both used as secondary housing for people from Madrid, but also full time residences to people who wanted to be closer to nature and/or to others who could not afford the elevated costs of living in the city centre.

Highway: El Boalo and Matalpino are connected to Madrid and to other rural and peri-urban villages by the highway M-607. The highway is here seen as an actor that enables physical mobility and connectivity in between rural and urban areas and the people that move in this continuum.

Drove roads: In Spanish, *vias pecuarias or cañadas*, these are livestock trails which connect rangelands all across Spain. This ancient network is constituted by tracks which amount to 120.000 km, but many have been encroached upon or closed. However, in 1995, the Government passed the Vias Pecuarias Act (Ley 3/1995, 23 March 1995) explicitly recognizing the role of transhumance on foot in maintaining pastoral resources, and laying down a legal system for governance of the drove roads. Since its enactment there has been a groundswell of popular support for pastoral mobility, a return to traditional transhumant practices and a resurgence of mountain biodiversity because of this ecological connectivity (FAO, 2016). El Boalo and Mataelpino are crossed by drove roads, and the use of those paths was a key element of the municipal goats' project.

Mountains: In El Boalo and Mataelpino the common mountains now have multiple land-uses: extensive grazing, walking, biking, mushroom picking, conservation, to name a few. For the past 30 years, they started to be protected by several environmental conservation entities, as the parks mentioned above. In this case study, they play an active role in feeding the municipal goats and are site for the negotiation of multiple ruralities.

1.3 Problem statement and knowledge gap

The concept of *rurality* lives in the collective imaginary and everyday practices of the contemporary world (Cloke, 2006). But oftentimes the *rural* is conceptualized as an opposition of what is *urban*, as being a backwards or less modernized counterpart. Meanwhile, idealized notions of rurality, as a naïve and untouched identity, combined with bucolic natural settings and traditional practices, do not express the multiple and complex nuances which shape life and space at the 'rural'[20]. On the one hand, with the influences of urbanisation and intensification of agriculture, restructured rural spaces have faced a process of abandonment of so-called peasant agricultural practices during the last decades (Ploeg, 2008). On the other hand, especially in western Europe, different pathways for a sustainable rural development are following more place-based strategies, what Horlings and Marsden (2012) call the 'New Rural Paradigm' or

[20] The term *rural* is used throughout this thesis despite my concern with the dichotomised vision of rural and urban. But the concept of *rural* is relevant as a base for argumentation and it is also used by the research participants to describe their own living environments and practices.

what Halfacree (2007) describes as 'radical' rural spatiality. It is thus increasingly important to research and account the rurals through narratives that allow for its openness and diversity.

In order to grasp the complexity and multiplicity of the rural space and be truthful to its dynamic character, a relational spatial ontology is sought. By abandoning an essentialist vision of places as closed or bounded entities, as well as the dualist perspective between nature and society for long maintained by the modernisation paradigm, this approach is seen as a way to take into account migratory fluxes, mobility, and material and in-material flows that form and shape place and lives in the countrysides. Or even further, as proposed by Healey and Jones (2012: 208):

> *Apprehending the complexity of the rural (…) requires not only thinking space relationally, but at the same time being epistemologically relational or theoretically pluralist. That is, recognising the co-constituent production of rural space through material and discursive phenomenon, processes and practices, and thus the value of existing theoretical resources (social constructionism, political and economic materialism) in relation with the critical and rigorous appraisal of 'new' concepts and ideas to better comprehend rural space and its multidimensional complexity and particularity.*

Taking this perspective seriously, this study contributes with empirical examples to an analysis that unravels diversity and multiplicity of the countryside, by using as unit of analysis the assemblage of socio-spatial and socio-ecological relations interwoven through the municipal goatherd project of El Boalo and its practices of diverse *ruralities*. This thesis thus aims to contribute to the body of work developed by sociologists and human geographers such as Scott, J.C. (1985), Van der Ploeg (2007; 2008; 2010), Halfacree (2007; 2014), Harvey (1996), Massey (1994; 2004), Latour (2005) and others, while advancing theoretical debates and empirical evidence of (agroecological) municipalism (Bookchin, M., 1982; 1990; 2006; 2015).

A series of case studies have discussed the practices of sustainable place shaping and rural development in Europe (Ploeg and Renting, 2000; Horlings and Marsden, 2012), and theoretical advancements on a relational construction of rural space (Healey and Jones, 2012). Rich accounts on new rural dynamics and contemporary migrations in Europe were provided by anthropology scholars Nates, B., & Raymond, S. (2007), as well as human geographers Milbourne and Kitchen (2014). In the case of Spain, a case study on the role of new rurals in the expansion of nature conservation and the issue of power relations approached through a political ecology lens by J.A. Cortes-Vazquez (2014) has offered a new perspective. Oliva (2010) has reflected on how new migrations are changing Spanish rurality, and the role of commuting in *rural melting-pots.* Benito Moran (2017) explores new farmers' trajectories in Madrid as a life choice, inseparable from their political and moral stands. But little or no research has yet been conducted tracing the lines between the 15M and its forms of governance, and those new projects of rural development; or the ways in which this movement and its practices gained political space in municipal councils beyond the main urban centres around the country.

By paying attention to the political context in El Boalo and its relations to the fertile ground created by the 15M movement for the rise of municipalist politics, I attempt to re-assemble these intertwined trajectories as being part of the rural development projects implemented by the municipality, especially the municipal goatherd. To focus on the radical potential of rural spaces as sites for performance of renewed traditional practices, such as herding municipal goats, can contribute to a more sensitive and holistic view of rural places, emphasizing that those are also

spaces of creative experiments of life towards social and environmental resilience, local autonomy, and participatory democracy.

1.4 Research Objective

The objective of this research is to contribute to the current reflections on the past and the future of rural areas, more concretely, on the different ways people who inhabit them relate to each other and the more-than-human world. To do so, I depart from a stand-point which recognises that (rural) places are socially and relationally constructed, being shaped by practices between human and more-than-human actors. In Spain, as in many countries of western Europe, transformations in recent decades have redefined the characteristics and roles of rural spaces within the broader society (Camarero, 2009). With empirical evidence from a case of a rural town that has lived especially intense socio-cultural, politico-economic and ecological changes in the past two decades, I aim to critically engage with the ways in which those changes are practiced and contested by rural dwellers and how those influence, and are influenced by, socio-ecological and socio-spatial relations.

By approaching the multiplicity of rural in its diverse practices and relations, I hope to contribute to the body of work in rural sociology and human geography that sees rural spaces as spheres of possibility. Accounts of this sort enable the recognition of attempts of innovation in practice, as being constitutive of the diverse trajectories which overlap in time and space. To do so I investigate how rural socio-spatial and socio-ecological relations are constructed, represented, materialised, performed and contested, using an agroecologically oriented project of a municipal goatherd as entry point. With this account, I also aim to contribute with an agency perspective to rural spaces and its actors, but at the same time portraying their everyday challenges and negotiations within the reconfiguration of those social relations. This thesis is thus a collection of different discourses, power relations and social practices that materialize within the municipal goatherd project, and on its potentials and challenges for reaching its goal to promote an 'sustainable' rural development.

These topics will be addressed in the next chapters, while responding to the following research questions:

1.5 Research Questions

MRQ: In what ways are social relations practiced and negotiated through the municipal goatherd project in El Boalo?

- In what ways are socio-ecological relations practiced and negotiated through the municipal goatherd project in El Boalo?
- In what ways are socio-spatial relations practiced and negotiated through the municipal goatherd project in El Boalo?

To situate this study within the relevant literature, in the next chapter I review past contributions to rural sociology, human geography and political science that served as both base and sounding-board to this thesis. The interdisciplinary character of this review also reflects the complexity of countrysides and multiple trajectories discussed along this thesis. Could also be seen as an analogy to "nomad thought" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), a way of thinking that knows no boundaries between concepts and academic disciplines, but rides on the differences and connections between them, speaking of always changing circumstances (*ibid.*).

2. Literature review

In this chapter, I will present a review of the main concepts and important features of the context of the case study in which this thesis is grounded. I will first provide a short introduction of some of the main processes shaping rural areas in Spain during the past decades, referring its social context, focussing on politico-economic aspects. This first sub-chapter lays the ground for the broader historical background to which the case studied in this thesis relates to. In the section that follows, I will explain some of the changes in governance after the transition to democracy in Spain that are relevant to this thesis, briefly exposing new public participation trends, and linking those to the concept of municipalism. The concept of municipalism was brought up several times by municipal council members when speaking of their political projects, and it was also very present in the discourse of Red Terrae. Is thus relevant to better understand the initiatives being promoted by El Boalo, including the municipal goatherd. In the last sub-chapter I focus on socio-ecological trends such as 'closing loops', which is part of the concept of agroecology, that will be described in both its practical and political aspects. The concept of agroecology was also used by the municipal council members when describing the goatherd project, and had started to be used as a thread to guide different policies and strategic plans led by the municipality.

2.1. Recent social changes in (rural) Spain

Reviewing the literature on Spanish rural transformations, studies show that between 1950 and 1990 Spanish mountainous rural areas have suffered severe depopulation (Collantes and Pinilla, 2011). As noted in the introduction, because of rural exodus, Spain has now 80% of its population living in cities (Barrios, 2012). Historians Collantes and Pinilla (2011) made an extensive account on rural demographic and land-use changes in Spain[21], and their analysis shows how industrialization and urbanization transformed rural areas in the country especially since the mid-twentieth century, after the Spanish civil war (1936-1939). This transition was highly influenced by processes of industrialisation of food production (*ibid.*) and the consequent deactivation of peasant agriculture (Ploeg, 2008). These processes, especially since the 1960s, led to a shift of the agricultural focus of rural towns, which increasingly diversified their productive activities – now centred on construction, retail, trade, hospitality and industry (Camarero et al. 2009). By the 1980s, Spanish agriculture had industrialized and maintained levels of mechanization like much of the rest of Europe (González de Molina and I. Guzmán, 2017).

These processes of movement and land-use changes in rural areas can also be understood as a fundamental alteration of socio-ecological systems, which may be spontaneous or planned, and can take on a normative and deliberative approach (Horlings, 2016). If taking a normative approach, rural transformation and development can lead to ethical concerns such as what constitutes a more beneficial state of a system, for whom, at what scale and who determines this (*ibid.*), questions that will be especially relevant to the context of the case studied in this thesis. Rural development and change, be it spontaneous or planned, entails a process of economic reorientation and spatial reallocation of rural dwellers away from a strictly agricultural-based livelihood, defined by Bryceson (2002) as deagrarianization. But at the same time, it in many

[21] The authors measure demographic changes in rural areas by focusing on populations who live in municipalities with fewer than 10.000 inhabitants (Collantes and Pinilla, 2011), using secondary data from Faostat and the national statistics institute of Spain.

cases relates to a back-to-the-countryside movement, and the realisation of diversified activities in the countryside (Cloke et al. 2006 ; Halfacree 1997, 2007; Marsden et al. 1990; Woods 2005, 2011; in Silva and Figueiredo, 2013). In both cases, it is important to note that these developments, or transitions, as put forward by Wilson (2007), do not follow linear and homogenous temporal-spatial dynamics, nor are they universalising and caused by structural forces. If we agree with this understanding, thinking rural development as a linear process might lead to thinking about rural spaces and their development as a pre-defined ideal, a deterministic and homogenous category.

Rural restructuring became the dominant narrative when describing these rural changes in the second half of the 20th century from a politico-economic perspective (Hoggart and Paniagua, 2001). Although several scholars have analysed Spain under the same umbrella of rural restructuring as other European countries in the same period (eg. Silva and Figueiredo, 2013), this conceptualisation of Spanish rural change is debated. Hoggart and Paniagua (2001) for instance, question this restructuration analysis in terms of its fitting to the context of rural Spain, since the country had a very different politico-economic history from that of the United Kindom or other northern European countries. The authors argue this was/is an uneven process, and when it comes to the existing literature, research on the 'restructured countryside' have been very much English-centred (*ibid.*). In their article, *The restructuring rural Spain?*, Hoggart and Paniagua emphasize that rural social change has been slower in Spain than in other European countries and limited to certain tourism regions. But their 'generalised' patterns on the agriculture sector and small rural villages are not exactly well fitted to the context of this case study, being only 60 km away from the country's largest city, Madrid. It is important to note that Spain is formed by many different rural Spains. For example, it is hard to trace parallels between rural Andalusia, one of the areas with highest rates of rural abandonment and rural poverty, but also a region with strong agrarian movements and political activism (González de Molina and I. Guzmán, 2017); and the rural area north of Madrid, which has been historically transformed in a touristic destination, being highly influenced by infrastructure development, secondary-homes and intense migration flows (Pinto Crespo, 2011). Although in this thesis I focus on one rural area in central Spain, it is the plurality and multiplicity of *rurals* within it which I try to make visible.

As Camarero et al. (2009) suggest, new information technology advancements also allowed for new forms of settling in rural areas that go beyond the traditional division of city/countryside, creating more complex and intertwined relations (also in Hoggart and Paniagua, 2001). Growing interconnections between urban, per-urban and rural areas in terms of accessibility and movement are in some regions to such an extent that rural areas start to see a demographic increase (*ibid.*). In terms of socio-economic analysis of these movements, amenity migration, characterized by a move from cities to rural areas in search of a higher quality of life (Moss, 2006; Abrams et al., 2012) has become a relatively common phenomenon in Spain since the 1970's (Cortes-Vasquez, 2017). Environmental quality and opportunities for new social groups are increasingly valued and support the construction of a positive, and to some extent, idealized representation of rural life, or *rural idyll*. This trend is also thought to be intertwined with the shifts in regimes of production and consumption that were brought forth by the introduction of conservation policies in many rural areas of Europe (Hines, 2010, 2012; in Cortes-Vasquez, 2017). With a construction boom in Spain in different waves, both in the 1960's and the late 1990's middle and high-income people started to buy secondary houses in rural areas, looking for an escape from the urban life, fresh air and outdoor activities (Hoggart and Paniagua, 2001; Pinto Crespo, 2011). Especially concerning the more recent wave, this migration movement can

be linked to the previously mentioned new communication technologies, increased infrastructure and more flexible working conditions, which allowed for people to more easily commute or to work from home in the countryside or to start their own businesses in amenity areas (*ibid.*). A movement of return migration is a relevant trend, especially for people who have maintained a family house or second-home in the countryside (*ibid.*). At the same time, rural populations have also migrated to the city, looking for work, educational opportunities, and social services (Camarero et al., 2009).

This section exposed some of the complex trajectories that influence and transform rural spaces, such as non-linear migratory flows, political and technological changes. Although these processes of rural transformation and restructuring in Europe could not be used to define all Spanish countrysides, they are relevant to the concrete case of the *Sierra de Guadarrama*, mountains where I carried out this research. Until the mid 20th century, El Boalo and Mataelpino had mainly primary sector-based activities, and it was only in the 1960s when an intensified process of urbanization and demographic changes became stronger and were part of a shift from agrarian economies towards tourism economies (Pinto Crespo, 2011). For this research, these different processes (migration, land-use change, urbanisation) also served as a rationale used by the municipality to frame the municipal goatherd project, referring to the influx of people coming from the city and looking for alternative lifestyles as an opportunity to create new jobs and activities related to rural 'traditions', such as goat pastoralism. In the next two sections (2.2 and 2.3) I will present some of the most relevant transformations in terms of the political context in Spain.

2.2 A brief history of governance in post-dictatorship Spain

In order to situate the previous debates on rural transformation in the Spanish political context, I found important to review some of the main changes after last century's dictatorship. The transition from the authoritarian Franco regime to the current democratic political system generated a radical change in the organization of the Spanish public administrative system (Hulst and Montfort, 2007). The 1978 Constitution laid the ground for an almost federal system of administration, decentralizing power (tasks and responsibilities) from the central government towards Autonomous Communities and municipalities. The seventeen Autonomous Communities have increasingly gained competencies over the past decades, being developed into new centres of administrative capacity at the intermediate level with exclusive power in policy sectors as spatial planning, public housing and public works, culture, health care, sports and environment, and with substantial responsibilities in the fields of agriculture, education and economic development (Garrido; in Hulst and Montfort, 2007).

These transformations in all levels of political administration and decentralisation of authority were a key factor in fostering rural differentiation. Notably for rural areas, with the creation of the Autonomous Communities as a regional level of government, prime responsibility for agriculture and environment was transferred from the national state to the regions between 1979 and 1996 (Barcelo and Garcia, 1986; in Hoggart and Paniagua, 2001). Decentralisation led to a multiplication of legislative initiatives. Regarding the environmental field, for example, there were in average 357 legislative enactments per year between 1986 and 1995 coming from the regional level (*ibid.*). These legislative changes impacted rural areas through a rush of protection and nature conservancy measures (*ibid.)*, a trend that is also pertinent to the case of El Boalo, which is now part of three different nature conservation sites.

In terms of citizen participation, the first decade of democratically elected municipal governments after Franco was marked by an efficiency-oriented vision for public

administrations (Gomà, 1997; Brugué, 1997; in Brugué, Font y Gomá, 2003). That meant local governments' role was focussed on infrastructure building and social welfare, while developing mechanisms for direct and active citizen participation in shaping public policies was not on the agenda. After the first years of transition to democracy, in the late 1980s, this scenario started to shift in several municipalities across the country, and important changes happened regarding the roles and relations between municipal councils and civil society associations. For instance, democratically elected town councils themselves assumed claims and approaches which used to be restrained to citizen-led associations, and integrated their leaders into the municipal councils (Brugué, Font y Gomá, 2003). A new model of relationship between civil society and municipalities was then initiated, when citizens' agendas and public participation started to appear as a relevant focus for municipal governments. But in Spain, as in most of western democracies, the 1980's were also a moment of privatization of public services, promoted by policies of economic liberalism institutionalized by European Community regulations (García Diaz, 2004).

In the case studied for this thesis I am focussing on a further process of power decentralization happening recently as a claim for more political autonomy at the municipal level. The dynamics discussed in this section set the political foundations for the movements examined more closely in this thesis: a 'new municipalism' being advanced and gaining more stability with the election of citizen-led platforms and the constitution of municipalist government coalitions[22]. This process entails both re-establishing or creating new mechanisms for participatory democracy as well as a remunicipalization of public services, which had been largely delegated to private actors in the last decades of the 20th century (García Diaz, 2004).

2.3 Introducing the practice and politics of municipalism

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, municipalism is a "preference for municipal as opposed to centralized action or control in government; municipal government as an institution". This political stand dates to the 19th century in Western Europe, when a civic reform of local governments pushed for public control over newly established services such as gas and water (Webb, 1890) and an overall increase of expenditure from local public bodies (Fiamingo, 1898). It was a cooperation effort between local authorities and their citizens which claimed political power and decision making on basic services to the municipal realm, moving away from the *laissez faire* economic thinking. Especially in late 19th century United Kingdom, this local-government led transition towards autonomy in terms of budget for services and its public provision, was known as *municipal socialism* (Webb, 1890).

Radical municipal politics is not a new concept, especially not in Spain. My initial interest in doing research in Spain was related to the country's long history of social mobilization, especially with well-known success stories of municipal cooperativism: Mondragon[23] and Marinaleda[24]. Fast forwarding to post-Franco democracy, both a stronger accent on local administrations as a local provider of public services, and a stronger significance of local

[22] See https://www.traficantes.net/sites/default/files/pdfs/TS-LEM6_municipalismo.pdf

[23] For more information, refer to Altuna, L. (2008). La experiencia cooperativa de Mondragon. Una síntesis general [Mondragon cooperative experience. A general summary]. Eskoriatza, Spain: LANKI-HUHEZI; and Flecha, R., Elboj, C., & Santa Cruz, I. (2009, September). Moving beyond the crisis: The mondragon cooperativist group. Paper presented at the 9th Conference of the European Sociological Association, Lisbon, Portugal.

[24] For an anthropological account, refer to Hancox, D. (2013) *The village against the world*. Verso Books.

governments' attempts to deepen public participation in democracy, characterize the 'two souls' of modern municipalism (Brugué, Font y Gomá, 2003: 2). In the case of Spain, Brugué, Font y Gomá (2003) speak of a division between local administration and government, describing the first as a mechanism focussed on efficiency, being the main *soul* of a representative democracy, and the latter as a mechanism for approximating the governors from the governed, *soul* of participatory democracy. Although this clear-cut division may risk being over-simplified, it does help to understand how different approaches can be mixed and stabilized in certain times, depending on the political context. Brugué (2002) presents the municipal sphere as a space of vanguard for political innovation and experiences in the late 20th/early 21st century Spain. He speaks of these innovations and debates around municipalism as a shift from a traditional local government towards local *governance*, which would take more deeply into consideration the different social actors and social relations in governing (Brugué, 2002). For him, the concept of governance entails governing in networks, and that would lead to what he calls a *relational municipality*. In short, the *relational* municipal council opens its doors to a wide constellation of actors and, consequently, facilitates their incorporation in the management tasks and provision of local services (Brugué, Font y Goma, 2003). What is not so clear is if this functional decentralization reaches the field of decision making; that is, if this constellation of actors is limited to work *for* the town hall or if it reached a level of thinking *with* the town hall. This 'relational' character fits very well with the case study of El Boalo and the theoretical framework used for this thesis, which will be presented in chapter 4.

A well-known thinker of municipalist politics was social theorist Murray Bookchin. Although he has written a lot about the Spanish revolution and Spanish anarchism (Bookchin, 2015), I found relevant for this case study to discuss his proposition to bring together practices of municipalism and the concern with ecology. His thinking contributed to a further recognition of the deep interconnection between environmental and social issues, being based on the conviction that nearly all of our present ecological problems originate in deep-seated social problems (Bookchin, 2006). According to him (1982; 1990), the basic promise of social ecology is to re-harmonize the relationship between society and nature, and the municipal level would be the *locus* for that change. As a politico-economic strategy to carry out social ecology in practice, Bookchin proposed the decentralization of institutions and power through the practice of direct decision-making. In his theory and ethical project[25], Bookchin (1990, 2015) described municipal assemblies as places for the political practice and education of the community as citizenry. He starts from an Aristotelian perspective of humans as "political animals", and from the municipality as *polis*, being politics a civic activity expected to be enacted by members of the community[26]. *Municipalism*, or a participatory direct-democracy enacted through face-to-face, non-hierarchical interactions, is the political strategy and form of governance of his vision. Bookchin's theory and praxis inspired many movements worldwide, including the anti-globalization movement in the 1990's, the Occupy movement in 2011, and the Spanish *indignados*, who proposed a 'new municipalism' formed by citizen-led coalitions and horizontal democracy, as a governance strategy.

