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BEYOND POST-PRODUCTIVISM: FROM RURAL POLICY DISCOURSE TO RURAL DIVERSITY

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Abstract: There has been a strong discourse in public policy aimed at transforming rural places from venues of primary production into truly diverse socioeconomic landscapes. Yet conceptualisations of the rural as envisioned in the policy and politics of the 'new economy' often prove to be elusive on the ground. However, post-productive activity in rural areas has become a major focus for rural studies scholars. This paper investigates the ideas of post-productivism in the existing literature, and argues for a holistic understanding of post-productivism as an idea and political ambition rather than an imperative and irreversible change of rural economic activity. The purpose of the study is to make clear the division between post-productivism and the related concepts of post-production and post-productive activities in order to better understand processes of rural change in relation to different geographical contexts. It is argued that post-productivism as a concept stands apart from de facto post-production and alternative concepts such as multifunctionality and should be regarded as part of broader regional development discourses. The paper outlines several important fields in which post-productivism is a necessary component for rural transformation and development. While it is not always easily captured in indicators or empirical studies in rural locations, post-productivism exists at the level of discourse and planning and thus has real effects on the ground. The paper concludes by offering suggestions on how to apply the concepts of post-productivism, post-production and multifunctionality in future studies.

Keywords: change, multifunctionality, policy, post-productivism, production, rural

Abstrakt: De senaste årens landsbygdspolitik kännetecknas av en stark diskurs för att omvandla platser från dominerande primärproduktion till skiftande socioekonomiska aktiviteter där inte minst turism förväntas inta en stark ställning. Omvandlingsambitionen framträder särskilt starkt i styrdokument och projektverksamhet, samtidigt som tydliga och omfattande reella avtryck ofta lyser med sin frånvaro. Däremot har post-produktiva verksamheter på landsbygden blivit

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ett viktigt fokus för forskare. I föreliggande artikel undersöks idéer kring post-produktion och post-produktivism så som de framkommer i tidigare forskning. Det argumenteras för behovet av en helhetssyn på post-produktivism som idé och politisk ambition, liksom att ta utgångspunkt i att uppenbara förändringar av landsbygdens ekonomiska aktiviteter ännu inte är särskilt omfattande. Syftet med studien är att klargöra begreppens innehåll och relation till multifunktionalitet för att bättre förstå landsbygdens förändring i relation till olika geografiska sammanhang. Artikeln beskriver flera viktiga områden där post-produktivism är en nödvändig komponent för landsbygdens omvandling och utveckling, men att den faktiska utvecklingen och de politiska ambitionerna inte alltid går hand i hand. Artikeln avslutas genom att ge förslag på hur man kan använda begreppen inom forskningen.

Nyckelord: förändring, landsbygd, multifunktionalitet, policy, post-produktivism, produktion

1. Introduction

Globalisation, increasing competition on the world market, increased environmental awareness, and the orientation towards the service sectors in Western economies has dramatically altered the preconditions for development, not only in urban centers but also in rural areas. Furthermore, despite popular perceptions, the consumption and provision of rural products and services has increased with demand mainly coming from urban areas. A countryside dominated by traditional occupations in agriculture separated from urban life is now regarded as 'a rural myth' (Kapferer, 1990). Although products and commodities are still important, other values of the rural landscape have become established and are now dominating policy as the 'new rural paradigm' (OECD, 2006) and have been developed in academia as 'post-productivism' (Evans et al. 2002; Mather et al., 2006; Wilson, 2001). The landscape that formerly was a production landscape has become viewed as a landscape for consumption and recreation in situ (Lundmark, 2006; Mather et al., 2006). Thus, 'rural' is no longer the monopoly of farmers (van der Ploeg et al., 2000). This change has important implications for rural development and restructuring. It is creating new spatial relationships, for example, through flows of people and finance, and at the same time it creates uneven and often unforeseen developments, for example, economic clustering of services is creating post-productive islands (e.g., tourism destinations) in traditional rural communities (Brouder, 2012, 2013).