[25] A project influenced but separated from both his Marxist and Anarchist influences (Bookchin, 1990; 2006).
[26] Aristotle, Politics (1252 [b] 29–30), trans. Jowett. In: Murray Bookchin. "The Next Revolution" iBooks.

Since the last elections in Spain, new municipalist agendas have also integrated new priorities which relate to the previously mentioned environmental concerns, such as creating local food policies and supporting a transition towards agroecology[27]. More than deepening participatory mechanisms in decision making such as local assemblies and open councils, in the case of El Boalo and its municipal goatherd, the remunicipalization of public services such as waste management[28], are also part of a broader project towards more local autonomy – both in defining what to do with their budgets and autonomy in terms of natural resources, e.g. by managing water and waste. In the case studied here, this shift from privatized services towards municipal public services comes together with an agroecological transition, in an attempt to reconnect human and more-than-human and close nutrient cycles, starting by institutional practices. In the next section I will briefly engage with some of the recent political debates on food and environment gaining space in different municipal agendas. In sequence, in 2.4.1 I will define the concept of agroecology, which is since recently gaining space in municipalist politics in Spain through inter-municipal networks such as Red Terrae and Red de Ciudades por la Agroecologia, including in the case of El Boalo. I will then also present the current debate on the risks of institutionalizing agroecology.

2.4 Food and environment in the municipal agenda

Bringing the debates about agricultural transformations in the urban-rural continuum together with active citizenship and municipal policies are part of newly emerging ways of thinking about food systems' governance (Pimbert, 2017). Over the past five decades, modernization and the industrialization of food production (Brouwer and Lowe, 1998) has been leading our globalized food system towards a social, economic and ecological crisis (Marsden, 2003; Van der Ploeg, 2003; 2006; Lang and Heasman, 2004; Sonnino and Marsden, 2006; Wiskerke, 2009; in Dominguez Garcia et al., 2014).

In the context of these diverse global environmental crises and an increasing decentralization of power towards the municipal level in the Spainish context, several municipal coalitions in Spain began to put ecological issues, such as sustainable waste management and supporting agroecological food production and consumption, into their agendas. This is happening for instance through the emergence of local Agendas 21[29], as in the case of El Boalo, and through global inter-municipal pacts such as the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, in the case of Madrid. For this case study, this trend became especially clear through Red Terrae, which as explained above has both municipalist politics and agroecology at its core.

2.4.1 Defining agroecology

Agroecology is now commonly referred to as a practice, science and a movement (Wezel et al., 2009). It combines elements of traditional farmers' knowledge with elements of modern ecological, social and agronomic science, creating a dialogue of wisdoms from which principles

[27] Agroecology became part of municipal agendas in several cities in Spain. For example: Barcelona: http://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/omic/sites/default/files/eipa_web.pdf , Madrid: https://diario.madrid.es/madridalimenta/ and El Boalo: http://www.adesgam.org/boalo-cerceda-mataelpino-visitas-la-fao-experiencias-terrae/. This trend is also seen through the creation of networks of cities organised around exchanging knowledge and experiences in agroecology, e.g. for larger cities http://www.ciudadesagroecologicas.eu/el-proyecto-de-red/ and rural towns http://www.tierrasagroecologicas.es

[28] For other cases of municipalities taking back control over public services, see Kishimoto, Petitjean and Steinfort (2017)

[29] http://www.sustainablecities.eu/the-aalborg-charter/

for designing and managing biodiverse and resilient farming systems are derived (Altieri, 2015). Agroecology as science, as defined by Miguel Altieri (1995) is "the application of ecological concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agroecosystems", and it is based on the following ecological principles:

1. Enhance recycling of biomass and optimizing nutrient availability and balancing nutrient flow;

2. Securing favorable soil conditions for plant growth, particularly by managing organic matter and enhancing soil biotic activity;

3. Minimizing losses due to flows of solar radiation, air and water by way of microclimate management, water harvesting and soil management through increased soil cover;

4. Species and genetic diversification of the agroecosystem in time and space;

5. Enhance beneficial biological interactions and synergisms among agrobiodiversity components thus resulting in the promotion of key ecological processes and services.

Another important definition of the concept comes from within the agroecology *movement*, who uses the term and its practice as a tool for political contestation of the global industrialized food system. According to members of La Via Campesina[30] (Machín Sosa et al., 2010:16; in Rosset and Martinez-Torres):

> *for the social movements that make up La Via Campesina, the concept of agroecology goes much farther that just ecological-productive principles. In addition to these, LVC incorporates social, cultural and political principles and goals into its concept of agroecology.*

These definitions, the first based in ecological science, and the second anchored in social and political interests of peasant movements, dialogue with each other in synergy but also conflict.

In Spain, the origins of agroecology as science and transformational practice, developed in the intersection of the labourer' and environmentalist movements, together with a group of social scientists in the Institute of Sociology and Peasant Studies (Instituto de Sociología y Estudios Campesinos — ISEC) in the 1980s in Andalusia (González de Molina and I. Guzmán, 2017). Molina and Guzman (2017) argue that this history explains Spanish agroecology's strong socio-political orientation and commitment to social movements, both in practice and academia. This overlapping between different movements is linked to the Spanish politico-economic context in the 1980s. After a process of industrialization of agriculture which started in the 1950's, during Franco's dictatorship, agrarian unemployment, especially in Andalusia, became a far-reaching problem (*ibid.*). After struggling for agrarian reform during the transition to democracy, especially the Union of Rural Workers (Sindicato de Obreros del Campo – SOC) raised the need to rethink the role of the labourer' movement, and sought for new alliances with other social groups in the rural world (*ibid.*). In search for ideological and political renewal, the SOC found tune with the emerging environmentalist movement in Andalusia. Through that

[30] La Via Campesina is an autonomous international movement that represents all together around 200 million peasants, small and medium size farmers, landless people, rural women and youth, indigenous people, migrants and agricultural workers from around the world. For more information, see: https://viacampesina.org/en/international-peasants-voice/

synergy expressed in joint mobilizations, political campaigns, and technical support from researchers in the ISEC, an agroecological transition started to gain strength in Spain.

In the next section I will resume the current debates amongst agroecology scholars, social movements and public institutions, which is relevant to the case study of the municipal goatherd project as it is framed by the municipality as an agroecological project.

2.4.2 Agroecology in dispute

In a recently published article, Giraldo and Rosset (2017) put under the spotlight and important discussion that has been taking place within the agroecology movement: the issue of co-optation through institutionalization. This concern is often raised by social movements when the concepts used for their political struggle are finally captured by the same institutions they are fighting against. "Agroecology is in fashion" (Giraldo and Rosset, 2017), and this can open a series of opportunities for food system change. But at the same time, there is a fear that the concept will be diluted and adjusted to the interests of private corporate capital and elites (*ibid.*).

As affirmed by La Via Campesina (2015), in the Declaration of the International Forum on Agroecology, the recognition of agroecology as by multilateral institutions, governments, universities and research centres, some NGOs, corporations and others, are redefining the concept as a narrow set of technologies, and a tool to reduce the sustainability crises from the industrial food system. Rosset and Martínez-Torres (2012) refer to this conflict of definition, practice and interest, as a material (agroecology as farming) and immaterial (agroecology as 'framing') territory in dispute (Giraldo and Rosset, 2017).

The issues and potentials of institutionalizing agroecology are part of this thesis, since the municipal council of El Boalo promotes the concept and its practices through the municipal goatherd project.

2.5 Conclusions

In this chapter I presented some of the key trends that are part of the context of the case study of the municipal goatherd of El Boalo, namely rural transformation and rural-urban migration flows, the transition to democracy, municipalist politics, and the institutionalization of agroecology. As highlighted above, Spanish rural areas and their processes of transformation are very diverse (as in everywhere), both within the country and in relation to other countries in Europe. But a lot of the literature remains focussed on finding patterns and thus smoothing over the differences existing within rural worlds. Therefore, ethnographic case studies as this one can contribute to enriching the empirical examples of diversity in countrysides. In terms of recent political events and changes in governance mechanisms, a wave of new municipalist politics is gaining strength across Spain, and this thesis aims to fill in the gap in accounting for these municipalist practices in rural spaces. Moreover, I have shown that a new municipalism is also bringing broad environmental concerns to the forefront of the municipal agendas, and this is translated into the of institutionalization of agroecology in the case of El Boalo.

In the next chapter I will present the lens used in this thesis to look at these processes and the conflicts and convergences they create in practice.

3. Theoretical Framework

After identifying key areas in the current literature that needed to be addressed to better contextualize this case study, I will present in this chapter the theoretical foundations which will later be used to discuss the findings of the research. This theoretical framework has evolved and transformed during the phases of data collection, reflection and analysis, being shaped by both

deductive and inductive approaches. Thus, the construction of the framework in its weaving of different concepts was created in a dialectical manner: piecing together the main patterns that came out from the data analysis and confronting it with social theories and concepts, and then repeating this process until reaching a point where the main themes emerging from the data where reflected in the choice of concepts, and could be used to unravel theoretical discussions.

Through this framework, I take up both a relational and materialist turns in social sciences, or as Whatmore (2006) puts, *returns*, speaking of space as a sphere of relations, which are constantly co-constructed and shaped through discourses, practices and materiality. In a few words, thinking space relationally and paying attention to the material and bodily relations that constitute the 'livingness' of the world, opens up an understanding of humans and more-than-humans as inseparable beings. This analytical standpoint is especially timely for the moment we live in, where rethinking the ways we relate with our living environment and recognize our inter-dependence in the world is a huge matter of concern for global ecological sustainability. I use relational thinking as an overarching lens, paired with a focus on social practices. Together, these lenses are used to analyse rural space and its transformations in terms of human and more-than-human interactions, enabling the recognition of the complexity and multiplicity of the countryside. The municipal goats' project is thus understood as being constituted by those human and more-than-human interactions, being a good entry point to tease out these multiple relations and practices such as agroecology and municipalism, which will be further discussed in chapter 6.

In the next sub-chapters I will present conceptual debates in different ways to understand the 'rural', and relate them to my chosen perspective. From this description, I will move onto presenting a theoretical shift from social representations to social practices, used as an analytical tool for this research. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by explaining how these lenses are used to explore the practices of agroecology and municipalism, which emerged from the data as important pieces of the case study.

3.1 Rethinking the rural

> *What happens if we begin from the premise not that we know reality because we are separate from it (traditional objectivity), but that we can know the world because we are connected with it?'*
>
> (Katherine N. Hayles, 1995: 48; in Whatmore, 2002)

What does *rural* mean in the 21st century? In the context of rural development and the recognition of interdependence between so-called local and global, so-called urban and rural, nature and society, the definition of who and what constitutes (rural) space is particularly problematic. For one, those definitions are more often solely based on the human inhabitants of the rural, focusing on characteristics of rural populations and not paying enough attention to non-human actors such as roads, animals, vegetation, that exert an important role in shaping practices and space in rural areas.

In an extensive study of the state of rural areas and their population in Spain, Camarero et al. (2009) highlight the methodological issues encountered when defining the rural. The authors mention that usually two criteria were used: one based on culture and tradition, according to which rural populations are those that have been opposed to the change; and another based on population size. The first refers to rural as those that continue differentiating themselves by maintaining their own values and lifestyles, or what could be called a rural *idyll* (Camarero et al., 2009). But this definition has been overcome by many contemporary rural sociology scholars, recognising that rural and urban populations do not have to be considered different *a*

priori (*ibid.*). In this way, the second distinction between rural and urban is made through a quantitative criteria, demographic size, assuming that size can be associated with different forms of sociability (*ibid.*), but defining a population based on numbers masks many complex and important characteristics. A third proposition distinguishes rural areas and their communities by their occupations, or main activities practiced, which would be then limiting the definition of rural to its economic aspects (*ibid.*). Although this criteria has been largely employed by social scientists, defining rural populations as mainly linked to primary sector activities such as agriculture and livestock production has become increasingly limited for the times we live in, when rural economic activities have been increasingly diversified, at least in the global-north. Finally, a more fluid and 'immaterial' definition is based on the representational meaning of the rural, seeing it as a cultural social construction (Cloke, 2006). The latter has been taken up by many rural sociologists and human geographers for the past decades as one of the preferred ways to avoid top-down definitions of rurality, enforced by statistical data and distant from actual rural lives and identities. For instance, Keith Halfacree's (1993) theoretical discussion on moving away from defining rural as a distinctive locality, and later his empirical study on social representations of the word 'rural' as expressed by residents of English parishes (Halfacree, 1995). Or more recently, Sarah Neal (2009) and the meanings of rurality in the English countryside, disentangling two hegemonic but contradictory social representations of the rural: rural idyll and rural crisis. The idyll would represent an imagery of rural as formed by intact communities, proximity to nature, rural traditions, small scale and local agricultural economies, to name a few. In contrast, the representation of rural crisis would entail the breakdown of communities, rural abandonment, closure of shops and social amenities, rural restructuring and rise of agri-business, isolation, commuting, loss of rural cultural identity, constant change.

Nevertheless, I argue that social representation theories are useful, but standing alone do not give enough attention to non-human actors and their agency in shaping (rural) spaces, by being focussed on the meanings and definitions created by the human mind. Moreover, so much about rural lives is created and enacted within the relations and practices in between humans and more-than-humans cohabitating rural spaces. Along this line, social scientists, especially in dialogue with society and technology studies, restarted to pay more attention to the more-than-human world, in a move from representational theories towards theories of practice and performance, a materialist *return* (Whatmore, 2006), or what Carolan (2008) calls more-than-representational theories. I inscribe this thesis within this movement, as will be briefly presented in the next sub-section.

3.1.1 From representation to practice

Catherine Nash (2000) offers an elucidating account on how human geography, as well as other social sciences, began to challenge the discipline's focus on representation by proposing a shift towards thinking from embodied practices. This shift is associated to a variety of approaches which relocate social agency in practice or performance rather than discourse, and reworks discourse itself as a specific kind of practice (Whatmore, 2006). Borrowing concepts from theatre, social scientists developed a new theoretical vocabulary of performance (Nash, 2000). Performativity and bodily practices are linked together within what Nigel Thrift describes as 'nonrepresentational theory or the theory of practices' (Thrift, 1996; 1997; 1999). With an emphasis on non-human agency and relational networks, and the language of heterogeneous fragments, flows, assemblages and linkages of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Thrift outlines the principles of 'non-representational theory'. According to him, it is not 'a project concerned with representation and meaning, but with the performative "presentations", "showings" and

"manifestations" of everyday life' (Thrift, 1997: 127; in Nash, 2000). A turn in social theory towards practices also seems to be tied to an interest in the 'everyday' and 'life-world', as they shift to the exploration and analysis of routines of behaviour, mental routines of understanding and knowing (Reckwitz, 2002). Taking this perspective as a starting point, I chose to focus on practices through which human and more-than-human become actors, relational, expressive and entangled in and with each other in a world continually in process. In that sense, I pay attention to the material dimension of rural place, as in the practice of goat herding and new relations with space, as a practice which performs a certain vision of the rural. This perspective thus not only recognizes the value of thinking in terms of social practices, but also in how those enacted practices are co-constitutive parts of a web of social relations between humans and more-than-humans.

3.1.2 Practicing ruralities

This research on the material and practical expressions of rurality is inspired by Carolan's (2008) 'more-than-representational' countryside. That does not mean rejecting the discursive construction of the notions of 'countryside' or 'rural', but recognizing that its social construction by discourses does not stand on its own. This means analytically meshing discourses, materiality and practices of rurality; reconnecting mind and matter, humans and non-humans, subject and object, through social relations. Understanding that rural places and their conceptions are relationally shaped and co-constructed through practices can also contribute to strengthening the potential of social practices to transform socio-spatial and socio-ecological relations. This ultimately means focussing on the doings and how they are constantly in *relation* with the living world, a dynamic trajectory that only exists in the inseparable associations between humans and non-humans. In other words, how the research participants' physical interactions shaped their understanding of their surrounding environment (Carolan, 2008).

As noted by other scholars, understandings of space are influenced by lived interactions with the environment over time (Tuan 1977; Ingold 2000; Thrift 2000; Cloke and Jones 2001; in *ibid.,* 2008). As Driver and Gilbert (1998) suggest, the metaphor of performance offers an alternative to more static approaches to place and landscape (Nash, 2000). Gibson-Graham (2008) take up the performative narrative to discuss diverse economies which exist and can be practiced and imagined as alternatives to capitalism. Here I use this reading through practices as a way to bring about an agency perspective to actors connected to rural places, seeing them as possible drivers of social and institutional change. In other words, everyday lives are interconnected within practices, and changing their routinization with ruptures, as with new forms of governance such as municipalism, or enacting new ways to relate with the non-human world, such as agroecology, can be ways to transform them. This theoretical and methodological shift is also echoed in Massey's *for space* (2005), when she presents propositions to sustain an alternative approach to space: one that recognises it as a space of interrelations, constituted through interactions and connectivity; and leads to reading it as a product of relations embedded in material practices. By taking a relational approach to space as an overarching lens, I hope to overcome the possible pitfall of social practices in being too concerned with the individual sphere, blind to the spatial context in which the practice occurs.

3.2 Towards a relational approach to (rural) place

The exact moment when a relational 'turn' in the social sciences - especially in human geography - first gained momentum is far from clear, but it can be situated in the context of continuous re-conceptualizations of space and place (Healey and Jones, 2012). The

understanding of space has shifted from an objective category, a cartographically bounded area, meant to be planned and developed, to a more fluid and heterogeneous approach, focussed on how relations between people at different times and spatial scales are constituted by and constituent of place (Harvey, 1994; Massey, 1994; 2005). Spatial ontology was then moving from a structuralist Euclidean spatiality (height, depth, size, proximity) to a geography of space-time relations and practices (Massey, 2005; in Healey and Jones, 2012), recognizing the significance of networks, connections, flows and mobilities in constituting space and place and the social, economic, cultural and political processes associated with them (Woods, 2011).

An anthropocentric[31] and Euclidean[32] approach to place led to a vision of nature as an *object* or *resource* to be managed, developed and planned for societies' uses (Graham and Healey, 1999). This two-dimensional and topographic representation of space has been a useful tool for modernization (*ibid.*; Harvey, 1996) and *order-building* (Bauman, 2004). In an attempt to deconstruct those absolute and utilitarian representations of nature and space as merely to be used for production, a post-structuralist relational approach to place has appeared as a hopeful endeavour of social scholarship towards an understanding based on heterogenous networks and interrelations. Murdoch (2006) and Cresswell (2009) provide a broad literature review of how human geography has evolved into thinking place relationally, moving beyond boundedness and fixity, and towards a sense of place shaped by interactions. In other words, thinking of space relationally means that place is not defined as a locality or mere geographic position, but as a complex network of relations, a product of multiple trajectories and practices (Massey, 2004).

Nevertheless, this form of socio-spatial ontology has been very much concerned with how cities are relational entities or nodes in networks, with social theorists stressing the multiplicity of time-space within and between cities (e.g. Giddens, 1979; Lash & Urry, 1994; Adams, 1995; Amin & Graham, 1998; in Graham and Healey, 1999; Massey, 2004). These analyses gained rapid influence in geography, urban studies, and social theory (Harvey, 1996; in Graham and Healey, 1999; Boggs and Rantisi, 2003; Woods, 2007, 2010). But those urban-centred social accounts remain the majority, while a much smaller amount of parallel narratives come from the perspective of rural settings and small or medium towns (e.g. Hedberg, C., & Do Carmo, R. M., 2012; Jongerden et al., 2014; Woods, 2015). With this thesis, I hope to contribute to the literature taking upon the until now 'marginal' perspective from rural areas and a rural-based projects as a node in a network of relations, and more than that, seeing the *practice* of goat herding itself as one of the main pieces in this puzzle.

I see a relational spatial ontology as a helpful tool to visualize (rural) spaces as spheres of multiplicity and possibility, as described by Massey (2005); from an understanding in terms of roots to thinking of open routes. But sometimes it might seem like grappling with such a fluid and ephemeral construction is too dematerialized to reflect the rocks, trees, people, houses and their practices which are all part of the rural. Starting from this perception, I searched for a concept that could weave those relations together and give it some stability, even if for a limited time. Using a relational approach to space as an overarching lens to look at contested socio-spatial and socio-ecological relations maintained and/or changed trough practices, allowed me

[31] By an anthropocentric definition of space, I mean something that was defined as resources to be explored and used by humans, as a fixed and bounded entity, in opposition to humanity and space being mutually constituted.

[32] In geometry, the Euclidean space refers to a two-dimensional plane, defined by a set of points which satisfy certain relationships expressed in terms of distance and angles.

to highlight its processes of becoming (*ibid.*). Acknowledging that space is always under construction provides room for recognizing the coexistence and constant recombination of multiple trajectories which are negotiated and subjected to power relations (*ibid.*). And taking this perspective for my analysis enabled the imagination of new forms of governance and diverse ways to relate with each other in a more-than-human world.

As argued by Massey, identities of place are always unfixed, contested and multiple (Massey, 1994: 5). And in the context of this case study, these lenses allowed for recognising the existence of multiple ruralities (or multiple ways of relating to and constructing the 'rural' place). The challenge of using 'rural' as a materializing concept is that it may hide the multiple nuances and sometimes sharp contrasts between rural places in themselves. In this sense, this perspective can be taken as a way to give more agency to marginalized actors, seeing how they are also important in practicing and reconfiguring institutionalized socio-spatial and socio-ecological relations. Through the field research I found the need to think rural space synergistically, as a constant interaction and thus construction through its context based practices. As proposed by Halfacree (2014), rural space is shaped by meanings and discourses (or representations of the rural), materialities, and practices (or everyday lives of the rural). The following quotes summarize this kind of understanding:

> *Materiality, meaning, and practice are all linked. The material topography of place is made by people doing things according to the meanings they might wish a place to evoke. Meanings gain a measure of persistence when they are inscribed into the material landscape but are open to contestation by* ***practices that do not conform to the expectations that come with place.***
>
> Cresswell (2009: 2)

> *The creation of meanings is an unfinished process, a site of (political) struggle where alternative meanings are generated and only temporarily fixed.*
>
> Gibson-Graham (2000: 96)

This approach is useful for it embraces both human and more-than-human actors as interwoven in a network of relations, recognizing their interdependence and the (political) struggles for strengthening or broadening a certain meaning or practice. In this thesis, these analytical insights are intertwined in order to grasp *space* or the *natural world* as having an active presence in social practice (Murdoch, J., 2006), instead of being a mere "container" or resource. These theoretical entanglements will be further explored with the case study in the discussion chapter.

3.2.1 Relating and practicing with livestock

Agriculture and livestock farming are socio-material practices (Arora and Glover, 2017). They involve humans in interaction with each other and with non-human living things – plants, animals, roads, tools. These practices are reproduced and maintained through space and time, but also adapt to and provoke changes in relation to the space-time in which they are a constitutive part of. There are infinite possible explanations for why a certain practice - for instance, pastoralism or agroecology - resists, reproduces itself and is maintained over time and space, when other practices are abandoned. When recognizing this, culture, traditions, social practices, well-established discourses, democracy, and modernity, are all part of successfully enacted ways of doing and relating, and form webs of socio-material relations between human and non-human.

Bringing these lenses to a concrete example of human and non-human relations, the way a farmer *relates* to his living environment is embodied and thus maintained by the enactment of practices. For instance, when grazing, or feeding livestock on pastures, both human and non-human actors develop and enact a relation – the farmer, the animals, the grazing land and its vegetation. Those practices and relations are in turn shaping what is considered a tradition, something to be maintained, both by practices and discourses. For example, a farmer that depends on his everyday relation with and use of the common lands for feeding his livestock likely ascribes meaning and value to the existence of these common grazing areas, and also likely do other farmers who depend on the same grazing lands. The pastures for them (farmer and cattle, goat or sheep) possibly have an important meaning, as material means for feeding and earning income, but is also as physical space that enables the reproduction of a cultural tradition (social **practice**). These meanings are then expressed and also maintained by the farmers' **discourses**. This approach recognizes the agency of people in shaping the world they live in. Through both practices and discourses actors have the ability to (re)shape relations (with other people and/or their living environment) (Reckwitz, 2002), by de-stabilizing or stabilizing certain relations and thus re-assembling the social in different ways (Latour, 2005).

In this scheme of things, the municipal goatherd would be a node in a network of socio-ecological and socio-spatial relations; and the relations stabilized through it, would be constituted and maintained by diverse practices and discourses, such as pastoralism and agroecology. This understanding is thus fitted to the appraisal of socio-spatial and socio-ecological interplays in a relational manner, as it does not take social structure as an essence, but it allows social organisation to be seen as constructed, transformed and maintained through practices. In this case study, the shift of consciousness towards agroecology and municipalism, attempted by the municipal goatherd project is done precisely by enacting goat herding in the common lands, relating with the natural world, and in general trying to revitalize pastoralism.

3.3 Conclusions

In this thesis, I use relational lens to the study of socio-ecological and socio-spatial relations in the countryside. Starting from the perspective of the municipal goats' project in a mountainous rural area in Spain, and focussing on the social relations assembled through it, a relational approach to the rural can help deconstruct binaries and open pathways to understanding how different ruralities are materially shaped. A theoretical shift towards a reconceptualization of place as a relational social construction (Harvey, 1994) which is plural and open allows us to move beyond an essentialist notion of space as bounded, being part of a movement to rethink how we live in relation to each other – human and non-human. In human geography, as well as in agri-food studies, a relational 'turn' to place has gained strength around the idea that so-called 'local' and 'global' are mutually constituted (Massey, 1994; Escobar, 2001; Boggs and Rantisi, 2003; Woods, 2015; Sonnino et al., 2016). By approaching the realm of the 'local' as reproducing but also influencing so-called global structures, this scholarly trend put forth a perspective of agency of the 'local', as well as created a framework for deconstructing dichotomies such as local/global, rural/urban, nature/society. This standpoint enables seeing (rural) spaces as spheres of multiplicity and possibility, enabling the recognition of social practices as constituting diverse trajectories which overlap in encounters in specific moments in time and place.

I use this relational conceptualisation of human and more-than-human to analyse the practices and relations within and around the municipal goatherd project, such as participatory democracy mechanisms and agroecology, paying attention to what kind of social relations and ideas of

rurality they strengthen as well as how those relations are negotiated and contested in practice. Municipalism was identified after the data analysis as being relevant to describe a shift in governance practices by the municipality of El Boalo, and agroecology was used to describe the shift in subjectivities attempted by the Red Terrae and the municipal coalition through the municipal goatherd. By herding municipal goats in the common mountains and enacting certain relations with the land and organic matter, the project enacted different ways to be in and imagine a future rural. Through the remunicipalization of public services and deepening participatory mechanisms, the municipal council was working towards more harmonic relation between people and their living environment. That is, at the same time rooted in local traditions and identities, and in route towards new values and principles, such as agroecology.

As put forward in the previous chapters, from an academic perspective, analysing the always changing rural in terms of relations allowed me to pay attention to the existence of multiple ruralities, or different ways of relating with place that do not conform to a unified ideal of 'the rural'. Moreover, a relational approach enabled me to understand rural space as being shaped not only by the biophysical ecology materialized in the landscape (mountains, trees, pasture…), but by the relationships and practices of people that inhabit or pass through it. Here the relationality of space is 'materialized' and brought to the ground through looking at practices, that sometimes enact an imagined future of the rural, but also perform ideas rooted in its past. These practices can be used to decentre dominant relations of power/knowledge, and remake other futures in the present. Used in dialogue, those lenses allow for collecting and connecting contingent associations of human and non-human actors, through their discourses, practices and materialities. Approaching this research in a relational manner and tracing the trajectories together in a process of collecting diverse stories, actors and practices, allowed me as a researcher to better grasp how different ruralities are negotiated and performed. The municipal goatherd project is thus here seen as a convergence of practices that aim to renew the tradition of pastoralism by enacting new ways to relate with the land and resources, such as waste and common mountains. This enactment also encompasses specific discourses, as in the use of agroecology and circular economy as rationales of the project.

In this thesis, the concept of municipalism is also seen as a collection of practices inspired by ideals that gained strength within the 15M movement, such as public assemblies, citizen direct participation, and the creation of municipal citizen-led coalitions. A relational approach can be used as a tool to understand how those practices enacted in major urban centres around the world – in this case, Spain – have gained momentum through interconnections, relations and movements passing through and shaping practices and discourses in rural areas.

Summarizing the main understandings useful for this thesis:

- Rural spaces are shaped by relations, and those are enacted, reproduced, transformed and negotiated through practices;
- A relational approach to rural allows for recognizing its multiplicity and thus openness to different futures in becoming;
- A relational approach also gives space to understand power relations and how they influence which relations and practices become stronger in certain times/spaces;
- Looking at practices brings an agency perspective to both humans and more-than-humans and a focus on their constant interaction in shaping the world.

4. Methods and research design

In this chapter I will share my research process, from approaching the case study to how research was conducted through the chosen methods. I will start by describing how I gained access to El Boalo and the municipal goatherd, as well as how my positionality has influenced myself as a researcher and the implications these had for my research endeavour (4.1). Then I will describe the methods used for data collection, why I chose them and how they were carried out (4.2). I will later present some methodological implications of my theoretical underpinnings (4.3), and in sequence, describe the methods of data analysis (4.4). Finally, I will reflect on the limitations of the methods used (4.5).

4.1 Thinking from the margins: approaching the case study

> *This mountain village, if it wasn't so close to Madrid, would have been forgotten, nobody would know it. There were people working the stones here. There were stonecutters, grains, cows, sowing… there was a lot of sowing around here.*
>
> Fernando, livestock farmer (Interview, January 2017)

Gaining access to the municipal goats' project was assured through a contact with the mayor, facilitated by Elisa Oteros-Rozas, main researcher of the REVERDEA research project and my field supervisor. She also provided other contacts with new rurals who had established projects in the villages, such as the Gabarrera Ecological Beer Cooperative and *Dejando Huella* (donkey agri-tourism). Elisa introduced me to the mayor of El Boalo by sending a letter explaining my research project and suggesting that I could 'give back' to the community by supporting the municipal goats' project as a volunteer herder. The mayor was what could be seen as the project's and the community's gatekeeper, and through his approval and housing support at the municipal *albergue,* I was able to quickly get settled and start my observations. He introduced me to some of the municipal employees and councillors, and invited me to all the activities related to the municipal goatherd during the first month of my stay. This opened the first doors for my integration in the village life, and contributed to the decision to focus on the goatherd as an entry point for my ethnographic exploration.

When speaking about the process of approaching the case study, it is also important to highlight my positionality as a young researcher, woman, Brazilian, and former city dweller, who had never had experiences working with livestock before. The differences that separated me from local livestock farmers can be seen as a mixed blessing. On the one hand, having such a distinct background might have been a barrier to overcome when trying to gain access and trust from research participants, because of being viewed as an 'outsider'. But at the same time, in some ways being seen as an 'outsider' helped creating a dynamic of mutual curiosity: me being interested in learning about the farmers' and other village inhabitants' practices and perspectives; and farmers and other dwellers being interested in knowing what I was doing and why I was there. When I first arrived in the village, people were very surprised and confused when I introduced myself, explaining I was Brazilian, but coming from my university in the Netherlands to do my thesis research there. But many times, they expressed a certain pride of being interviewed and studied, being opened to talking to me and responding to my questions. I also noticed that after a few weeks people would know me and talk about me as the new *'cabrera'* (goat herder). Being aware of my 'outsideness' within this cultural context led me to be more reflexive about the motivations of the research. It also led to reflections about how I was conducting the process of fieldwork, serving as a reminder that research should be more

than "extracting" knowledge from a place and research participants. This kind of thinking steered me towards doing a participatory exercise at the end of fieldwork, for instance.

Despite having previous theoretical interests and a few preconceived ideas of what to look for when first arriving to the field, I tried to strip myself down of these pre-formulated hypotheses and to adopt an open-minded and flexible position when carrying out the field work. At first, an inductive approach was chosen for its fit to exploratory research, and in a second moment, a deductive outlook aimed at theorizing through the process of data analysis. Starting from the perspective of rural inhabitants, it was possible to engage with their relations, practices and discourses, providing opportunities to better understand how people in that place experienced rural development and how their practices were shaping and shaped by socio-ecological and socio-spatial relations.

The choice of Mataelpino and El Boalo as case study also relates to an ethical and political standpoint of wanting to bring centrality to the marginal. For long this area has been 'forgotten' for being tucked away in the mountains, poorly connected to the city and focussed on agrarian activities for self-provision and local markets. Over the past three decades a lot has changed: now a renewed highway serves as a direct connection to Madrid; extensive farming was reduced and gave way to new housing complexes; and the natural parks attracted more tourists to the region. At the same time, new rural development initiatives such as the creation of a PGI for the Guadarrama meat, ecological farming, artisanal food processing, rural tourism, and environmental education also began to take place. In the political sphere, new practices of participatory democracy such as participatory budgeting and village assemblies gained space. At the same time, cultural centres, municipal arts and music courses, and a renewed young population coming from urban areas created new synergies between rural actors, the city and the villages. So the villages might not be so 'marginal' anymore, but it is shaped by a diversity of lifestyles, human and non-human actors and practices that are constantly negotiated. In this sense, wanting to bring centrality to the marginal means paying attention to the different nuances and multiple ruralities existing within this space; and to create a narrative that engages with both the failures and potentials of experimenting with new forms of public participation, new municipal services and new ways to reconnect humans and more-than-humans.

In the next sub-chapters I will continue by further describing the data collection methods and how those enabled me to gather data on social relations, by their expressions through practices and discourses.

4.2 Data collection: ethnographic methods

Doing ethnography enabled me as researcher to embrace the multiplicity, complexity and fluidity of situations; as reality is not one and the context of a study is alive, in ongoing change (Whitehead, 2005). Ethnographic methods and descriptions have been particularly useful for this research in grasping and accounting for often incommensurable changes and transformations occurring with regard to identity, power relations, and human and more-than-human relations or sense of belonging (Anderson and Berglund, 2003). Things changed very quickly with the municipal goatherd project upon my arrival in Mataelpino, and therefore I recognize that the data collected and the results from the process of data analysis are representative of the 3 months of field-work when I gathered empirical data using qualitative methods of ethnographic research: from November 2016 to March 2017. The set of methods consisted of participant observations, field notes, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and a participatory mapping exercise, which were chosen since they provided the flexibility and creative openness needed to inform exploratory research. The municipal goatherd and the

municipality's agroecological policies were very recent, and thus never investigated before. This led me to adopt an exploratory research design, as I was focussing on a relatively unstudied topic in a new area, and attempting to develop ideas and theoretical insights about it (Adler and Clark, 2011). The research design and research questions developed and changed as I gained more insight on the context and issues related to socio-spatial and socio-ecological relations. Keeping an open research design also meant taking a risk and embracing the uncertainty of tracing contingent assemblages taking shape around the municipal goatherd project.

In the next sections I will describe each data collection method used: starting with participant observations, informal conversations, reflexive journal, in-depth interviews, and finally participatory mapping.

4.2.1 Participant Observations

As mentioned above, an important part of data collection consisted in ongoing participant observation during various activities related to the villages' life, focussing on practices connected directly or indirectly to the municipal goatherd project. According to DeWalt and DeWalt (2011: 2), paraphrasing Bernard (2006), "participant observation puts you where the action is and lets you collect data…any kind of data that you want, narratives or numbers." This method comprises a few key elements: living in the context for an extended period of time; learning and using local language and dialect; actively participating in a wide range of daily, routine, and extraordinary activities with people who are full participants in that context; using everyday conversation as an interview technique; informally observing during leisure activities (hanging out); recording observations in field notes (usually organized chronologically); using both tacit and explicit information in analysis and writing (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011).

Malinowski (1961, 1975) is considered one of the founders of ethnographic fieldwork as we know it today, and one of his main contributions to its practice was including an emphasis on everyday interactions and observations rather than on using directed inquiries in his approach (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). This method has several advantages to scientific research, including improving the quality of the data obtained during fieldwork and enhancing the quality of the interpretation of the data collected by other methods (*ibid.*). I chose participant observations as one of the main methods for my thesis for all of these reasons, but also because of its fit to the understanding of social practices and the opening it provides for gaining access to unknown contexts, as in the village of El Boalo and its goatherd. Choosing to participate in and observe the most mundane everyday life activities, such as having coffee or spending time talking with the local butcher, and the most unusual ones, as in herding municipal goats, brought me closer to the feelings and the values of people in the context and allowed me to experience and better understand their interactions with the non-human world. Walking up and down the mountains to move in between villages when there were no buses passing through, listening to the sounds of cattle bells ringing, or participating in religious festivities that gave rhythm to everyday life, I could slowly understand something about the different ways of life intertwined and sometimes conflicting in that space. As it will be described further bellow, through participant observations with the goatherd and in the village life in general, I was able to gain access to different people and gather data on both how the municipal goatherd project was being carried out in terms of practice, and how it was perceived by different actors dwelling or passing through El Boalo and Mataelpino. Finally, this practice also contributed to solving the problem of reactivity - of people changing their behavior when they know that they are being studied (Bernard, H.R., 2011).

During the 3 months of fieldwork, I gathered data in the form of field notes of my observations while working as a volunteer for the municipal goats' project, helping with the care and herding of the goats. I had never worked with goats before, and with not much more experience than me, the mayor and one of the municipal councillors were learning it on the job too. This experience of informal apprenticeship shaped the way I looked at things and definitely the way I acted and interacted with people, the mountains, and the animals. Desjarlais (1992) is one of many ethnographers who have apprenticed themselves in the field in order to gain new perspectives (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). Coy (1989) argued that the apprenticeship experience results in specific "ways of knowing" and "learning to see" that differ from less participatory approaches. He argues, like Desjarlais, that these ways of knowing are connected to the physical performance of the duties required in the role being examined (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). Methodologically, performing the practice of goat herding was a way I found to better engage with it. Everyday performance of knowledge practice, apprenticeship, have been argued to be performative rather than cognitive, such that 'talk' itself is better understood as action rather than as communication (see Shusterman, 2000; Thrift, 2000; in Whatmore, 2002). Reflecting about any sort of experience of apprenticeship, it is possible to make a parallel to that of ethnography, because both rely on learning through participation/observation (Eingleton, 1989; in *ibid.*, 2011). This experience helped me not only in the process of intellectually understanding the perspective of participants in the context, but also to feel for myself the view of the other. More than that, it allowed me to be reflexive on my own performance of rurality and what it took to be integrated in the context of a mountain village and its livestock farming practices.

During those times, I could talk to and interview both the mayor and the councillor most involved in the project, as well as the hired goat herder (from January through March) and the transhumant shepherd who came to spend the months of December and January there. During the weekends of February and March there were also a series of weekend events called *pastoreo en familia*, or "herding in family", where families from the village and other neighbouring villages came to spend the day in the mountains with the goats, experiencing how it is to be a shepherd. These activities would start with the mayor introducing the project and later taking the groups up the drove roads for a half-day of explaining visitors about pastoralism. I participated in several presentations of the goatherd to new visitors and took field notes of the discourse of the mayor and the different interactions happening between the participants. During the weekdays starting in February, school children and their teachers also participated in the daily animal husbandry activities, and I then also observed and took part in their practices and interactions. After the first tasks of feeding and milking the goats in the mornings, I would go herding them with the groups of visitors or with the shepherd up the common mountains, and later take notes of our conversations. During all those activities, I always presented myself as a researcher, since adopting a covert role would have led to a series of ethical implications I was trying to avoid. Moreover, adopting this open position as a researcher allowed me to not be fully 'sucked into' the municipalities' discourse and relationship with the goats' project. Being integrated in village everyday life and hearing people gossip about the project, I quickly noticed that if I wanted to be accepted and trusted by livestock farmers, I needed to have a minimum distance of the municipality and the project. For this reason I adopted a position in between peripheral and active membership in the participation, according to Adler and Adler's membership roles (1987; in DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011: 24-25).

Observation and inquiry also happened during village social activities in bars, restaurants, public library and cultural centre. Spending time in those spaces allowed me to get to know

people who lived in the village, including elders, former livestock farmers, and new rurals, who all spent a lot of time at El Espliego (restaurant/bar in the main square of Mataelpino owned by a *familia ganadera*[33]). More concretely, these informal encounters allowed me to build *rapport* by participating in peoples' everyday lives. From those connections, I was able to get access to and participate in conversations which gave me deeper insight on the history of that place, and also brought insights on polemic discussions about the goatherd project. The villages had several public festivities to celebrate religious holidays or community events, when both new rurals and local dwellers would interact. Taking part in those activities enabled me to build links with different members in the community and get to know more people that could be important to later interview. At the same time, those informal encounters were appropriate spaces to listen and observe how different people talked about the goatherd project, which was, together with the arrival of the transhumant shepherd, one of the main topics of gossip and debate in the villages. The full list of activities that informed by participant observations are listed in Annex 1.

During or after every day of participant observations I took field-notes, in which I described the situation and the perspectives of the people involved, as well as my own reflections on the day and the events. As put forward by DeWalt and DeWalt (2011), as one replays in the mind and recounts in field notes conversations and events, many different details emerge after the moment of participation and observation. After more descriptive notes, I also noted new methodological ideas or connections with earlier observations or interviews. These field-notes were an important source of data.

4.2.2 Informal conversations

I used informal conversations and observations as data sources, as well as tacit and explicit information of the experiences shared as participant observer in the municipal goatherd project and every day activities of the village life. More practically, this involved conversations in public spaces in the villages such as the library, cultural centre, municipal building and bars, during farm visits, and while participating in daily activities of the municipal goatherd project such as feeding, milking, herding and hosting visitors. In general, the people I interacted with knew I was there for my thesis research, and that I was a helper with the municipal goats' project. So when encountering them in public spaces and events, I would let them lead the discussion but would also pose some questions to guide the conversation towards the relations I was interested in (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). I used the data collected from those informal conversations as knowledge that helped me be more integrated in the context of research and understand the nuances of social relations in the villages. Moreover, during those informal conversations I could incorporate insights from research participants on other places and activities where I could do further observations or meet key informants. If there would be something new coming from those encounters, I would document it on my field notes. But in terms of research ethics, I did not use any direct quotes from informants then, since during those informal chit-chats I did not openly asked to record or to use that data directly for my research.

Some of these informal conversations were carried out during a two week period of surveys I did to support the REVERDEA project. It consisted of a participatory mapping activity of the conflicts in the territory, cultural and ecological values of the landscape and its different uses by local inhabitants. By targeting respondents in both Mataelpino and El Boalo and guiding them

[33] Family with a livestock farming history.

through the use of an online map and survey on my computer, I had enough time and the appropriate topic of debate to collect data for my own research. The surveys became a 'conversation-starter'. And although surveying was not my primary data collection method, I was able to talk to over 120 people from 18 to 85 years old in both villages, thus gaining valuable information on the history of the area and the way people relate to their land. Moreover, some of those encounters allowed me to make new contacts with livestock farmers, through snowball sampling (Bernard, H.R., 2011). Snowball sampling is considered an appropriate data sampling method for reaching marginalized or 'hidden' populations (*ibid.)* and it was used here for reaching the human actors directly or indirectly related to the municipal goatherd project. Since livestock farmers were not easily visible or accessible without previous acquaintance, asking the survey respondents for their contacts was a way found to reach a broader group of farmers. It was interesting to notice that several times during the surveys the respondents asked if I was doing this for the municipality or if I was being payed. And when I explained that this was not the case, that I was interested in learning more about their lives and the ways they relate to their place, they opened up to me and talked about several issues; especially the arrival of a transhumant shepherd, and for the local people, the nostalgia of the times when the community was smaller and less urbanized. Building trust in this sense meant making clear my position as an independent researcher. In this process I noticed that when I mentioned a link with the municipal goats' project, some informants became more hesitant to speak, or had strong criticisms towards it. Since noticing this trend, I was more careful when presenting myself as independent from the municipality and the project, especially if interacting with livestock farmers.