Emerging from these ongoing global processes is the potentially important concept of post-productivism, and the related but distinct concepts of post-production and post-productive activity. Although much of the attention given to the concept of post-productivism has been academic, with debates centred on the content of the shift or transition (Evans et al., 2002; Hoogendoorn & Visser, 2011), there is a concurrent discourse in public policy about moving rural places away from primary production and towards the 'new economy' (OECD, 2006). The policy debate has spurred a reorientation of the academic discourse on rural change away from post-production towards post-productivism (cf. Mather et al., 2006). The earlier literature on post-productivism primarily focused on agriculture and on the UK empirical context (McCarthy, 2005; Wilson & Rigg, 2003). However, there is also an increasing, but still limited, focus on the countryside as a place of consumption (Burton & Wilson, 2006) and also on post-productivism relating to forestry (Elands & Praestholm, 2008; Mather et al., 2006), rural governance (Wilson, 2004), second homes (Hoogendoorn, 2010; Hoogendoorn & Visser, 2011), as well as wider rural land use changes (Mather et al., 2006).

The geographical application of post-productivism has also expanded with a greater number of studies from outside the UK including, for example, Norway (Bjørkhaug & Richards, 2008), Denmark (e.g., Kristensen, 2001), the EU (e.g., Wilson, 2001), Australia (e.g., Argent, 2002; Bjørkhaug & Richards, 2008; Holmes, 2002, 2006, 2008), the United States (e.g., Bergstrom, 2001), and South Africa (Hoogendoorn, 2010; Hoogendoorn & Visser, 2011). However, the number of studies from developing countries is still limited. Despite the increase in the number of studies, holistic approaches to post-productivism are still lacking (Mather et al.,

2006). This is because most research on post-productivism has focused on agricultural change, while limited attention has been paid to other rural land uses such as tourism (Hoogendorn & Visser, 2011).

In rural studies, there has been a parallel effort towards sustainable development in the rural context and this has found synergies with the goals of a post-productive transition, leading to an aspirational status of the post-productive transition as a way to a better future for rural areas. As van der Ploeg et alia (2000) put it: “rural development theory is not about the world as it is – it is about the way agriculture and the countryside might be reconfigured” (p. 396). Thus, a normative post-productivism has emerged and it is conceptualised in an aspirational way.

In this study, a critique of the epistemological concepts of ‘post-productivism’ and ‘post-production’ in relation to rural realities is offered. This paper investigates the concept of post-productivism as described in the existing literature, and argues for an understanding of post-productivism as an idea within political discourse rather than as a singular manifest change of rural economic activity. Hence, post-productivism as a concept is shown to be standing apart from de facto post-production, and while there is post-productive change in rural areas, it is not necessarily in line with post-productivist discourse when viewed in terms of regional development. The purpose of the study is to make clear the division between the related concepts in order to a) better understand processes of rural change in relation to different geographical contexts and b) offer suggestions on how to apply the concepts in future studies, also in relation to the alternative concept of multifunctionality. The paper outlines several important fields in which post-productivism is an integral, prominent, and a necessary component for rural transformation and development and also how post-production fits within frameworks for understanding rural change on the ground.

2. Post-productivism in rural studies

‘Post-productivism’ became commonly used as a concept in the 1990s by rural geographers as an attempt to explain and theorise changes and trends in contemporary agriculture, where the focus on agricultural production gradually shifted towards demand for amenities, ecosystem services and preservation of cultural landscapes (McCarthy, 2005; Wilson & Rigg, 2003; Woods, 2011). Thus, post-productivism challenged ‘productivism’, “a discourse of agricultural organisation in which the function of farming was singularly conceived as the production of food and fibre, and which prioritised increasing agricultural production over all other considerations” (Woods, 2011, p. 67). Post-productivism is frequently used as the antithesis of ‘productivism’ (Mather et al., 2006). In this sense, while productivism refers to intensive farming with high inputs and high yields, post-productivism is “an approach to farming that is environmentally sensitive, not predicated on high yields and where farmers may look to non-agricultural use of their land and resources to supplement their incomes” (Jack, 2007, p. 910). This change in focus has been described as a post-productive ‘transition’ (cf. Ilbery & Bowler, 1998), thus implying a change “from one mode to another” (Bjørkhaug & Richards, 2008, p. 100).