4.2.4 Semi-structured in-depth interviews

Besides participating in everyday life activities, I also did farm visits and in-depth interviews with informants. The informants were representatives from the municipal government, present and former livestock farmers, members of local associations related to rural development[34], technical advisor and co-founder of Red Terrae, new rural inhabitants and elders. Those informants were also reached through snowball sampling, recognizing that to achieve greater representativeness in my sample I needed to be proactive in finding contacts of people that I would not just randomly meet in public spaces. Starting with the mayor, I had an entry point with the municipal councillors and Red Terrae. And by meeting one livestock farmer that was also the butcher of Mataelpino, I was able to gain contact with others. In-depth interviews were especially important to get more detailed perspectives from livestock farmers, who were farming all day in their *fincas* and did not often join the village social activities. The full list of interviewees is described in annex 2.

For the in-depth interviews, I accessed informants in person or by phone and asked to schedule a time for a longer conversation. Informed consent was cleared verbally during the interviews, and the interviewees' names were changed under their request for anonymity. But because of the uniqueness of the case of the municipal goatherd, it was impossible to anonymize all the data. I chose then to keep most of the respondents' occupations, since those are an important part of the results of this research.

[34] The associations were: *Associacion Punto de Luz*, a rural women's entrepreneurship association from which the municipal goats' cheese maker is part, as well as a beekeeper and hop farmer; *Dejando Huella*, working with environmental education and rural tourism with donkeys; and the livestock farmers' association of El Boalo.

Reflecting on preliminary data collected during the first two weeks as participant observer led me to decide upon broad themes to ask people about and guide our conversations. Especially through informal conversations with the mayor and former livestock farmers during those first weeks, I noticed there were some repeating themes that people wanted to talk about and that somehow shaped their relations with their living environment and with each other. Those themes were: transformations they have seen take place, changes in the landscape and on social practices, how they use the common lands (and how/if that has changed), their perspective on new inhabitants coming from the city (if interviewing a local farmer), their relation with local inhabitants (if interviewing new rurals), their biggest challenges, their participation in public decision-making and their perspective on the municipal goatherd.

Interviews with livestock farmers, mayor and municipal councillor for culture and participation, new rural dwellers and the co-founder of Red Terrae were recorded and fully transcribed. Not all the interviews were recorded because of their social context (if in an informal context, where other people are gathering around, e.g. in a loud space such as a bar). If I was not able to record, I would take short notes as the conversation went and later take more notes at the end of the day. I would start with unstructured and open questions useful for grasping participants' lived experiences and building personal rapport (Bernard, H.R., 2011). Then I would go into the themes of the semi-structured interviews, chosen as a way to let the respondents express themselves in their own terms, but keeping in mind the main topics I wanted to steer the conversation towards. The list of interviewees includes respondents of in-depth voice-recorded interviews as well as people I had informal or group interviews with and did not get recorded but were later described in my field-notes. It happened a few times that when having an interview with someone at a public place, other people from the community would come and join and take part in the conversation. This can often happen after a long period of fieldwork in small communities (Bernard, H.R., 2011). I treated the data that came out of my field notes as an important piece to the context and background of the research. But to avoid bias, I used the fully transcribed interviews, together with notes from participant observations, as main data sources and as a 'fact-checking' tool for the data analysis that will be further described in the next sub-chapter. In other words, if there would be an important information in my field notes about the use of the common mountains, I looked for quotes in the transcribed interviews that could sustain or that conflicted with that information. This way I made sure to be truthful to all sources of data collected and increase the reliability of my results.

4.2.3 Reflexive journal

Keeping a reflexive journal was a way I learned to connect my theoretical interests to practice, to keep track of my perceptions of the field, and to be aware of my researcher biases. Some of my early reflections on the complexity and multiplicity of place were inspired by reading Howard Becker's (1998) chapter on Sampling and his ethnomusicology example, when he discusses the hard job of defining the scope of research and about the fallacy of "pure" descriptions. Here are some of my reflections on the reading and on the experiences in El Boalo:

> *There is no 'pure' music, such as there is no 'pure' countryside or rural. There is no 'pure' mountains. Rural is both constructed and contested by diverging uses and practices and diverging political standpoints. All of that interwoven by religion, tradition and cultural institutions and practices. The rural is multiple. But still, what forms of "preserving traditions" or "maintaining identity of place" are here? On one hand the 'traditional' livestock farmer families who had been farming livestock here for generations want to 'close' their territory to new, more 'agroecological' oriented*

practices. And on the other hand, the mayor and the municipal goats project claim to be 'preserving tradition' by bringing back an autochthonous goat breed and doing extensive grazing in the common mountains like people use to do here generations ago. Whose tradition to keep? Are they compatible? How to solve those issues?

Reflexive Journal, 29.01.2017

Reflections as such helped me to later define the scope of my research, as well as deconstruct an idealised vision of that creative and innovative village in the countryside, paying more attention to the power relations and to actors marginalized from spaces of 'participatory' decision-making, such as livestock farmers. By writing my reflections on the field observations I was able to start disentangling the messiness that constitutes any social assemblage, in this case, a rural village and its' municipal goatherd. This was my first sketch of describing the components of what I was trying to grasp in El Boalo:

Municipal goatherd as an 'entry point' to analyse and understand multiple trajectories in place: from the goats come the wolves, and the mayor, the councillors, the local farmers, the more 'traditional' inhabitants, the neo-rurals, the school kids, the teachers, the entrepreneurs of the region, the soon-to be entrepreneurs, the mountains, the national and regional parks, dog owners, hikers, consumers, other food producers, legislations, EU, CAP, subsidies, unemployed people from the city, shepherds, migrants, traditions, natural environment, food, food sovereignty, agroecology, waste management, fodder, Terrae Network, municipalities, pilot project, community, idealism?, personal project?, visualization, media, education, future, sustainable rural development, fixing young rural population...

Reflexive journal, 12.05.2016

After two and a half months of fieldwork I reached a point when a lot of the information mentioned in informal conversations and participant observations were similar. And although I believe with a longer period of field research I could have gathered more relevant data, I recognized then that research was reaching the point of saturation. At that time I screened all my data to select a set of preliminary findings to share with a group of research participants. This meant re-reading all my field notes and highlighting repeating words and positions, tracing some first patterns and making comments on the side, which would later be integrated in the research results. This exercise could also be characterised as meta-notes or analytic notes (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011), and comprise an intermediate stage between data collection and analysis.

The idea was to have then an exercise to check my findings as well as to give back to the community some of the information gathered throughout my research with them. I chose the participatory mapping activity as a method to discuss the content of my results (Bernard, H.R., 2011). Its use as a tool to share and check the first findings provided a way to see how different people from different social groups interacted with each other when asked about the same themes. It created a space for thinking together and co-creating preliminary conclusions about recent transitions Mataelpino and El Boalo are facing, and this will be further described in the section bellow.

4.2.5 Participatory mapping

Para el pueblo El Boalo

Este es un pequeño pueblo
que se levanta altanero
con su ladera,
la sierra la maliciosa,
y el yelmo lleno de edificios nuevos,
también urbanizaciones
que tienen gran abolengo,
encierra tanta belleza,
que yo enumerar no puedo,
con esos prados
tan verdes la iglesia y el cementerio,
al que yo quisiera ir porque están
aquí mis muertos.
(…)
Y todo que llega aqui
Sea espanol o extranjero
Encuentra tal cariño y tal respeto
Que quando intenta dejarnos
Ja no sabe como hacerlo
(…)

To the village El Boalo

This is a small town
that rises upright
with its hillside
the sierra La Maliciosa,
and The Helmet full of new buildings,
also urbanizations that have great ancestry
it encloses so much beauty,
that I enumerate I cannot,
with those meadows so green
the church and the cemetery,
to which I would like to go
because my dead are here.
(…)
And everyone that comes here
Be it Spanish or foreign
Finds such love and such respect
That when you try to leave us
You already don't know how to do it
(...)

- Isabel Garzón Guadaño

After reflecting on my preliminary conclusions, I proposed a group activity with some members of the community. The aim was to both share my preliminary results and check the findings with a group that represented the diverse actors I had been researching, as well as doing a participatory mapping exercise that would spark debate and also give something back in terms of synergies and insights to the people involved.

The activity was held at the municipal *albergue*, where I had been staying during most of my time in Mataelpino. I chose the location because of its big open living room space and easy access to the public, without having the feeling of being in an 'official' municipal building. The idea was to have a small number of people that included: livestock farmers, municipal employees, members of local associations, young rural entrepreneurs; also having representatives from different ages and backgrounds, i.e. people born and raised in the village and new rurals. Through the activities proposed, the participants shared opinions and thoughts amongst themselves and could discuss their diverging political views regarding the recent events and developments happening in the villages. Those included mapping relations between human and non-human actors, reflecting on public participation issues, and expressing perspectives on the municipal goatherd project. The procedures of the activity will be further detailed bellow.

First I welcomed the 6 participants by reciting a poem to the *pueblo* by Isabel Garzón Guadaño (the part above was translated by me), elder and famous poet from El Boalo I had the chance to meet and listen to during an interview at the Senior House of El Boalo. I chose to start with this poem as a form of gratitude to the village and the people who accepted my invitation to participate, as the poem praises the natural landscape of the villages and the welcoming character of its inhabitants. The participants were Roberta (councillor for culture and participation, member of the citizen platform En Comun), Marita (cheesemaker), Alice (active citizen and former member of the local development council), Loli (beekeeper and member of the *Assiacion de mujeres Punto de Luz*), Angel (neo-rural and entrepreneur) and Fernando (municipality employee and part-time livestock farmer). Later I briefly presented how I had come to be in Mataelpino for my research and explained that what we would discuss in that group was confidential, but that it would be used as information for my research, whose results would be shared with the community later. Then I put on the wall a sketch of the mountains I had prepared and left on the table some colorful post-its, asking the participants to write or draw on them all the actors (people, institutions, living beings, nature, associations, groups) that they thought were shaping this place (El Boalo). They drew and wrote actors such as: rivers, livestock farmers, municipality, associations, national park, names of *caminos* (tracks/paths).

Looking at all of it I started to try and regroup the actors they came up with, and think about questions on the relations between them. I asked about conflictual relations between the national park and livestock farmers, about conflicts between the wolves and livestock farming, about who uses the common mountain lands. About conflicts with the urbanizations and changes on land-use with the new housing and infra-structure developments. And finally, about cooperative practices and new social relations.

Afterwards we moved on to the next exercise: putting together an Influence X Importance matrix. This idea came from wanting to promote a collective activity that could potentially bring about some sort of agency perspective to the people living in the village. In other words, I wanted to try out a method that allowed for the participants to visualize and debate about who

has or who should be involved and have influence in (political) decisions in the village. As suggested by Hunjan and Pettit (2011)[35], this tool can be used to map and identify how different stakeholders relate to an issue. For this case, I related it to the participatory governance attempts of the municipal government, and at the same time the conflicts emerging from the municipal goats' project. The question was which of those actors they had previously described were important and/or influential in promoting (sustainable) rural development in their villages.

Figure 5: Importance x Influence Matrix (March 2017)

Then after a pause for a brief discussion on why they chose each actor, I provoked their thought with the following question: What if we changed the theme of the map and it became "who is important or influential for the identity of this place and its traditional practices?" After a moment of silence, they all started to shift the positions of the actors of the map, switching them to the opposite poles.

Throughout this activity, I collected data by pictures and voice recording. The recording was later manually transcribed and translated, and key quotes representing participants' positions were later used to illustrate the research results.

On this sub-chapter I entered in detail on the methods for data collection, explaining why they were chosen and how they were conducted. In the following sub-chapter I will briefly express

[35] See Hunjan, R. & Petit, J. (2011). Power: A practical guide for facilitating social change.

some methodological implications that my theoretical lens have on this methods, especially for the following section on methods of data analysis.

4.3 Methodological implications of relational thinking

As presented in Chapter 3, the focus of this research is to explore the multiplicity of rural in terms of the socio-ecological and socio-spatial **relations** enacted by livestock farmers, new rural dwellers and municipal council representatives together with their more-than-human world (highway, chalets, mountains…). To do so, I use social **practices** and **discourses** as analytical tools, departing from the understanding that relations, practices and discourses are mutually constitutive, a well-formed assemblage (Latour, 2005). Or as put by Healey and Jones (2012: 208), "recognising the co-constituent production of rural space through material and discursive phenomenon, processes and practices". By following the municipal goatherd project in and beyond the boundaries of the villages through both its activities in El Boalo and related events in other places (see list of participant observations in Annex 1), I was able to gather data on its practices and related discourses. Thus, these were later analysed as components that shape and describe relations (socio-ecological and socio-spatial), as it will be further explained in the next sub-chapters.

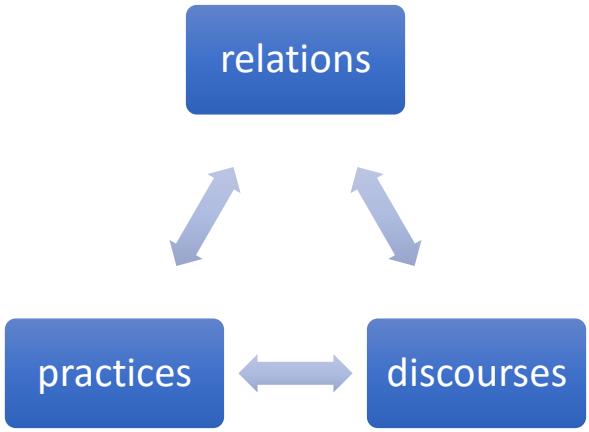

Figure 6: Components of the data collection, prepared by the author

In the next sub-chapter I will describe the methods used for analysing the data, including how I transcribed and coded interviews and field notes.

4.4 Methods of data analysis

For this research, all field-notes and interview transcriptions were coded and analysed manually, as well as relevant official documents from the municipal government of El Boalo and Mataelpino[36]. The interviews were all conducted in Spanish and later transcribed in Spanish. And the quotes selected to give life to my respondent's perspectives and connect my arguments to the ground were hereby translated by myself from Spanish to English. In this process, I chose to privilege the maintenance of the meaning over the exact wording. Nevertheless, I believe

[36] Official documents analysed: Organic Regulation of Citizen Participation and Action Plan of the Local Agenda 21.

some of the nuances and rich expressions of the Spanish language, especially the figures of speech and informal expressions, get lost in translation. As an attempt to dodge that barrier and try to bring more of the ground reality into my analysis and writing, I used some of the most recurring expressions as titles of or within the results (Chapter 5), relating my arguments to their etymology and popular meanings.

The fundamental techniques of data analysis put quite simply are reading, thinking and writing (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). But before actually doing it, this concept of *data analysis* was quite mysterious and seemingly complex to me. As methods of analysis, I first conducted a qualitative content analysis of the data, subdividing it in three broad categories or *indexes*: materiality/non-human actors, discourses/meanings, and practices. These categories derived from my theoretical framework, recognising that *materiality, meaning and practices* are all interrelated and co-construct place (Cresswell, 2009). These indexes were *a priori* categories drawn from the theoretical framework and applied to the text in order to help finding material for further analysis, as suggested by DeWalt and DeWalt (2011). Through these high-level or descriptive indexes, I could have an overview of how non-human actors, discourses and practices were all part of socio-ecological and socio-spatial relations. After indexing the data within those broad codes, I re-grouped them into sub-codes which were derived directly from the data, reflecting the main research findings. Those sub-codes interconnected different discourses, practices and materialities, for example: (1) vacas o chalets (ecological/material changes), (2) paletos y perroflautas (rural-urban relations/conflicts) and (3) municipalism (practices of political participation). Both indexing and coding entail attaching names or labels on pieces of text describing events, parts of conversations, words, sentences, or phrases recorded in field notes (Strauss and Corbin 1990, 1998; in DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). More practically, this meant color coding all the written data with the broad indexes, and later transposing fragments from those into a different word document for every sub-code emerging from the data. These word documents had three columns: the first with the date and participant being interviewed, the second with the text fragment related to that file's code, and the third with my comments and interpretations. Though out this process, going back and forth between the data and research questions helped me to readapt the questions as the analysis went further. It was only through repeatedly engaging in this process that I realised that in fact the mysterious practice of data analysis consisted of making connections myself and tracing patterns that were thick enough to stand on their own, drawing well-supported conclusions. Analysing data requires some confidence.

Once having reached an overview of the main topics coming out of the data, I conducted a discourse analysis of all the transcribed data regarding those main themes. Discourse analysis is a broad method used to analyse the meaning behind different forms of expression, both verbal and non-verbal (e.g. body language, practices, expressions, word choice). Discourse analysis was chosen as the preferred method because of its social dimension, as a method for studying how language "gets recruited 'on site' to enact specific social activities and social identities" (Gee 1999: 1; in Juez, 2009). In this sense, discourse is seen as a social and linguistic (or outspoken) dimension of social practices, and through its analysis I was able to find the nuances and patterns present within the language in practice in its socio-political context, as well as notice questions of power. The rationale behind the choice of this method relates to my theoretical framework and the other methods used in this research. As explained above in the "approaching the case study" section, in this thesis I understand relations as being mutually shaped by discourses and practices. So to analyse both the transcribed data from the semi-structured interviews and field notes, I found important to pay attention not only to the written

words (as in text analysis), but also to translate the nuances of the context where my interactions with different people in the villages occurred. This is done by presenting my results through short stories that mix quotes from the research participants and the different meanings of the wordings used by different groups, together with descriptions of the context of our interactions.

After analysing the research data and reflecting on the main findings of this research, there are several points to be discussed and confronted with theory and with other empirical experiences, as well as with my own perceptions as researcher and participant. These findings, which constitute socio-ecological and socio-spatial relations in El Boalo, will be addressed in the following chapter by weaving in the analysis through short stories that illustrate them. These stories were chosen as a method to present the data in a way that transports the reader to the context of the research, and contributes to the description of the case study. They were drawn from my field notes and interview transcripts and represent some of the key patterns found through the data analysis process. Those results will also be further explored in the discussion chapter.

4.5 Conclusions and limitations

As Woods (2015) recalls, ethnographic research can reveal and experience discursive components of (rural) places as well as material components. Therefore, using ethnographic methods and relational theory as an analytical tool allowed me to recognize how both human and non-human actors played an active role in shaping socio-ecological and socio-spatial relations. At the same time, looking at practices such as maintaining or revitalizing extensive grazing in the common mountains with herding public goats, or trying to change people's relations with their living environment by remunicipalizing waste management and repurposing organic waste, opened space for taking into account those apparently 'marginal' realities in becoming. This is especially the case for the relations interlinked through the municipal goatherd project, since it is both innovative in its form and recent in terms of its implementation.

Nevertheless, the use of participant observations as the main research method holds limits to understanding change or changing conditions, unless the change is taking place during the research period (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011). While informants often commented on their perception of changing conditions, technically, the researcher can only know that they say they perceive that there has been changes (*ibid.*). While change became a theme of analysis, participant observation is limited to the participant's perspectives on these changes. But those, combined with a process of literature review can better support an argumentation which relates to changes and transitions.

"Participant observation is also an experiential approach" (*ibid.*: 123). This experiential character of the method implies several limitations in itself. First, by being based on a lived experience of the researcher, it undeniably reflects characteristics of the researcher, which makes the data collected valid, but with limited reliability. That means that it is hard to tell if another researcher doing the same observations would come up with the exact same responses, since it depends on his/hers own lived experience (*ibid.*). Secondly, participant observation is used effectively to understand phenomena that are observable, which implies that they are available for observation. This holds limitations to considering activities that a researcher may not observe/participate in during a period of fieldwork for they are not happening all the time. Thirdly, the experiential nature of the method can also allow researchers to ignore the importance of processes taking place beyond the world of the local community. That means participant observation provides an inherently limited view of phenomena.

To counter-balance these limitations, the use of in-depth interviews allowed me to gain knowledge about activities and changes that happened through a much longer period of time than the three months of my fieldwork. Moreover, literature review also allowed me to better cover that historical gap. Therefore, putting together these methods I aimed to be able to grasp the practical and material aspects (with participant observations), as well as the discursive and historic aspects (with informal conversations and semi-structured interviews). And finally, to reflect on those altogether, I kept a reflexive journal, and proposed a collective reflection during the participatory mapping activity.

5. Results: collecting associations

Through this investigation, I gained insight into practices and discourses where socio-ecological and socio-spatial relations were in many ways entangled. Here I aim to unfold these entanglements by going beyond discursive representations of rurality – not rejecting them – moving towards an understanding of how relations are practiced and thus perform multiple rurals. I will present here some of these diverse trajectories interwoven within and enacted by diverse actors through the municipal goatherd project of El Boalo: livestock farmers, neo-rurals, municipal councillors, visitors, migrants, mountains, *urbanizaciones*, highway. These categories, as presented in chapter 1.2, do not pretend to be all encompassing nor homogeneous, but they help in understanding the ways in which human and more-than-human relate to each other. These social relations are argued here to be linked to the diverse fluxes that shape space in the rural-continuum (e.g. people, food, capital, waste) and the political context of the villages (see chapter 2).

In the next sections I will present the results in a fairly descriptive manner, telling stories that focus on more-than-human actors and practices (5.1; 5.2), and discourses (5.3; 5.4); all of which are entangled within and shape the municipal goatherd assemblage. All of those dimensions of everyday lives are enacted and maintained through social practices, be it grazing in common lands, exchanging knowledge with people from 'outside', practicing new relations with organic matter, repurposing waste, or institutionalizing certain discourses. This analysis is an effort to "germinate connections and openings", inspired by Whatmore's work (2002), and bring about the livingness of space (Massey, 2005). As de Certeau suggests, stories *are* spatial practices that bear within them traces that act as reminders of our journeying to and from; conveying in words a sense of inhabiting and traversing spaces, transforming it into places (1988; in Whatmore, 2002). The analysis of the results that come out of these stories will be further developed in dialogue with the literature and theoretical framework in the discussion Chapter 6.

5.1 Vacas o chalets

> *Where before there were 100 cows, where a family was living to give them what to eat, well now there are 500 chalets.*
>
> Fernando, livestock farmer (Interview, January 2017)

During my conversations with farmers, elders and people born and raised in El Boalo and Mataelpino, they often expressed their experiences - many times negative - with changes in the landscape and land-uses in the last decades. This was especially the case when speaking with livestock farmers that used to take their cattle out for grazing in the *vias pecuarias*, since according to them, it became harder to move the animals around because of the highway and

houses, and the little amount of *pasos canadienses* or *pasos de ganado*[37]. Some said how having more of these cattle passes would be more urgent than having a municipal goatherd.

It was a drizzly afternoon in late January and snow was still covering the ground since the previous day's storm. I walked from the *albergue* to Fernando's *finca* to talk to him and his father – both named Fernando – and get to know their farm and their stories about life in the village. Fernando is one of the remaining livestock farmers in Mataelpino and will soon retire. His family has farmed for generations – first goats, then cows for milk and now cows for meat[38]. I went to visit his farm three times, since it was a short walking distance from the village square. When Fernando the son first gave me their address, he said I couldn't miss it, because it was the only farm in the middle of one of the closest *urbanizaciones*. Their farm is surrounded by a series of nearly-identical brick chalets, one of the tract housing complexes developed around the village in the late 1990s and early 2000s. As I arrive I see the gate closed. A few seconds later an old white truck comes and stops in front of the gate. It's Fernando (the father). He looks surprised to see me waiting there. I say I'm waiting for Fernando (the son), who besides helping on the farm, works as a municipality employee. He welcomes me in, and I give him a short explanation about what I am doing there. I start discussing with Fernando (the son) while he takes me for a small tour around the barn, but he soon leads me towards his father and says he would have many more stories to tell me. Fernando (the father) is almost 60, and was very keen to tell me about his life as a farmer and how his farm has changed over the past years, as well as about other transformations happening broadly in the village and its natural spaces. When asked about the use of the common mountains, he mentioned not being able to graze his cattle as he used to in the drove roads around his farm, because he was trapped in between roads and *urbanizationes*.

> *In the spring the cattlemen take the cows to graze in the drove roads. But in winter they do not take them because it's not worth it. I do not take them out around here anymore, because there is nowhere to go. The fact is that there are only chalets and roads. The bus passes, also a lot of cars… this looks like the Gran Via (main road in Madrid city center) in spring and summer. And the municipality comes and they clean, they prune everything. The brush-cutters clean more than the cows. But now where the sheep and goats are (municipal goats and the transhumant shepherd's sheep), there is plenty of ground for grazing cows.*
>
> Fernando, livestock farmer (Interview, January 2017)

When speaking with elders and former livestock farmers, I could also grasp how land-use and farming practices changed very quickly in the past two decades. Responding to a question about changes in the natural environment and on the relation between livestock farmers and their

[37] In English, cattle grids or cattle guards, used to pass livestock across roads.

[38] This transformation is very representative of the changes livestock farming has seen in the area. See Manuel Ruiz and Juan P. Ruiz (in Abella et al., 1988) for the history of mountainous livestock farming in the *Sistema Central* (mountain range that encompasses *Sierra de Guadarrama* – case study area).

living spaces, Fernando mentioned that by reducing extensive grazing over the years (with no goats grazing the mountains for the past twenty years) the mountain landscape has materially changed in terms of its vegetation and animals: "Before, there on the hillside there were all the goats. The slope was all eaten, all clean. That is what has changed. Now you cannot even walk (on the hillside) since there's so much bush". These socio-ecological and spatial changes referred to by Fernando were also mentioned by other elders in the village, when speaking about how the reduced management of the mountains due to conservation efforts came in parallel with the abandonment of goat-herding as a livelihood *practice*. Livestock farmers themselves mentioned several reasons for the changes in farming practices or abandonment of livestock production, such as Spain joining the EU and the lift of milk quotas (Borja and Fernando), and the lack of interest from the regional government of Madrid to support livestock farming as a livelihood (Domingos). But other village dwellers saw nature conservation parks as the main reason for reducing livestock farming activities. This reason was also mentioned by sheep farmer Carmen and her partner Julio. It is interesting to note that several livestock farmers used of the word *clean* (in Spanish, *limpia*) to describe the mountains after being grazed by goats, what I see as ascribing an aesthetic and moral value, but also being strongly related to their use of the mountains and their practices performed with it. It was also used as a way to describe the practice of goat herding by the mayor, speaking about how the municipal goatherd project would be beneficial for *cleaning* the mountains and thereby preventing forest fires.

The way people in the village relate to and experience the mountains has thus transformed, and these changes are materialized in different ways, such as by the spread of invasive species like blackberry bushes, the population increase of wild goats and wolves, or by the increasing number of mountain biking events hosted in and around the villages. These changes are expressed in the accounts of several producers, including Fernando, referring to how it was increasingly hard to take their animals out for grazing in the common mountains because of the highways, houses build around them, and insufficient amounts of cattle passages. These materialized barriers to extensive grazing can be related to a trend of keeping livestock in semi-extensive regimes, or not taking the animals out of the fences of the private *fincas* (estates, farm properties). This grazing practice, different from pastoralism, was also mentioned by most of the interviewed farmers as being the way in which it was possible to currently farm in the region. Leaving the animals free inside their own fenced land requires less labour and is adapted to the current conditions of access to the common lands – having urbanisation as a concrete barrier. Moreover, it allowed farmers to work off farm, commonly with construction for the booming housing industry.

It takes about an hour to get from the centre of Madrid to Mataelpino, and as the bus approaches the village, it stops at one *urbanizacion* after the other. During an interview, Fernando mentioned how it used to take at least two hours and a half to get to Madrid, and the bus would only come two times a day (now it goes every hour). This time-space compression was made possible by a new highway, a materialization of a faster connection between the city centre and the countryside. The highway is the main link between the *sierra* and Madrid, and it also passes right next to the municipal goats' *finca*. A few of the young people I met in the village use it every day to commute to work. For them, the road made it possible to live near the mountains

and enjoy the pure air while working an office job in the city - a *connection*. For livestock farmers, the road was a *barrier*, a division between grazing areas that was hard to overcome. While it increased mobility for some – both in intensity and speed –, making it possible for example to move to the mountains while commuting to work in the city, it also made extensive grazing a harder job. This material interconnection also made possible the increase in public transportation between the villages and Madrid in the last decades, but it is harder to get by bus to a neighbouring village, about 15km away, than to Madrid, 60 km far. Being a tangible connection and thus conductor of relations between rural and urban areas and its inhabitants, their practices, knowledge, money, food, waste, just to name a few, the highway can be seen as a non-human actor that takes part in shaping socio-spatial relations in and beyond the villages. The road could be conceptualized as a *vector* for counter-urbanisation, it can also be termed as a material expansion of the city into the mountains.

The picture below shows the image of a housing development project by the roadside, one of the many *urbanizaciones* - urban sprawls that formed completely new neighbourhoods - built in the last decades. The latest materialization of such trend was the inauguration of an Aldi[39] in Cerceda (neighbouring town) as a response to the increasing demand of industrialized food supply from the urban population newly migrated to the area.

Figure 7: Urbanization being built, viewed from Intercity bus ride from Mataelpino to El Boalo (January 2017)

In the assemblage of extensive livestock farming, chalets and cows are mutually exclusive, that is, if more chalets are built, there is less space for cows to graze. And although the highway can be used to connect and revitalize a rural space by bringing in new people and ideas, it can also be a material way to exclude those who are dependent on the land. In this sense, *vacas* or

[39] International supermarket chain, founded in Germany.

chalets represent some of the conflicts for different kinds of land use enacted by the diverse inhabitants (human and more-than-human) of El Boalo. Some of those who claim for a more "defensive" sense of place and identity, are critical of the influx of people from 'outside', and often made mention to practices of *consuming* the mountains instead of living with and using them for living to describe how tourism and urbanization have reconfigured the mountain lands. One of the farmers I interviewed mentioned for example the shift in lifestyle and values that came with the urban sprawl, referring to urbanisation not only in terms of its material expressions such as the highway or the chalets, but also its immaterial expressions, such as different social practices, values and lifestyles, for example using the mountains for a biking event versus for extensive grazing.

The municipal goatherd project was framed by the municipal council as a way to deal with these intensified fluxes between urban and rural, by inspiring new rurals to undertake agroecological projects in El Boalo. At the same time, it intended to revitalize the practice of grazing livestock in the common lands. But as shown by the quote above, *vacas* are now not only competing with *chalets* for their grazing lands, but also with the municipality's bush-cutters and the municipal goats themselves.

With this story, I focussed on presenting the *materialization* of changing socio-spatial and socio-ecological relations, and at the same time, some of the ways in which infrastructures create different ways of relating. These material changes are here seen as important to understand how different actors and their interests are negotiated within rural spaces, and how they translate into conflicts and multiplicity within El Boalo. In the next story, I will go into the multiple and conflictive relations that are woven within the *practice* of pastoralism and extensive grazing, also illustrating those through divergent discourses.

5.2 A transhumant shepherd and the politics of grazing

Pastoralism refers to a system of productive relations and practices, or more broadly, to an entire 'way of life' (Ingold, 1987: 166). Be it nomadic, transhumant, or not, the practice of pastoralism and extensive grazing retains the concept of spatial mobility at its core, and requires adaptability to complex conditions (MARM, 2011). This skilled activity is practiced in a constant relation between human and non-human, in a permanent creation and maintenance of social relations between them, through their movement. The pastoral animal is a vehicle in itself, as it carries not only its owners' property but also its social relations (Ingold, 1987). This relationship and livelihood takes place in rangelands that cover something between one and two thirds of the global land surface, but it is still seen as a marginal activity and form of livelihood, being ignored by policy-makers (Hoffman et al., 2014, in Manzano, 2015). In Spain, transhumant pastoralism is a historical tool for managing ecosystems (Ruiz and Ruiz, 1986), and recognized as part of the country's cultural landscape (Oteros-Rozas, 2012).

It was sometime in late December when I heard from the mayor that I would have a new housemate in the municipal *albergue*. Until then the building was almost always empty, since in the winter not many people came to stay. In January I was joined by a transhumant shepherd coming from Avila to visit the municipal goats' project for a month or two, together with his 400 sheep and goats. Julio became famous for taking his flock to the middle of the city centre in

Madrid to raise awareness for transhumance during the *fiesta de la transhumancia*, a party held every year in Madrid since 1994 as an initiative to celebrate transhumance and pastoralism. The city, besides being the capital of the country and thus the ideal stage for such a performance, is also crossed by what is called a *canada real*, a path historically used by transhumant shepherds to take the animals from the valleys they stayed during the winter to the mountain summer pastures. The mayor of El Boalo told me he met Julio during the previous' year *fiesta*, and he saw in hosting him an opportunity to both gain traditional knowledge of an experienced shepherd, and enhance the visibility of the municipal goats' project within the community of people who support transhumance as a sustainable practice strongly linked to the lands and an ideal of *rurality* in Spain.

Figure 8: Annual *Fiesta de la Trashumancia* in Madrid, photo credit: Andres Kudacki (AP)[40]

The first time I met Julio was in the *albergue*, and I told him I was there to do my thesis research while helping out with the municipal goats' project. We went for a coffee at one of the few bars in town. We sat at the counter and started talking about how we both ended up there, as maybe the only 'outsiders' at the bar. He told me he had been invited by the mayor to stay at the *finca* with his animals while giving some practical support to the municipal goatherd project. He didn't have clear plans and a date for leaving back then, but he mentioned staying around a month, before maybe taking his sheep through the *camino de Santiago*. He told me how his family had been doing transhumance for generations, and that he was now trying to find

[40] The transhumance party in Madrid happens since 1994. It was created by the association *Trashumancia y Naturaleza*, of which Julio is part, as a way to give more visibility and value to the traditional practice of transhumant pastoralism in Spain. The picture above was retrieved at: https://elpais.com/elpais/2014/11/02/album/1414934930_760932.html#1414934930_760932_1414945549

someone to whom leave his flock with. He was around 55 years old, but soon wanted to retire from walking around the country with his animals.

At the same time that Julio arrived, so did Omar, 40-year-old born and raised in Morocco that had been living in El Boalo for the past two years, after spending time working in the Netherlands in the hospitality sector. Omar was hired by the municipality in January as goat herder for the municipal goats' project, and would be working for six months under a 5 day a week contract. Omar told me that farming was not his passion nor life goal, but that he liked animals and he saw that job as part of a transition period in his life. A step needed to make a living before finding another job in hospitality. As mentioned by the mayor, he was one of the few people that applied for the position, and he was chosen, amongst other reasons, for being the one applicant who was living in El Boalo. And there we were: a transhumant shepherd from Avila, a Moroccan hospitality manager, and a Brazilian rural sociology student, all helping take care of those municipal goats. Defining ourselves by our nationalities and occupations is of course a very limiting attempt, but that is just to underline the cultural diversity and spatial connectivity involved in the project. And somehow, its reliance on people coming from 'outside'.

Figure 9: Omar and Julio taking the municipal goatherd and Julio's sheep on the drove road

Mobility and movement are one of the key elements of the practice of goat pastoralism. In the case of the municipal goatherd, this mobile spatial dimension is also made visible through the people who perform it. The flows of different people dwelling in the village in some ways converged within the municipal goats' project, since most of those directly involved in its daily activities were passing though, and coming from 'outside'. Despite being shaped by the vocabulary of mobility, the practice of pastoralism was in this case also an attempt to fix and revitalize tradition, using an indigenous breed and knowledge from the ancient practice of transhumance. In this sense it is both 'opened' to new routes, but also rooted in place-based practices.

Julio stayed in the *albergue* for a few days, but he soon asked the mayor to have a room in the barn together with the animals. He wanted to stay close to them in case there would be an unexpected birth, or an unwanted intruder in the *finca*, such as a wolf. Julio knew so much. I was always in awe about how he knew exactly what was happening with every one of his sheep and goats: who was going to give birth when, who needed extra feed, who was not going to make it through the winter. I would follow him around and try to grasp some of his ways of doing things. I asked questions and he responded by doing. In the mornings since the beginning of January I would arrive at the farm and be received by either Julio or Omar. It was the middle

of winter, and a lot of the kids from the municipal goatherd were getting born then, which is far from ideal with the freezing cold. We would then do the first tasks of the day of feeding and milking the goats and checking on the new born kids. In the middle of January, a second hand milking machine arrived, and we started testing it with some of the goats. But Julio did the machine's job at least two times faster with his hands, and got out more milk as well. Then the three of us would take the 75 municipal goats together with Julio's flock across the river, and from there Omar would often go back to the barn and I would continue with Julio walking further for a few hours. It took a few days herding together to feel like Julio accepted me as someone he could talk to and trust with taking care of the herd. Or at least I got the sign when he offered to share his home-made *chorizo* for lunch.

One day I was out herding the municipal goats together with Julio and his 400 sheep. It was a sunny but very windy day and he had decided we would walk over the *ladera* (hill) until reaching a stretch of pasture that had not been much used by then. We walked up for a few hours, and as we were out with the flock in the drove road, we crossed with a big and unleashed German Shepherd dog and his owner. And maybe because of its instinct to herd, he started barking and running after the sheep as our flock came through. Julio got very angry. The sheep went all over the place because they got scared, and according to him, that happens very often in the common mountains nowadays. There I saw live a staged conflict between different uses of the drove roads. The traditional extensive grazing practice was then being to some extent disturbed by the presence of an unleashed dog. And although that might not seem very serious at first glance, speaking with livestock farmers I often heard about how challenges like these, together with mountain biking groups coming downhill in high speed, for instance, act as sorts of inhibitors of pastoralism. These conflicts can be seen as an immaterial barrier to extensive grazing as a common practice, that adds up to the materialized ones previously mentioned as the highway and the chalets.

Julio quickly became the talk of the town, I could hear gossip about him in every public space, mainly by people somewhat related to livestock farming. It didn't take long after his arrival before local livestock farmers began to collectively organise and resist his presence. A few days after he came with his sheep, farmers held an emergency meeting with the mayor to express their concerns and pressure the shepherd to leave. When asking both the mayor and livestock farmers about this conflict, I came across contradictory narratives. On one hand, farmers complained about being abandoned by the government and having their common lands opened to the use of another shepherd coming from a different region. On the other hand, government representatives claimed to have tried to include farmers in the debates, and that if the local herders would graze on the common lands and maintain their traditional practices, there would be no need for having a transhumant shepherd and a municipal goatherd to do that work. When interviewing livestock farmers about the arrival of the shepherd, several of them mentioned the revitalization and renewal of the farmers' association that had been dormant for over twenty years. Julio's presence made the local livestock farmers defensive of their lands, so much so that they revived the old association to try to reclaim their use of the mountains and engage more actively in public participatory spaces. It might have been an unintentional 'shock treatment', but it did function as a push to awaken local livestock farmers to collectively organize and

engage with the local government to reclaim their space (both physical and political) and rethink their role in maintaining the common mountains.

> *(the association) was made because we saw ourselves a little abandoned on the matter of this gentleman who came with the 400 sheep. Because we were very abandoned by the town hall. Because he was using the communal pastures, and it had not been thought, they had not talked to the farmers of the town to see if we were interested in doing what this man was supposed to do. For that they told us 7 different theories. It's that we never really got to know the truth ... (smiles) Well, but I thank this man for coming because now the association has been made. At least in the Community of Madrid, the association has the rights of management of municipal communal pastures. At least now they have the obligation to ask us. And well, the other functions is to look for the livestock improvements that can be made in the village.*
>
> Carmen, sheep farmer (Interview, March 2017)

The livestock farmers interviewed also had diverging perspectives on the municipal goats' project. In most cases, they supported or showed nothing against the concept of having goats that belonged to the municipality. But they also affirmed that they were not consulted by the municipal government before, and thus felt 'left out' by only getting to know the goats together with the rest of the community. Also in terms of political participation, some of the livestock farmers complained that the public meetings were always held at 19h, when they had to be at the farm for the evening milking. One of the livestock farmers interviewed wanted to respond confidentially:

> *To me it seems good the idea to maintain the environment, the traditions. But the corrals are abandoned, nobody cares about anything. They cut water from the cattle tanks. It's as if you have a house, you do not take care of it, and you want to buy another one. First take care of what you have, and then you get new things. What I think is good, but you cannot do both. First take care of what you have. We (livestock farmers) were never called and asked – 'Hey, what do you think of this project?' Maybe someone from the village wanted to work on it. No, nothing, he has told us nothing.*
>
> Ganadera (Interview, January 2017)

The municipal council needed legitimacy for the project, and thus having a well-known transhumant shepherd staying and participating in the daily herding and milking with the municipal goats' – together with his 400 sheep – gave the support the local livestock farmers didn't provide. Moreover, it was a way to gain traditional knowledge, part of one of the principles of agroecology (chapter 2.4.1). Finally, to have a professional herder taking care of the goats and maintaining the landscape through grazing in the drove roads contributed to the image of rurality the municipal council was pushing forward.

> *The goats have been highly controversial for the farmers. But they are farmers and ranchers with whom the representatives of the town council have tried to work with for a long time so that they do what the goats and the sheep are doing now (grazing and 'cleaning' the common mountains). Now comes another shepherd from outside to do it and they complain. 'His animals are eating my pastures ...' Now maybe they will do it. And if the municipal council has to remove their goats because there are many neighbourhood initiatives that cover it, great. We have no interest in having goats, what we want is to recover traditional livestock practices.*
>
> Roberta, municipal councillor (Interview, January 2017)

These quotes highlight the tensions between conflicting visions about the municipal goats' project, and they certainly became more acute with the presence of the transhumant shepherd. I would hear the gossip around the villages, about the "shepherd that came from Avila", to use "our" pastures. Yet Avila is only 80km away. I heard uncountable times about the 'moroccan' that was herding the municipal goats. But Omar had been living in El Boalo for over two years. How long does it take to become a 'local'? How far does the 'local' space stretch out? This story also raises questions about the past and the future of rural space. In the case of El Boalo and the municipal goatherd project, a moral idea of the future rural based on an agroecological transition was being enacted, and that in turn was based on a moral idea of what the rural was. Those visions of rurality did not exactly fit with what local inhabitants imagined, or practices they wanted to maintain. As I heard from Carmen, local sheep farmer, in our interview (March, 2017):

> (about agroecology) *I cannot comment on what I do not know. As I do not know, I'm scared. I have not heard about them. It scares me because first, here the town hall does not have land to offer, communal lands, to the people. Then, this town has no water. The drove roads cannot offer for agricultural activities. For grazing yes, but the only problem here is that in terms of the drove roads, maybe it does not interest us that other farmers come to graze here. The only thing is that I should have consulted the ranchers about the cattle trails.*

With the next story, I will focus on another aspect of the practice of livestock farming, reflecting on how contested socio-spatial and socio-ecological relations are translated into different *discourses* about the goats' project.

5.3 Por profesión o por capricho

During my first weeks in the village, I started asking people about the use of the common mountains, and what I heard most was how nobody used the *commons* anymore, that now it had all become national park and was taken over by *cabras montesas* (wild goats). But some of the livestock farmers I met would say: "you should talk to Domingos"; "Domingos is always around by the roadsides with his cows". Domingos was indeed the last farmer to depend on the common lands for feeding his livestock. I would always see him wandering through the village, moving around. I tried to intercept him a few times, and he would be busy, running somewhere else, but finally one foggy afternoon in mid-January I managed to find him and his herd grazing through a *via pecuaria* up the mountains behind Mataelpino. We had scheduled to meet near Jose's *finca* around 14.00, and it was very cold and hazy. I waited for a few minutes while giving some attention to the donkeys that were poking through the fences of the property next-door. Before seeing him, I started hearing the cows' bells ringing, louder and louder. Those sounds felt so familiar by then. Every time I would go around the villages walking on the drove roads I would hear the bells, and it was almost as if the sounds were coming from the mountains themselves. I finally saw the first cows of the group coming up the hillside, and Domingos came running after. I asked him to record the interview and started with open questions about his life as a farmer and about his use of the common lands. He told me about his family's history in livestock farming and stonecutting and his own past working with building houses in the real estate boom that ended up in most of the *urbanizaciones* surrounding the village. He said most of the time he fed his cattle by grazing on the roadsides and drove roads, but that when he had a job in building, he could afford to buy them processed feed – and also would not have time to take them grazing all day. He had been offered the job to become the municipal goat herder, but did not want to take it because it was too short-term. When talking about the goats' project, he

said the municipal council bought it by *capricho/*whim, because they thought it looked very beautiful to have goats. But that they bought without knowing anything about farming, without having people qualified for it.

"We want to do something different", the mayor told me the first time I met the goats. As mentioned before, the project was inspired by principles of agroecology and circular economy, such as closing loops and nutrient cycles. Using those now "fashionable" concepts (Giraldo and Rosset, 2017), the municipality wanted to engage in practices that would turn it into a pilot of sustainable town and create precedents for more place-based initiatives to (re)connect people to the land in the region. The discourse and practices of the goatherd project aimed to restore human-nature relations in an agroecological way, using the traditional practice of extensive goat herding to revitalize an indigenous breed, while closing nutrient cycles by repurposing organic waste from the municipal landscape prunnings. In practice, this meant integrating the municipal goatherd in the local school activities, offering environmental education in weekend herding days for both people from the villages and tourists, bringing the goats to public cultural events in the area, and using them to fertilize soil that would be used for ecological hop production. The official discourse from the municipality was influenced by concepts used by Red Terrae, Madrid Agroecológico and the Transition Towns movement. Since my arrival, I noticed how agroecology and circular economy were increasingly being brought up by the mayor when describing the initiative to groups of visitors. The institutional innovations proposed by the government started to be picked up by local and national media, and their communication efforts were being noticed outside the village. These efforts cumulated with the participation of the mayor in a conference hosted by Red Terrae together with the Geography department of the *Universidad Autonoma de Madrid* in March 2017, to present El Boalo as one of the practical experiences of "agroecological dynamization". The panel presentation of the municipal goatherd project was finalized with showcasing a newly born baby goat that the mayor had been taking care of.

Figure 10: Mayor of El Boalo and baby municipal goat at the Universidad Autonoma de Madrid in a conference organised by Red Terrae

The not-for-profit character of the project allowed it to get "out of the comfort zone", as stated by the mayor, not being bounded to economic efficiency. The municipal goatherd was co-funded by the *Comunidad de Madrid* (regional government) and the European Rural Development Fund 2014-2020, under the support of the Rural Development Programme of the Comunidad de Madrid for non-productive investments linked to the fulfilment of agri-environmental and climate objectives (BOE Comunidad de Madrid, September 2016). That allowed it to be used for activities that were not driven by productivity, such as environmental education for school children and other visitors. These environmental and educational aspects of goat herding were the main pillars put into practice by then, only a few months after the project was set up, fuelled by ideas from Red Terrae and supported by new rural families and urban visitors. The municipal goatherd was very often referred to by the municipal council members as a "*herramienta muy potente",* or a "very powerful tool", to promote the above-mentioned services. The goats were also framed as a powerful communication tool, as a means to attract people – from near and far – and inspire them to create similar projects or establish themselves in the region by working with their living environment and its potential land-uses. This framing of the goatherd as a tool was present in almost every presentation or discussion about the project coming from municipal councillors and the mayor.

Nevertheless, those innovative practices were not completely approved by the local community, especially by livestock farmers. Those who had to constantly readapt to macroeconomic changes (i.e. industrialization and urbanization, Spain entrance in the European Community, lift of milk quotas) to survive through animal production, saw the municipal goatherd project with suspicion. A common perspective expressed by farmers (Domingos, Jorge, Carlos, Fernando, Prestes) was discrediting the project, because it was not 'economically sustainable' or lucrative. For livestock farmers, the goatherd project was framed as a whim (*capricho*), as something that the mayor was passionate about, but that had no chance in being maintained after the end of his political mandate. Another trend in their discourses was the issue of economic sustainability, mainly raised by those who did not have off-farm income and thus fully depended on their herds (Prestes, Fernando, Jorge, Domingos). When asked about their perspectives on the municipal goatherd initiative, professional farmers gave the highest importance to the economic sustainability of the project over the potential for social or environmental sustainability. They often mentioned the importance of autonomy (or economic self-sufficiency) and some stated that the project was a misuse of public money for not being productive enough. Another point mentioned by livestock farmers was the fact that the municipal government had no professional farmer to do the job - neither the mayor nor the hired farmer – which they saw as a major flaw. They would refer to their own farming practice as *por profession*, by profession, and to the concept and practice of the municipal goatherd, as *por capricho,* by whim. Their professional way of farming was often driven by the goal of economic success, and their relationship with their animals and their environment was inseparable of their means of making a living. Their cattle and sheep were not framed as tools, but something they were proud to take care, and that ultimately, they relied on. This is not to say that the municipal goats were not as important to its care takers, neither to idealize the relationship between local small scale livestock farmers and their herds. But the difference was seeing the goats as a *means* or a *tool* for a political and moral project, versus livestock farming as a professional livelihood.

These perspectives came together with expressions of the challenges (legal, economic and physical/personal) local livestock farmers faced to maintain their practices as a way of living. "Farming livestock is a 365 days a year job", I heard from almost all the livestock farmers I met. When discussing changing spatial relations between urban and rural areas and how those

are influencing practices and social relations in the village, especially when it comes to livestock farming, four of the livestock farmers I interviewed mentioned something about new rurals not being used to the hardship of depending on farming every day. In their view, the practices of livestock farming and its performance of rural life was related to some sort of expected suffering, and people who came from the city could not get used to that. The following quote represents that discourse, one which highlights that the inexperienced young people coming from 'outside' the farming world, expect to have vacations, worker rights, fixed schedules… and that these demands or expectations are not compatible with the everyday life of and practices of a farmer that depends on grazing animals for a living (Anamari, Domingos, Carlos, Julio).

> *Well, let's see, to a goat, a cow, you cannot say: 'hey, I have my work rights, it's 8:00 p.m., you're giving birth now in the change of shift...'*
>
> *I don't know, the fact is that these businesses are profitable based on a lot of sacrifice, a lot of effort. But they do not give enough to change car every year.*
>
> Anamari, livestock farmer and feed retailer (Interview, March 2017)

In this sense, the practices and relations between professional farmers and their livestock and grazing lands were not concerned with the showing or construction of a certain idea of rurality. Meanwhile, the practices and relations promoted by the municipal goatherd project attempted to attract tourists and engage with a new generation of rural dwellers, mostly those coming from urban areas, through their educational activities and repurposing of organic waste.

"We will all end up selling goat keychains"

Place-based development initiatives based on the identity of place or *terroir* have been established in recent decades as a rural development strategy sought by a wide range of European rural areas. But more than just EU supported development projects, this 'turn to place' has also been used in political statements from social movements such as anti-globalization and the local food movement. In practice, it promotes cases such as Shetland, attracting visitors and consumers to see the meadows and sheep that made it famous for its woolen clothes (Horlings and Kanemasu, 2015), or geographic indications for product as varied as Tequila in Mexico and Comté cheese in France (Bouwen, 2010).

When discussing about the municipal goats' project and how it was being implemented and practiced by the municipality, sheep farmer Carmen talked about rural development strategies that transform every villager in a 'seller' of the so-called indigenous or traditional practices, products, and in general, an idealized conception of rural life defined by urban tourists. We were sitting around a table in a small wooden shed in her farm. Her husband, a retired livestock farmer friend, and Cami, new rural and future goat farmer, were also there, but Carmen did most of the talking. She started by suggesting that the project would only bring economic losses. But then shifted the discourse by saying that the idea of attracting people through rural tourism is not bad, and sarcastically mentioned the example of the *cabras pajojas* in southern Spain, comparing it to what the municipality wanted to do with Mataelpino and El Boalo and their *cabras de guadarrama*.

I think the idea to turn a town towards tourism is good. There are people who are going to live for tourism, to exploit the Sierra de Guadarrama. Well, from this point of view, if we should all end up dressing ourselves as paletos (peasants), selling keychains of goats, well, we all will end up selling goat keychains. That happened to them with that cheese (in Andalucia) with the payoya goats. But the payoya goat is from private owners, not municipal. Payoya goat t-shirt, payoya goat caps ... the idea is not bad (laughter).

Carmen, sheep farmer (Interview, March 2017)

We all had a good laugh. Her idea in the end was an 'alternative' to the economic failure she thought would be the fate for the goats' project. That vision and value based on the economic success or failure was one of the main discursive and practical differences between the municipal government and livestock farmers regarding the project. The government was confident with the fact that the project was not for profit, and that allowed them to focus on other practices focused on establishing sustainable human-environment relations and education. Meanwhile, livestock farmers saw this as being a failure in itself, since for them if livestock farming is not economically sustainable, you are doing it wrong. Cami, new rural and future goat farmer, mentioned how the issue was that the case of the goats' project was fitting a political goal, and that the next one that got elected would not want to keep the goats. They (Cami, Carmen, Carmen's husband and Ferran, retired farmer) nodded in agreement, and converged in stating that the public administration should support people who want to start their own private farming initiatives, but not do it themselves using public funds.

In the following chapter I will engage with different actors' perspectives on diverse social relations in the villages, and on how these relate to their practices. Together with the spatial/material transformations analysed in the first section of this chapter, the social dynamics constructed within those rural-urban encounters are also an important piece in the exploration of the multiplicity of place in El Boalo and Mataelpino. I will start by presenting how their perceptions of each other is shaped by changing socio-spatial relations and later go into how the municipal goats can be an entry point to understand some of the actors' conflicts.

5.4 Paletos y Perroflautas

The people of the village were the ones who knew nothing, and then we adapted to what was 'supposedly' better. We were paletos (someone who has no culture, who knows nothing) - the people of the city would call us that. The people of the village wanted to lose this appellation… so now for people to return to their roots is very difficult.

Loli, beekeeper and livestock farmer (Interview)

(on perroflautas) The people who lived in squats, more than hippies; the punks. Everyone with a certain way of living. It began a bit to be the expression to call the people who lived in a different way. Well here, with the project of the donkeys, people began to call us the 'burrro flautas' (donkey flutes).

Alejo, member of Dejando Huella (Environmental Education with Donkeys) and Gabarrera (Local Ecological beer Cooperative)

In Spanish slang, the term *paleto* is used to refer to someone from a small village, a derogatory way to call someone who would respond to a stereotype of lacking sophistication and having special jargons and customs of their own. *Perroflautas* (or dog-flutes) is a depreciative expression used to undermine anyone who is 'against the system', used to designate a broad group of people which can include: left-wing activists, anarchists, punks, hippies, anyone who lives off-grid, or in an alternative way. Word by word, people that roam around playing instruments on the street, occasionally in the company of a stray dog.[41]

These expressions can be seen as symbols of different identities coexisting in the rural-urban continuum and social conflicts which emerge from their relations. The expression *paleto* would be used by urbanites to describe peasants, and the term *perroflauta* would be used by villagers to describe the new rurals coming to the countryside to reconnect with nature and engage in alternative ways of living. In the case studied, even the mayor of El Boalo was called perroflauta by some of the more conservative groups. In a less pejorative way, and readapting the expression to the local context, the members of *Dejando Huella,* association formed by young new rurals who offer environmental educational services through mountain trails with donkeys[42], were called by some of the local inhabitants as *burroflautas* (or donkey-flutes). Alejo, member of the association, and also co-owner at the Gabarrera Ecological Beer Cooperative, mentioned another expression used by local inhabitants to refer to himself and other new rurals who were considered to be very different from those people born in the village: *"eres un frontera".* If translated directly, the English equivalent would be "you are a frontier", which can be analysed as a reference to being on the margins, on the 'outside', being too different, 'alternative'.

Several farmers I interviewed saw new rurals in a negative way. Not only farmers but other villagers who were born and raised in the mountains talked about how the urban lifestyle has changed the way people relate to each other in the village. As expressed by Loli, beekeeper and livestock farmer, also member of the rural women association *Punto de Luz*:

> *That feeling has already been lost. Of care, contact. The feeling of unity of the villagers, of concern for one another. We have come to the culture of the city. They have absolutely different lives, they care about nothing at all. And we, instead of making the people who came to do the same as we did here, we have adapted to the ways of the people who came from the city.*
>
> Loli, beekeeper and livestock farmer (Interview, March 2017)

She continues, connecting the expansion of urban values in the countryside - such as different consumption patterns - to changes in livelihood strategies and in the way village dwellers perceive each other: "Before it was the culture of survival, and now it is the culture of consumerism. If there is no money, there is not consumption; and if we don't consume, we go

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[41] According to documents from the 15M movement (15M Madrid Comunidad, 2012), this expression was used to undermine the young activists of the movement, but it was turned around with good humour by a large collective in Cataluña, with members aged 60-80 who called themselves "iaioflautas" (iaio(a) is a catalan popular expression used to call grandparents). More information at: https://issuu.com/madrid15m/docs/madrid15m_n1

[42] Donkeys were traditionally used in the region for centuries and now this group (https://www.dejandohuellaenmataelpino.com) is recovering its relevance while connecting people to nature in mountain routes.

back to being the *paletos* (peasants) again" (Loli, Interview). During our conversations, she extensively described how she saw changes in social relations happening in the villages after the intensification of urban in-migration. From solidarity-driven or collaborative relationships, such as collective management of the common bee-hives in the mountains, to a place where you don't know your neighbours anymore. Anamari, livestock farmer and feed retailer, also highlighted these changes during an interview, affirming that livestock farmers and their practices changed together with bigger changes in society, such as globalization and consumerism.

But this perceived conflict between urban and rural dwellers is not homogenized. Some of the neo-rural projects have been openly embraced and supported by the local community, such as the ecological beer cooperative, Gabarrera. They have found faithful support from both the municipality and local restaurants for their entrepreneurial project. And since the last few years, creative initiatives such as the local ecological beer, or the donkeys for environmental education, have been attracting more people from Madrid into the village. As mentioned by the councillor for culture, Roberta:

> *What I see is that there is a cultural movement here, a big effervescence. Major synergies between professionals of different arts. A big desire to do things. Very interesting people, who live here because it is a very quiet, inspiring atmosphere. Because it has on hand other professionals who do things that interest them ... dance, painting, music, there are a lot of movements. And if it is also promoted from the town hall, I think since a year ago we are here with the art school of the mountains... They are also attracting a similar population from Madrid. It is seen that here it moves, that something is happening here, that there are creative people. There is no turning back.*
>
> Roberta, municipal councillor (Interview, January 2017)

One of the findings which relate to those sometimes conflictual socio-spatial relations is the fact that the municipal goats' project was also met with very diverse positions: local livestock farmers had a discourse of resistance against the project, especially when the mayor welcomed a transhumant shepherd from a different region to graze in the common lands managed by the municipality; while non-farming members of the community had diverging opinions, but mostly positive about the project, seeing it as a way to reconnect with the local identity and traditions; and new rurals, some of them related to the agroecology movement, or who had come to the countryside to be closer to nature, saw the project as extremely positive. As described by Roberta, member of the municipal government:

> *There is a bit of everything. There are people who have lived here for many years, doing it differently. For them it is a setback. "How? Are you going to come to my house for the trash bag? As it was 50 years ago?"; "Goats? Are you going to bring goats?" That here is linked to poverty in some way. The villages that had goats were the most miserable. And so this is put to the test, that it seems to us a valuable traditional knowledge, and that it is also attractive; to enhance it, relate it to schools and such. Some people think we've lost our minds. They think it's crazy. However, other things seemed crazy before and time is showing us that they bring benefits to the whole village. Also for them, for the livestock farmers.*
>
> Roberta, municipal councillor (Interview, January 2017)

It was possible to notice clear practical and discursive differences between the municipality (implementing institution of the goats' project) and the livestock farmers (supposedly

beneficiaries of the initiative). The municipal council focused on the importance of environmental education and ecological sustainability in the maintenance of the landscape and the 'rural' identity of place, as also described in the previous sub-chapter. In this sense, the municipal goatherd represented and practiced a moral or normative rural that aimed to pilot an agroecological transition. In other words, it enacted a restoration of 'sustainable' socio-ecological relations, where tradition was meshed with innovation, and closing nutrient cycles for local natural resource self-sufficiency was one of the main guidelines. Meanwhile livestock farmers gave more value to economic sustainability and the importance of having a professional farmer in order to make the project possible as livelihood source, and saw this moral agroecological project as something confined to ideas and practices from new rurals, *perroflautas*.

6. Ruminations/Discussion

The objective of this research was to contribute to the current reflections on the past and the future of rural areas, more concretely, on the different ways human and more-than-human relate to each other and negotiate their ideas and practices of multiple ruralities. As I presented earlier, with this account I aimed to contribute to a more sensitive and holistic view of rural places, emphasizing that those are also spaces of creative experiments towards social and environmental sustainability, local autonomy, and participatory democracy. In other words, by collecting stories and practices from diverse actors dwelling in El Boalo, I wanted to discuss the multiplicity of rural social relations through the municipal goatherd project, untangling the negotiations around what rural means and what rural should be, and how it relates and impacts diverse human and non-human actors.

In this chapter I analyse and discuss my results in dialogue with the contexts and concepts described in Chapter 2, and the theory I outlined in Chapter 3. The short vignettes above represent some of the different visions of rural and its developments in relation to the municipal goatherd project. It relates to one of the possible and existing 'projects' or futures of rural spaces, as it responds to a certain representation of the rural. The disconnect between the representation and practices implemented by the local government and what livestock farmers want to do in practice creates conflicts between them in the public sphere. In the spatial proximity and intimacy of the municipal level, these contestations become more vivid, and raise questions on the politics of place and identity.

From the results in general, a few observations can be drawn. Outlining them in few words: first, understanding rural as shaped by relations allows to visualise multiple trajectories coexisting and being negotiated; second, building up on the first observation, it is possible to see diverse possibilities, and thus openings for social, political and ecological change towards more 'sustainable' and participatory rural development, shaped by these multiple relations and trajectories; third, space is negotiated, and moral visions for a future rural put forward by spaces of democratic participation are not always inclusive. In the following sections I will discuss those observations more in depth.

6.1 Enacting multiple ruralities

In chapter 3 I distinguished different narratives of the rural: cultural, demographic, economic, representational and relational, and also presented a turn towards thinking through practices as being constitutive of social relations. Coming to the conclusion that the first three definitions provided narrow and essentialist views of rurality and thereby were unfit to fully describe complex and fast-changing rural spaces, and arguing that a representational perspective did not give enough attention to the embodied and practiced construction of ruralities, I opted for a fifth way. As discussed in the theoretical framework, a relational ontology, inspired by the philosophy of Deleuze and Guatarri (1987) gained momentum with interdisciplinary dialogues between science and technology studies, sociology, feminist theory, performance studies and cultural geography, used by scholars such as Sarah Whatmore (2002; 2006), Doreen Massey (2005), Michael Woods (2010; 2015), Tim Ingold (2000), Nigel Thrift (2000) and the list goes on. By bringing this thinking to the case of the municipal goatherd project, I was able to see how it relates to attempts to redefine human-nature relationships through practices, such as herding goats, and to reconceptualise the notion of waste through reusing organic matter. But at the same time, it enabled me to understand power relations that influenced which projects of rurality were being implemented by the municipality, and who benefited from them.

Here I have been inspired by Gibson-Graham's suggestion to "read for difference rather than dominance" (2008), opening space for multiple ruralities to unfold through the narratives and practices I was able to document during my months in El Boalo. In this sense, I mean not only presenting the 'positive' facet of the municipal goatherd project, but fleshing out conflicts, power relations and negotiations which are part of everyday life in the rural and its socio-spatial and socio-ecological interactions. Therefore, to address the research questions[43], I found important to deal with the movement and the material practices that shape different *rurals*. Here I found necessary to deal with plurals: multiple; rurali*ties*. For that, I recognize the need to look back at theories and concepts that had fed into the debates around seeing places as plural and diverse. Edensor (2006: 484; in Woods, 2010) noted that:

> *"the ways in which the materialities and meanings of rural space are reproduced, consolidated and contested, along with the identities of those who dwell and move within them, can also be considered by examining how rurality is staged so as to accommodate particular enactions. It is through the relationship between the array of characters playing out particular roles, and the spaces in which they perform, that ruralities are routinely produced."*

Theoretically, as I developed in chapter 3, this means recognising the existence of multiple trajectories enacted through and made visible within human and more-than-human relations and practices (Massey, 2005). By paying attention to those diverse relations and practices, looking at how they are both destabilized and reconfigured in some ways by the municipal goatherd project, I showed how the so-called rural space is multiple and always changing (*ibid.*). Perhaps, a return to the material world and its practices (Nash, 2000; Whatmore, 2006) is a way to render visible and possible new pathways for transformation which move towards more responsible

[43] In what ways are social relations practiced and negotiated through the municipal goatherd project in El Boalo?
- In what ways are socio-ecological relations practiced and negotiated?
- In what ways are socio-spatial relations practiced and negotiated?

and deeply connected spatial relations between rural and urban, society and nature; breaking those boundaries in patterns of thought and of practice.

Seeing the more-than-human world as not something constant, independent, an *a priori* in the background of our human existence, reaffirms the importance of rethinking how our practices and social relations – human and more-than-human – are responsible for shaping present and future spaces and their identities (Massey, 2004). I believe this vision also resonates with Tim Ingold's 'dwelling perspective', moving beyond the opposition between the naturalistic view of a neutral landscape, "external backdrop to human activities" (Ingold, 1993: 152), and the culturalistic view of landscape as symbolic social representation. As Massey (2004) proposes in *Geographies of Responsibility*, recognising our constant interconnections and thus capacity to continuously influence and be influenced by different people and places, brings in a perspective of multiplicity and thus of a future which is open; a future we are responsible for. Along this line, the practices of a 'moral' rural, one which is based on sustainable socio-ecological relations and practices of inclusive participatory democracy, depends on our active and creative experimentation, and engagement with the world (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). Especially by having as entry point a project promoting a certain vision of rural future, one based on principles of agroecology and municipalism, I was able to trace the coexistence of multiple and contested ruralities: the one promoted by the municipality; the one practiced by livestock farmers; the one lived by urban commuters; the one imagined by new rurals. Those are not homogeneous categories nor are they encompassing of all the diverse ruralities in El Boalo, but are entangled in each other and coexisting in constant negotiation; in converging and conflictive relations; in relational co-construction but also sometimes boundary building.

By recognising El Boalo as shaped by a multiplicity of pathways and encounters has allowed me to understand that the 'local community' is not homogeneous, even in a small rural town. On the contrary, it is made by diverse groups, who often have different ideals and sometimes conflicting discourses and practices. This perception is neither new nor revolutionary, it was discussed by many, for instance, Amin (2002) and Massey (2004), when problematizing the apparently pre-existing and cohesive notion of community. But the idea of plurality must be brought to light when discussing a normative choice by the municipality for implementing a project for 'revitalizing livestock farming' without deeply engaging with local livestock farmers. By seeing space in a relational manner and making visible its multiplicity, it was possible to render visible also the different negotiations and contested visions and practices of what developments in and of the rural should be and look like. By pulling and connecting different threads of trajectories coexisting in El Boalo, both converging in and contesting the municipal goatherd project, I could pay attention to new patterns of co-operation that appeared amongst livestock farmers to deal with their interests in public participation, as well as new relations between municipal council and new rurals and urban dwellers. At the same time, social conflicts appeared over who is legitimate to perform certain practices such as extensive grazing. This became very clear when local livestock farmers, who had self-organised in terms of who grazes where and when for the past centuries just amongst themselves, felt the need to revive their farmers' association in order to be politically represented and actively engage in municipal decision making spaces. In this case, livestock farmers were in some ways boundary building around what they claimed as *their* common mountains, but also opening up for dialogue and creating anew relations amongst themselves and with the municipal government.

The building of roads and chalets, extensive grazing, reusing organic waste, voting in participatory processes for policy-making; all of those are open-ended processes shaping the lifeworld in and beyond the villages. In this way, the practices (including discourses), social

relations and material world, can be seen as perpetually under construction (Ingold, 1993; Massey, 2005). Thus 'nature', or the more-than-human world, is always a 'work-in-progress' (Ingold, 1993).

6.1.1 Herding towards future rurals

By tracing these associations of *becomings*, in a present oriented towards future goals and moral ideals, bringing a relational ontology into practicing and thinking the present and future of rural spaces through the case of the municipal goatherd, I argue for a politics of multiplicity and anti-essentialism of what is considered rural. Friedmann (2016) highlights how a return to farming in the sense of closing loops - as previously described in the literature review on agroecology - do not need to be constrained by 'local' nor 'traditional' stands. This means moving beyond a politics of identity and towards a politics of interrelations (Massey, 2005), as well as seeing the potential of performing and reshaping existing farming practices and broader human-more-than-human relations in the countrysides.

While the municipal goatherd in some ways materializes tradition, both in the practice of goat pastoralism and in their autochthonous breed - this term was used by the mayor, municipal councillors and farmers when speaking about the project and its *cabras de guadarrama* -, it is also a vector of new relations between urban and rural, human and non-human. I experiment here with seeing the goatherd as materialization of practices in different senses. For one, its dynamic character involves daily mobility of the goats grazing the mountains. If we think through Carolan's (2008) more-than-representational – and practice oriented – countrysides, the simple act of herding and grazing with municipal goats presents a certain symbolic image of rurality, as practices embed and contribute to a reproduction of identities. At the same time, it assembles tensions between different ideas of ruralities. Those acts exist in the interrelation between human and non-human, traditional practice and imagination of a future rural inspired by both tradition and innovation. Secondly, it performs new relations between humans and non-humans within the public sphere – in terms of political spaces, the herd itself, and the mountains. It is in this way a vector for new social relations between the municipal council and all the people involved in the project (new rurals, councillors, school children, visitors). In terms of socio-ecological relations (human and non-human), integrating the principle of closing loops from agroecology by the repurposing of municipal prunnings can be seen as one of the forms of reconfiguring those relations, performing new practices with what was before called organic waste.

It was interesting to note that the local livestock farmers, who have a history of farming families and have inherited their profession from their predecessors, were now mainly farming cattle for meat, instead of the 'traditional' mountain goats that were historically grazed in the region. They had to adapt to new politico-economic circumstances, but also to new spatial dynamics that created immaterial and material boundaries to extensive grazing. For instance: nature conservation parks, the European Union Common Agricultural Policy, mountain biking, *urbanizaciones*, highways, wild goats, wolves... Meanwhile, the municipal government, with the support of new rurals, was the institution bringing back the indigenous breeds and practices such as pastoralism in the common drove roads with *cabras de guadarrama*, doing it as a way to perform renewed traditions and envision a future rural with deeper and more conscious relations between humans and more-than-humans, towards an agroecological transition. But also making the goatherd and the village more 'sellable' and attractive to visitors from outside, as exposed in the vignette above ("we will all end up selling goat keychains").

In this sense, a relational approach to place provides visibility to these multiple realities within a socio-political context, and emphasizes the possibility for new connections and reconfiguration of relations. As put forward by Massey (2004: 7):

> *It may indeed, further, be a crucial political stake to challenge and change the hegemonic identity of place and the way in which the denizens of a particular locality imagine it and thereby avail themselves of the imaginative resources to reconstruct it.*

Seeing the municipal goatherd project as a node in a network of practices and relations helps to understand its multiple facets, as discussed above. Especially under the framing from municipal councilors, when referring to the goatherd as a *powerful and complete tool* to promote agroecology and sustainable rural development, the practiced and material dimensions of the project came to life. Seeing the interaction between human and non-human, herders and goats, actors and tools, in a relational manner, I could recognize them as mutually constitutive (Latour, 2005), meaning that the project was at the same time a tool but also an active vector towards an imagined ideal. Its goal to be a tool for fixing a young new rural population also plays an important role in that performance of a *future*, in the sense it pays more attention to the interests of those who are newly migrating into the countryside than those who have dwelled in rural areas and practiced more traditional agrarian lifestyles. This thinking then leads to questions about which practices and discourses of *rurality* gain strength and become more stabilized through the municipal goatherd project. Is the project moving beyond identity politics, or (re)producing and giving more political space to a certain identity? These questions will be discussed in the following sections as I debate how municipalism and agroecology are promoted and contested by different actors in El Boalo.

6.1.2 On multiplicity and conflicts

Through the stories presented in the previous chapter, I attempted to unravel the internal multiplicity of place, introducing some of the threads to be pulled out and trace how rurality and politics in El Boalo are also a product of relations which spread out way beyond it. El Boalo might be far less globally interconnected than London, the case used by Massey (2004) in her discussion about deconstructing the supposed hegemony of the so-called global processes over what happens in the so-called local; but that is one of the perks of looking through the lens of relations: it doesn't matter where you depart from, there is no dead end, every place is interconnected through a web of relations (be they visible or not). At the same time, I wanted to present an honest account that did not show a purely positive or idealized vision of multiplicity and interconnectedness, highlighting the conflicts that arise from the heterogeneous encounters overlapping in rural places. With this analysis, I see space as a site of negotiation, where interrelations (between humans and non-humans; rural and urban) are constantly shaping each other; sometimes converging and dancing together, sometimes conflicting and stepping on each other's feet.

The use of a public institution to push forward a project based on a disputed concept such as agroecology can have potentials but also setbacks. The political nature of a public institution raised some suspicion from farmers when it came to taking up a practice that would expand on its expected mandate. That is, firstly, local livestock farmers were unsatisfied with having their tax money being used by a project that they did not see economically viable; and secondly, they were sceptical of the mayor taking up livestock farming as an activity of the municipality because that was *per se* something that went beyond his role and practical experience. Using the concept of agroecology, despite having the revitalization of extensive grazing and traditional livestock farming as one of its main pillars, also created another barrier between local livestock

farmers and the municipal goatherd project. It was being employed by the mayor and other councillors in their official discourse about the project, but some of the farmers I interviewed mentioned being tired of listening about this concept that they did not know about or did not find useful. In some ways, they felt it was another part of the projects' performance, something to attract urban tourists or *perro-flautas.* At the same time, other rural dwellers, mainly new rurals, saw this initiative as being important for the maintenance of the environmental and cultural values of pastoralism, which relates to the performative facet of the project. The practice of goat pastoralism in the common mountains in some ways materialized the discourse or representation of what they were looking for in rural space. For them, taking their children to herd goats and learn about nature through this practice represented their ideal of rurality.

These heterogeneous ideas and trajectories coexist in complex ways, so much so that power relations, discourses and practices are inseparable from spatial materialities (Cresswell, 2009). Here the space of the mountains and drove roads and public funding was being used to implement and promote a certain vision of rurality, one which had a moral foundation in reconnecting human and non-human through everyday practices of herding and care with goats. But attempts from the local government to maintain and develop traditional practices such as livestock farming in an innovative way did not necessarily directly respond to the needs and demands from rural dwellers, especially livestock farmers. I argue that place-based rural development attempts need to have real participation, especially from the most marginalized groups, in order to be representative and therefore have sustainability in time (Bass et al., 1995; Leeuwis, 2000; Barca et al., 2012). Projects imagined and implemented by the municipality (*gabinete)* can benefit many, but if those are not embraced by the community on the street-level (*calle*), they risk being lost after the end of the mandate. Citizen-led platforms have found cracks and put their feet into Spanish public institutions, and in El Boalo, in the municipal council. But based on the results presented here, it is possible to argue that in this case the opening of participatory democratic spaces does not automatically address the issue of inclusivity in decision-making, and that personal projects such as the municipal goatherd face the risk of not being continued even if they are started with the best intentions and aim to improve socio-ecological sustainability.

Conflicts in socio-spatial and socio-ecological relations

In the first part of the results (5.1) I have shown how material changes in space, such as infrastructure building (highway and chalets) influenced social relations and social practices in and beyond the villages. As in Meili's (2013) *Is the Matterhorn city?,* where the conflicting relations between different uses and representations of the mountains cumulate into a city-mountain hybrid, the mountains in El Boalo are not so isolated anymore, and their different land-uses have both symbolic and physical consequences. In some ways, I could also trace an analogy with Neil Smith's (1996) *New urban frontier,* seeing the consequences and changing relations made visible by the municipal goatherd in El Boalo as a sort of gentrification of the countryside. Through relational theory, I linked the material and the non-material, seeing how the mountains have multiple uses piled on top of each other; sometimes overlapping in harmony, but also in conflict. In this sense, I argue that more than a 'restructuring' vision of the countryside (Hogart and Paniagua, 2001), a relational approach to rural allowed for seeing its nuances and always changing processes (Massey, 2005). The highway and the chalets are both material and social constructs which constitute part of how certain practices gain more power and prevail over others. In a way, the municipal goatherd is an attempt to destabilize the highway-chalet-urbanization collection, by promoting extensive goat herding and the use of the mountains for pastoralism. In another sense, it is fuelled by the same highway-chalet-

urbanization assemblage, in the way it is mainly supported by new rural and urban dwellers and the networks created with other places aiming for an agroecological transition.

"Spatial relations are also power relations" (Murdoch, 2006: 23). "I repeat that there is a politics of space, because space is political" (Lefebvre, 1977: 345). These spaces and spatial *relations* are not constrained to the physical space of the municipal council building, the legislative assembly, or the judicial court. In fact, these spaces, as the so-called rural, urban, local or global, are conceptualized here as being shaped by human and non-human interactions. Taking these affirmations seriously, it is possible to see new political spaces as constantly opened up (Diçec, 2012) and as constantly constructed by interrelations (Massey, 2005). Through the participatory mapping and influence/importance matrix exercise, for instance, participants representing different social groups in El Boalo and Mataelpino arrived at a consensus about which actors had more influence on shaping rural space through their relations. Public institutions such as the municipality, and the National Park where put at a high position of influence and importance on the graphic, as well as the drove roads. Madrid was also drawn on the map, as exercising high influence but having little importance on shaping rurality. Livestock farmers and local producers were put as important, but not quite influential. Non-human actors such as rivers and natural pastures were also put on the map as important but not influential. Looking through social relations highlighted the transboundary character of power and influence, and the importance of 'external' actors in driving change (the city, the highway, urban dwellers, migrants, tourists…). But it also allowed for the examination of how social relations are configured in place and the role of individual agency (Woods, 2015). Along these thoughts, I found important to reflect on inclusivity and marginalization within public participation spaces, going beyond the boundaries of identity politics.

Conflicts in governing municipalism

Through this research, I found that the municipal goatherd project aims to change subjectivities, to transform human-nature relations in a 'sustainable' or 'agroecological' way. But a political project without social mobilization is incomplete (Gramsci, 1971; in Calvario, R., 2017). In terms of the politics and practice of municipalism, El Boalo and its municipal council were proactive in creating new spaces for inhabitants to actively participate in political decisions about the most diverse aspects of life in the villages. Through setting up a village assembly as the ultimate space for decision making, all people living in the village in theory had an open space to express their ideas and support or reject certain public projects. Throughout the year, sectorial councils divided by themes such as: tourism, waste and urban planning, environment, participation and culture, and most recently, agroecology, carried out the work of discussion and presentation of public initiatives that later would be presented and approved through the village assembly, which would then also be in charge of defining the public budget allocated for each project. All these spaces were open to whoever wanted to actively engage, part of what Brugué et al. (2003) would call a *relational municipality*, one that is governed in *relation* with a broad constellation of actors in a participatory way.

Nevertheless, these forums were not very well attended, being followed by a minority of well-educated and politically active dwellers. The municipal council sometimes came up with online surveys to incite public participation, but that also came across the knowledge barrier on who can participate online. I found that the discourse and practice of the municipal councillors involved in these initiatives for furthering active citizen participation was strongly related to their former political activism; including participation in the 15M/*indignados* and/or other social movements. In this sense, politically engaged people who were not 'professional' politicians before, occupied the public institutions through the *openings* created since 2011. In

the dispute and balance between *calle* (street) and *gabinete* (government), the spaces occupied by new ways of thinking, doing and governing are becoming more concrete. From the *rhizomatic* and relational movements before, during and after 15M, to being *rooted* in municipal councils across the country, including El Boalo.

Ideas and practices of participation became more stabilized since the citizen-led coalitions gained more space in El Boalo's municipal council, but here I argue that these strategies are not automatically inclusive to the needs of people living in rural areas. The *relational* municipality, if taking up Brugué's (2002; 2003) term for a municipal government focussed on institutionalizing spaces of public participation, in fact encountered in practice several boundaries. The claims of the 15M for *"democracia real ya!"* or "real democracy now", still has ways to go. Spaces of participation are still spaces of power (paraphrasing the above quoted Murdoch, 2006). I therefore argue here that citizen participation and inclusion with diversity needs to be further reflected upon and publically discussed in order to ensure that such a transformative strategy can be sustained by a diverse community. In the case of El Boalo and Mataelpino, livestock farmers had different priorities and visions of what rural development should look like, and the concept of agroecology and citizen participation did not speak to them directly.

As shown in chapter 5.4, the diverging discourses and practices from local livestock farmers and the municipality in some ways created boundaries where there could have been more connections: whose traditions to keep? Who benefits from what kind of development trajectory? Even though the municipalist coalition in power was enacting practices that in theory enabled deeper social engagement and participation. Those who were more acquainted with the new discourses and practices promoted by the municipal government (that is, new rurals), had more knowledge, and thus interest and power, to participate in public assemblies and spaces of direct decision-making.

Local livestock farmers interviewed were not familiar with the concept of agroecology (see chapter 5.2), and so did not feel represented by policies and projects motivated by that discourse, as the municipal goatherd, even though the project aimed to make extensive grazing more visible and thus revitalize the importance of livestock farming. The citations bellow represent some of the contradictions between an idealized vision of rurality and rural space and who should have more say in decision making. In some ways, a vision of a 'moral' landscape imagined by new rurals includes local livestock farmers as key actors in shaping it with their traditional practices and land-uses, and as a group that needs to gain more space in the municipal council. At the same time, if livestock farmers would have been more active in participatory decision making spaces, the municipal goatherd project might not have been put into practice.

> *(On livestock farmers) Those really important, who give character and identity to the village, are not influential. Or not as influential as they should be. And it's a shame, because this landscape was made by the cattlemen.*
>
> Municipal goats' cheesemaker (Focus group, March 2017)

> *Livestock farmers do not have real participation. It is pure aesthetics.*
>
> Neo-rural entrepreneur (Focus group, March 2017)

> *Who really has influence are the institutions above, the city council, councillors, and the population does not feel represented, nor the livestock farmers.*

Municipal councillor for culture and participation (Focus group March 2017)

On one hand, pushing for practices of municipalism, the municipal coalition wanted to create spaces for more active public participation. But at the same time, it put a lot of focus on mediatizing the municipal goats project and its innovative waste management plan, strengthening new relations with urban centres and urban dwellers interested in reconnecting with nature through the project. Meanwhile, its impact on improving or making livestock farming livelihoods possible in El Boalo and Mataelpino was not yet clear. The municipal goats project was popularly referred to as "the mayor's goats". This misfit between the supposedly communal or public ownership of the goats and the cult to the political person of the mayor for his passion with the project create a strange mix and somewhat contradictory situation. Sheep farmer Carmen also mentioned the issue of accountability that comes with distributing the decision-making responsibility between municipal councillors and non-elected citizens. In her words, this occurs "so nobody feels responsible". "I don't have all the information. I voted on someone so he could decide and take the risks for me." She then raised the issue of legitimacy of decision-making from the elected council members: "in the end the decisions are made by others, not those that should have to take decisions; and in the end the fault is of the other. 'It was the agro sector council, the village council' - which sounds so precious. 'It has been the people's council', which is also super democratic (sarcastic tone). It meets at 7 pm when everyone is working" (Interview).

In the case of the municipal goatherd, lack of participation in the project design, implementation and benefit sharing with one of those most concerned with the revitalization of pastoralism - livestock farmers – risks hindering the legitimacy of the project itself. I found this to be linked, amongst others, to a lack of knowledge about the concept of agroecology amongst local farmers. As mentioned in previous chapters, they saw the municipal goats as a *capricho* for not being economically profitable, and found themselves excluded from the discourse and practice of agroecology since they associated it with the new rurals, *perroflautas*.

6.2 Closing loops and opening new relations

"The municipal goats project is very round."

– Municipal councillor for culture and participation (Interview)

Can we talk about closed circles and loops with openings? Opening up for ideas of a 'radical rural space' (Halfacree, 2007)? From the dynamics and rhythms of the landscape as in closing nutrient cycles, to the perception of spatial interconnections and co-construction between humans and more-than-humans?

The roundness of the municipal goatherd project can be seen in relation to a few things: it relates to several pillars described in previous chapters (see case study description, chapter 1.4), which in turn connect fluxes of people, capital, food and waste between rural and urban. Moreover, the principle of closing loops and the concept of agroecology used as a pillar for the municipal goatherd project related with a broader search for autonomy at the municipal. By closing loops and nutrient cycles, as well as remunicipalising public services, the municipality framed the practice of agroecology as a way to be more autonomous in terms of nutrient use. As argued by Gonzalez de Molina (2013), the level of autonomy is an essential attribute of sustainability and is closely related to the internal capacity to supply the flows of energy and materials required for agricultural production. Although he speaks of the responsibility of political institutions to establish regulations that allow for autonomy at the farm level, I expand

this understanding to autonomy beyond the farm in the municipal sphere. At the same time, municipalism was employed as a way to reach more autonomy over decision making about how public services are practiced. Put together, this meant that moving towards a pathway of agroecological transition was made possible by making decisions based on socio-ecological sustainability for all activities implemented at the municipal level. As found recently by other case studies on remunicipalisation of services (see Kishimoto, Petitjean, and Steinfort, 2017), change was driven not only in terms changing relations of ownership of resources such as water and waste from private to public, but on how these are managed, and what ideal of future rural/city/community is being performed through their uses.

> *Here the last thing that has been remunicipalized was waste, it is being done now. We are also changing the waste management model. Even if we had not changed the waste management model, we would remunicipalize it as well. Our experience shows that a supposed public, managed directly by the city council, is more effective, is cheaper, and you control much more, you have more control over the working conditions of the workers, about the training of the workers, the selection that is made. Since we arrived we have internalized several services: school of music, sports school, everything that has been possible. Waste takes a very large percentage of municipal budgets. It will be a saving of about 400,000 euros or more; to do so with better quality and less money; eliminating the big companies' profits, any possibility of mafia, controlling the working conditions as you think they should be.*
>
> Roberta (Municipal councillor for culture and participation, Interview)

It became clear through my research that this 'autonomy' is not enclosed and inward looking; but it is made possible because of its outward looking and relational interdependence with networks such as Red Terrae, funds from the EU, transhumant shepherd's and migrants' support, and more broadly, a recognition of interdependence between humans and more-than-humans. Closing nutrient loops thus can also mean opening space for new interrelations.

> *Ecological wholeness is not an immutable homogeneity but rather the very opposite - a dynamic unity of diversity. In nature, balance and harmony are achieved by ever-changing differentiation, by ever-expanding diversity. Ecological stability, in effect, is a function not of simplicity and homogeneity but of complexity and variety.*
>
> Murray Bookchin (1982: 24)

New rhythms were being created through practices and relations with humans, goats, drove roads and mountain pastures. In this dynamic movement between spreading out new connections and closing loops, the drove roads or *cañadas* are themselves a network that connects spaces and relates to their complex and heterogeneous actors: the goats, herders, tourists, mountain bikers, urban dwellers, new rurals, municipal councillors.

In a dance between the traditional/autochthonous practices - used by several respondents when describing the goatherd project – and open, innovative, "out of the comfort zone". I heard an interesting perspective from Monica, ecological beer maker. She spoke about how hard it is to create an 'autochthonous' product from the region/*Comunidad Autonoma* of Madrid, since it is a place shaped by such multiple identities and convergences of different routes, that there is not *one* vision or imagined ideal of what the region produces through its material practices. In this sense, the municipal goats contribute to the enactment of one of multiple ideals, but attempts to put together both tradition and innovation within it. This becomes visible when noticing that

organisms, practices and discourses are not as externally bounded entities, but as bundles of interwoven lines of growth and movement, together constituting a meshwork in fluid space (Ingold, 2008). The non-human environment, then, comprises not the surroundings of the organism but a zone of entanglement. "Life in the open, far from being contained within bounded places, threads its way along paths" (Ingold, 2008: 1796).

Not so marginal

As I described in chapter 4, approaching this case study came together with wanting to bring centrality to the marginal. After analysing the research results, this position was reflected in different ways. Looking at social relations, the villages are interconnected with the city through infrastructure (highways, *urbanizaciones*), communication technologies, ideas, people, waste, politics and other interrelations. The municipal goatherd project relates to all these fluxes, as well as a will to bring focus/centrality to the then marginalized practice of goat pastoralism. In another sense, the case of the remunicipalization of waste management and the municipal goats also led to telling a different story about municipal projects, policies and public services; different from a discourse of inefficiency and austerity, moving towards creative local decision-making with goals oriented towards broader social and environmental changes (Kishimoto, Petitjean and Steinfort, 2017). In some ways, this also resonates with Bookchin's vision of municipalist politics, mixing the notion of autonomy with sociality, moving away of an individualistic view of autonomy (sometimes used by anarchist movements) and towards community in a civic sense, "as a node of social organization" (Bookchin, 2004)[44].

Bringing centrality to the marginal can also be seen here as (re)creating relations with what was previously framed as waste. Repurposing what would have been otherwise discarded, marginalized, can be also conceptually seen as a part of this return to the matter, to practices which give central role to the more-than-human world. The rhythms and movements of these human and more-than-human practices configure spaces of connectivity within more-than-human life worlds; closing loops but also strengthening new relations (Whatmore, 2002). When it comes to recreating traditions and re-establishing human-nature relations in an ecologically sustainable and harmonic way, the municipal goatherd project can be seen as an expression of the assemblage between tradition and innovation, reconfiguring socio-ecological and socio-spatial relations through somewhat 'moral' relations with the more-than-human world. These are the kinds of contingent practices of/for relational ethics that I have been working towards in this thesis, 'projects of making' more liveable worlds made possible by the 'ongoing interweaving of our lives' with manifold others (Ingold, 2000: 69; in Whatmore, 2002: 162-163).

6.2.1 Agroecology and politics

> *Just as seeds await favorable conditions under the snow, the socio-political upheaval provoked by 15M has left the soil removed, predicting a fertile period for new practices to germinate also in the form of agroecological public policies.*
>
> *Lopez et al. (2017)*

Through this research, I found that the politics and practices enacted by citizens occupying the streets during the 15M, were, 6 years later, being translated into policies and projects by

[44] This is a quote from one of his last video interviews, accessed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8fdPbLeQvE&feature=youtu.be

recently elected municipal coalitions. As mentioned before, several citizen-led platforms gained seats in local governments across Spain in the 2015 elections, and in the case of El Boalo and Mataelpino, the municipalist coalition has almost doubled its seats in the town hall since 2011 and has significantly influenced the practices and discourse of the government. One of the major demands of the 15M movement was the defence of the public services, fighting against the privatization promoted by neoliberal politics (15M Madrid Comunidad, 2012). After new citizen-led coalitions were elected since 2015, the (re)municipalization of services as a politico-economic strategy can be found in government programmes of several Spanish cities while in some of the cases, such as Madrid, Barcelona, and El Boalo, programmes also include agroecology as a guiding thread for local development and diverse municipal activities/services[45]. Nevertheless, the institutionalization of those demands is still contingent, being an act of experimentation in the case studied for this research.

In recent years, we have seen a changing role of public institutions in food systems' governance, taking upon the issues of sustainable food production and procurement to the municipal political agendas (Renting and Wiskerke, 2010; Pimbert, 2017). It could be argued that especially in peri-urban and rural areas, where agriculture still plays an important role in the local culture and economy, an active role of public institutions in maintaining or shifting towards sustainable agricultural practices would make sense and be envisioned. In the political context of Spain, this more pro-active role is increasingly taken upon my municipal governments who are now formed by representatives which come directly from neighborhood groups and social movements. When it comes to agroecology, a recent engagement with the concept in local public policies has sprouted in Spain (Lopez et al., 2017), as in El Boalo. But as presented in the literature review (Chapter 2), the link between agroecology and politics is a contentious one (Molina, 2013; Giraldo and Rosset, 2017). On one hand, agroecological movements strive for change in our food systems by proposing agricultural production principles that mimic natural ecological cycles and put small-scale food producers in the center of local policies for agroecology. On the other hand, as discussed by Giraldo and Rosset (2017), the issue of co-optation of the concept when being institutionalized by governments, and its definition by policy-makers is highly controversial.

As previously explored, through my field work I found that the municipalist practices of the local council, which embrace participatory democracy mechanisms such as assemblies and open councils, also integrated agroecology principles as guidelines for institutional change in the local level. Nevertheless, public institutions can be a both limiting and enabling space for such practices, e.g. participatory mechanisms, public policies to support agroecology and sustainable rural development, or (re)connecting humans and more-than-humans by changing practices at the institutional level. Reflecting on the need for a *political agroecology*, Molina (2013) argues that the possibility for closing nutrient cycles and using local resources depends on territorial planning and organisation, and thus falls under the mandate of local governments and public policies. At the same time, agroecological principles such as farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchanges and self-determination risks being lost when the concept is implemented from a political institution, especially if the latter is not focussed on addressing issues and needs of local farmers. How to ensure that agroecology remains open to different interpretations in practice but keeps its roots in maintaining diversity? How to ensure it does not become another boundary or exclusive concept used by those who have a specific knowledge? Whose project of

[45] For more examples of local policies for agroecology in Spain, see Lopez et al. (2017).

rurality to push forward – urban centred (reconnecting with nature, etc) or rural centred (e.g. reform of sheds, water tanks, cattle trails; support to local markets)? How to deal with uneven power relations? I am in no position to offer answers to those questions, but to tease out their relations to the multiplicity of place and the constant negotiations involved in inhabiting the world together, human and more-than-human.

In the case of the municipal goatherd of El Boalo, the practice and institutionalization of agroecology came together with issues of knowledge and power – livestock farmers had more power in a way when it came to the knowledge and skill of farming livestock, they did it *por profession* (chapter 5.3). But the municipality had the power over defining agroecology in their institutional practices, including the municipal goatherd, and the skill to attract visitors and media. The latter performed an image of a moral future where rural and urban dwellers are living respecting each other and their more-than-human worlds, but were criticized for doing that *por capricho* (chapter 5.3). Somehow the politics of agroecology risked running against the same wall of other identity politics if it becomes restricted to those who have the privilege to have knowledge about it, and are politically engaged in its project.

Through enacting social practices, in this case, a routinization of seemingly 'crazy' or 'radical' ideas, new forms of being in the world can emerge. The political will of the municipal coalition to promote rural development practices that reconnect humans and more-than-humans, such as extensive grazing and repurposing organic waste, allow for these new practices and relations to become more stable. But I have shown here that promoting participation mechanisms for citizen engagement *in* the municipal council and its decision-making processes does not mean that those decisions are made *with* all the relevant actors, as in the relational municipality debate (Brugué, 2002; Brugué, Font y Goma, 2003). The support of different local, national and global networks which relate to the agroecology, food sovereignty and municipalist politics, are also seen here as important strings for binding innovations together and making them stronger and long-lasting. Agroecological experiences are here seen as not just "local and uncoordinated" (Molina, 2013: 46), but part of a rich network of on-the-ground experiments. Practices such as remunicipalising public services such as waste and water management, repurposing organic waste with a municipal goatherd, can be seen as practices which constitute an effort of stabilizing a different future for the rurals.

7. Conclusions, limitations and final reflexions

7.1 Concluding thoughts

One of the trajectories of this study was making visible the livingness and multiplicity of rural space, through its diverse practices and negotiations of socio-ecological and socio-spatial relations. Another one was tracing connections between the political context of recent years in Spain, especially since the *indignados*/15M movements, and the 'new municipalism' and rural development project envisioned and practiced in the case of El Boalo, as this has not yet been addressed in academic literature. Working towards these propositions also meant moving along a transboundary trajectory between practices and ideas which transit across different spaces, such as agroecology and municipalism. The socio-spatial dialogues in this thesis allowed for an open perspective on coexisting and interconnected realities, and their potential to transform and shape different futures for rural areas. Meanwhile, a focus on socio-ecological relations moved along a similar thread, linking spatial practices and relations to the livingness of the more-than-

human world, making visible our constant co-creation, negotiation, and interdependence with material space.

As it has hopefully become clear so far, those thoughts, practices and relations are deeply entangled and mutually constitutive (as in Cresswell, 2009; Healey and Jones, 2012). But for a clearer understanding I'll attempt to unfold them in the following two-part conclusion.

On socio-ecological and socio-spatial relations

Relationships between humans and more-than-humans in El Boalo and Mataelpino have changed in non-linear ways: from using the mountains as common land mainly for extensive grazing for animal products, to exploiting the touristic potential through conservationism and outdoor activities, and being shaped by new infrastructures and spatial mobility in and out of Madrid. Firstly, an analysis of the municipal goatherd project through the lens of relational theory and a focus on its practices allowed me to illuminate its contested character and discuss the negotiations happening in terms of diverse socio-ecological and socio-spatial relations. Moreover, looking at the spatial dimension of the project through a critical perspective, I could see that the use of the common mountains by the goats and the transhumant shepherd have 'appropriated' the space previously used by the local livestock farmres. At the same time, it indirectly relates to an 'appropriation' or 'consumption' of rurality and the countryside by urban dwellers that aim to experience and and perform practices they see as being symbolically representative of the rural.

But recognizing that spaces are shaped by our human and non-human relations and that therefore, space is always open and changing (Massey, 2005), it is possible to envision different futures in the present. That means, to visualize the multiple ruralities converging and conflicting in rural space. Moreover, a recognition of interdependence and responsibility between human and more-than-human actors can lead to unlocking the potentiality for living together in respectful ways. It means valuing each other – human or not – in our multiplicity, giving space to multiple ways of being in the world.

On agroecology and municipalism

The implementation of municipalist politics and mechanisms such as citizen-led sectorial councils and assemblies are a tangible victory of the practices enacted by the 15M movement. Citizens' imaginaries of more direct democracy have mushroomed into the public administration machine – mainly in major Spanish cities, but here also in a small rural villages, through the creation of village assemblies, participatory planning and village sectorial councils as open spaces of decision-making. The propagation of direct democracy practices – such as using assemblies as spaces of deliberation - into Spanish municipalities should not be seen as a coincidence. As presented in previous literature (e.g. Brugué, 2002; Brugué et al., 2003), participatory democracy only began to be part of the agenda of Spanish municipalities on the early 20th century. But six years after the first occupations in Plaza del Sol and Plaza de Catalunya, it is possible to argue that the political transformations achieved by elected citizen-led platforms such as Podemos, En Comu and others, are becoming more concrete, but it still remains uncertain whether they will transform public institutions in order to gain long term stability. Did their power and creative potential consist precisely in their rhizomatic and unstructured character? Are they loosing contact with the street-level when becoming institutionalized? The same questions apply to the practice of agroecology.

Agroecology could be seen as a vector for diversity and new socio-ecological relations/connections, both 'internal' – in the loop between human and non-human actors in El Boalo – and 'external', with other places and actors beyond municipal spatial boundaries. In the

case of El Boalo, the inclusion agroecology and the idea of closing nutrient cycles through its new waste management strategy happened in parallel and dialogue with others, especially Red Terrae, Madrid Agroecologico, Transition Towns. But new alliances still can be made to connect those processes to farmers and other rural dwellers, farmers' associations, rural workers', or trade unions. Discussing the findings of this research, I argued above that the agroecology movement should be reflexive about the inclusion of 'traditional' local farmers who are not connected to their more radical discourse. Agroecology as politics, when pushed from a political institution – even if attempting for participatory democracy as a process to achieve change – may be contradictory if actors who are concerned with agricultural practices are not involved in shaping agroecological projects. Science, practice and movement are thus not always harmonious and working from a unified voice, especially when it comes to dealing with internal power relations and inclusive decision making, going beyond those who are more knowledgeable and active within the movement. Now the municipality is constituted by citizen platforms but that does not automatically mean that what it proposes reflects the diversity of needs from the multiplicity of social groups. Power relations are an issue, which also raises the question of social justice in the normative principle of participatory democracy – Are all who are counted as members able to participate?

By unfolding the internal multiplicity of ruralities in El Boalo, and tracing the municipal goatherd's connections between human and more-than-human, as well as to other ideas and practices that go beyond the so-called local and rural space, I hope to have contributed to a debate on some of the radical potentials of rural spaces as sites for performance of renewed traditions and creative practices. At the same time, I expect to have contributed to a new and emerging dialogue in literature and practice on the challenges and potentials for new municipalist politics in engaging with agroeocology in their agendas. Overall, contributing to a narrative of hopeful and lively rural places.

7.2 Limitations and recommendations for further research

Firstly, I find important to highlight some of the limitations related to my personal biases as new researcher. Livestock farming in Spain was a completely new context for me. And because of a broad interest on several movements and influences in the case studied, from the start of fieldwork, I faced difficulties in defining the scope of the research and research questions. Moreover, my Spanish language was not completely fluent at the first weeks of field work, but that improved significantly as the research went further.

On the content of the research, assessing the saturation of the data was not easy, as I felt that an extended period of data collection could have provided interesting new insights, since my case study was in a process of constant and rapid change. During the first weeks that followed my arrival in Mataelpino, I was mainly being guided by the mayor, being presented to the few people directly related to the goatherd project. It took longer than expected for me to gain access to the livestock farmers and to be able to gain their trust. It was only at the last month of research that I managed to line up several visits and interviews with the livestock farmers that were most critical of the goatherd. Choosing to focus on farmers' perspectives, as well as their relations with their living environment, with new rurals and with the local government was a choice that undoubtedly left out other important perspectives. Including the perspectives of other stakeholder groups such as representatives from environmentalist movements and park officials could have brought other interesting insights to my results. But time and movement limits restrained my ability to explore the topics discussed here in a more diverse or

comparative manner, which could have been done with other rural villages in the same region which were being led by municipalist coalitions, for instance.

For further research, mapping the influence of practices and ideas performed during and beyond the 15M movement in local, regional and national politics can help to give legitimacy and further recognition of its impacts on participatory mechanisms and on implementing agendas directly pushed by social movements. There is still very little academic attention to the concrete transformations happening after those citizen-led coalitions formed governments in Spain. In some ways, this more evidence-based research could be interesting for contributing to better understanding this political "climate" in Spain, especially since the 2015 elections. Even if those results were unclear and unreachable from the start of the movement in 2011, they slowly started to gain shape and consolidate in the form of local policies and projects in several municipalities around the country. Moreover, it would be important to expand the research on how participatory democracy mechanisms takes shape in rural areas and what are the challenges faced in their implementation (e.g. lack of inclusivity).

Regarding the municipal goatherd project, the revitalization of pastoralism and its attempts to reconfigure relations between human and non-human were still incipient. It was too early to tell how the project will be able to expand beyond its educational role into more production-orientated goals laid out for the project, and if it will be sustained in time. Therefore I would suggest further research on how the project is continuing and if it is attempting to be more inclusive of broader social groups beyond new rurals and urban visitors.

In the following sub-chapter I will explore some of my lessons and reflections on learning to do research, using my first successful experience with meat curing as a thread.

7.3 Reflections on learning to be a researcher and on the art of *chorizo* making

Reviews on fermented meats point out that drying and fermentation of meat products represent the oldest forms of meat preservation (e.g. Bacus, 1984; Smith, 1987; in Zeuthen, 1995; Roca and Incze, 1990). It was realized a few thousands of years ago that meat in whole pieces or ground, stuffed in natural casings, and dried afterward would be stable for months without spoilage if in appropriate temperature and humidity (Roca and Incze, 1990). While it is uncertain when and where the first meat curing happened, there are references about the production of sausage from pork meat by the Chinese more than 2000 years ago (*ibid.*), of preserved meats in Homer's *Odyssey*, *ca.* 900 BC, and sausages of the old Roman Empire (Smith, 1987; in Zeuthen, 1995).

The art of chorizo making in Spain has been kept for centuries and mainly enacted by men, who usually kill (what in spanish is called *matanza*), butcher, season and process the pork for preservation and taste. The *matanza* is a traditional process of killing of one or more pigs for making cured meats to feed a family for an entire year. This process has been celebrated by Spanish rural families for centuries, usually during winter. The Spanish *chorizo* has a unique colour and spicy flavour that comes with the addition of smoked red peppers to the seasoning, together with salt and garlic. Since peppers only arrived in Europe from the Americas in the XVI century, it is possible to say that Spanish *chorizo* as it is known today was created somewhere after that time.

In the process of *chorizo* making, or of any meat curing, every step is simple but essential to a healthy, tasty and reliable result. The first step is to gather and mince the meat. Like in meat processing, thesis research and writing begins with gathering (data), and then *mincing* all information to make it more digestible. Next in *chorizo* making is to season the minced meat with the chosen ingredients. In research, once data is collected, *seasoning* it with a chosen theory and with the broader context of the case study comes as a next step. The seasoned minced meat should rest overnight; as should the data during the first phases of analysis, when letting it rest and going back to it later helps the researcher have clearer and/or new perspectives to make sense of it. The next day, the seasoned meat is put into the sausage filing machine. While meat goes in at one end of the machine, the natural casings go on the other. The meat is then pressed into the casing and cut every time it has filled a large enough stretch of it. While in discussing the data analysis, theory and concepts are the frame, or the *casings*, for empirical data. In *chorizo* making, the next step is to puncture the sausages to let the air out, then tie the ends together with a thin rope and hang it to dry for at least two weeks. After finding concepts, or the appropriate *casing* to *fill* in with empirical examples, the researcher *ties* those pieces together through theory, and let it *cure* before coming to the conclusions.

In one of my last weeks in Mataelpino, I felt honoured to be invited to participate in the process of making *chorizo*, led by Jose, restaurant owner and son of a family of goat herders and cattle owners. Jose's restaurant *El Espliego*, was the place for several of my social encounters and informal interviews, since it was one of the main meeting places for both old inhabitants and new rurals in the village. For the experience of *chorizo* making, I joined a group of retired livestock farmers and two young men that came from Madrid to live in the village in an old farmhouse by the drove road near Mataelpino. Despite being a diverse group in terms of age and life trajectories (definitely not gender diverse), they were all working together as friends, in a fluid process of collaboration where each one took turns in each task. After observing the scene for a few minutes and being a bit unsure about how to integrate myself into that group of mostly old men, I took the position of puncturing and hanging the sausages, 150 of them. While learning the process of *chorizo* making in practice was quite straight forward, learning to be a researcher has proven to be a much more complex task.

Learning the tricks of the trade on the job was not easy. There were moments of uncertainty, doubt, lack of confidence and some very cold days when goat herding was the last thing I wanted to do. As a participant observer, I learned about building *rapport* and being flexible when needing to adapt my questions and follow the lead of the research participants in our conversations. At first I felt limited by previous ideas of what field work would be like and what I was interested in writing about. Then I felt slightly overwhelmed with the freedom that came with letting myself be guided by the people and the natural environment in El Boalo before deciding what to focus on. I also realised that research methods and a well thought timeline are useful safety nets to keep a first-time researcher afloat and confident with where the field work is going. But being able to improvise and change plans was proven to be equally important. Maybe doing field work is a good way to see social sciences with more humble eyes, and to figure that complex theories not always fit well as analytical tools for what happens in everyday life. And when you least expect you might be invited to join a group of livestock farmers, restaurant owner and new rural dwellers on a day of *chorizo* making.

Figure 10: Jose making chorizo, Juan and Paco at the back (March 2017)

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Annex 1: List of participant observation activities

Participant Observations
- Volunteering as a herder of the municipal goats; - Attending the annual meeting of the *Plataforma por la Ganaderia Extensiva y el Pastoralismo* in Madrid, with livestock farmers, researchers and advocates; - Participating at a training workshop by Red Terrae on municipal organic waste management with other network members; - Taking part in a participatory session for drafting the local Agenda 21 held at the municipality of El Boalo; - Participating in a workshop on Agroecology and Cooperatives by Madrid Agrolab with farmers members of *Madrid Agroecológico;* - Participating at a Conference on Local Agroecological Initiatives at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid with the mayor of El Boalo and Red Terrae; - Participating at village's public cultural events; - Visits to the Senior House and Cultural Centre of El Boalo; - Participating in a workshop on Rural Women Entrepreneurship at the municipality of Mataelpino, hosted by the local Association *Mujeres Punto de Luz.*

Table 2: Participant observations

Annex 2: List of Interviewees

	Interviewees	
	Name/Nickname	Description
1	Juan	Mayor of El Boalo
2	Roberta	Councilor for Culture and Participation
3	Igor	Councilor for Social Events
4	Marta	Councilor for Social Services
5	Sueli	Councilor for Urban Planning and Waste
6	Pili	Municipality Employee
7	Franco	Red Terrae technical advisor and co-founder
8	Jorge	Cattle farmer and butcher
9	Domingos	Cattle farmer
10	Prestes	Cattle farmer
11	Fernando	Cattle farmer
12	Ganadera	Cattle farmer
13	Carmen	Sheep farmer

14	Justo	Sheep farmer
15	Sebastian	Goat farmer
16	Dionisio	Retired goat and cattle farmer
17	Roberto	Retired goat farmer
18	Loli	Beekeeper and former cattle farmer
19	Julio	Transhumant shepherd
20	Omar	Municipal Goats' shepherd
21	Anamari	Cattle farmer and livestock feed retailer
22	Jose	Former goat herder and restaurant owner
23	Miguel	Dejando Huella - Donkey association and CSA organizer
24	Carlos	Neo-rural/ Gabarrera Cooperative - Ecological Artisanal Beer
25	Alejo	Neo-rural/ Gabarrera Cooperative - Ecological Artisanal Beer and Dejando Huella
26	Noemi	Neo-rural and cheesemaker/future goat farmer
27	Angel	Neo-rural/future goat farmer
28	Marita	Cheesemaker with the municipal goats' milk and member of the Punto de Luz rural women's association
29	Marluce	Association Punto de Luz co-founder
30	Marga	Association Punto de Luz co-founder
31	Alice	Active citizen
32	Alberta	School teacher
33	Chaves	Active citizen and member of community garden
34	Fernando	Municipality employee and son of livestock farmer

Table 3: Names and short description of Interviewees