Because of “the breadth and diversity of meaning” implied in the concept of post-productivism, Mather et alia (2006) argue that ‘dimensions’ rather than ‘definitions’ are increasingly used in the rural debate to characterise post-productivism (p. 442). Markey et alia (2008), based on a compilation by Mather et alia (2006), group these dimensions as “the nature and type of production (from commodity to non-commodity outputs), the multidimensionality of objectives associated with landscape and resources (including environmental, amenity, and ecosystem service values), and the importance of governance (representing a greater diversity of actors and institutions) in land-use decision-making” (p. 410). However, most sets of dimensions, or categories, in the literature focus on agriculture (e.g., Evans et al., 2002; Ilbery & Bowler, 1998; Mather et al., 2006; Wilson, 2001). For example, Evans et alia (2002) merged the characteristics of Ilbery and Kneafsey (1997) and Ilbery and Bowler (1998) into five categories: the shift from quantity to quality in food production; the growth of on-farm diversification and off-farm employment (pluriactivity); extensification and the promotion of sustainable farming through agri-environmental policy; dispersion of production patterns; and environmental regulation and restructuring of government support for agriculture (p. 317).

Wilson (2001) listed seven dimensions of post-productivism: ideology, actors, food regimes, agricultural production, agricultural policies, farming techniques and environmental impacts. However, Holmes (2002) points out that Wilson's set of dimensions has a Western European focus and does not apply in other contexts. In Australia, for example, conditions are different and the role of agriculture is not as dominant. Thus, the four farm-related dimensions have less importance there. Studies in other contexts also demonstrate differences in relation to which dimensions or characteristics are germane. For example, Wilson and Rigg (2003) applied the concept of post-productivism to 'the rural South' to see whether it "can be used to understand contemporary agricultural change in developing world regions" (p. 681). The analysis was based on six broader characteristics (or 'indicators') of post-productivism: policy change; organic farming; counter-urbanisation; the inclusion of environmental NGOs at the core of policy-making; the consumption of the countryside; and on-farm diversification activities. They concluded that "the notion of post-productivism and the developing world are not necessarily 'discordant concepts'", but that it is necessary to adapt and develop the concept "to address specific conditions in the rural South, possibly by combining theoretical approaches surrounding the notion of 'post-productivism' developed largely from a Northern perspective, and 'deagrarianization' from a Southern perspective" (Wilson & Rigg, 2003, p. 681).

The bipolar relationship between productivism/post-productivism has been criticised with the argument that there is little evidence that "productivist processes are being progressively reversed" (Evans et al. 2002, p. 324). Wilson (2007) suggests that instead of using 'post-productivism' as the antithesis of 'productivism' the concept 'non-productivism' would be a better name since it is a 'true opposite' contrary to post-productivism. Wilson (2001) had earlier argued that, rather than productivism and post-productivism being separate entities, there is a spectrum of different views where "different localities are positioned at different points in a temporal, spatial and conceptual transition from 'pre-productivist' to 'post-productivist' agricultural regimes" (p. 77). This, he argues, is true within the EU where some Mediterranean countries have not fully entered the productivist phase while at the same time the northern European countries "may be firmly embedded in the post-productivist transition" (Wilson, 2001, p. 91). Thus, common EU policies supporting post-productive activities (e.g., extensification of agriculture) are applied on countries with productivist practices and thinking (Wilson, 2001). This spatial blindness is at the heart of the matter and implies that 'transition' may not be a helpful concept since, while having sound motivation, it may lead to bad policy being applied to certain places.

Post-productivism has also been criticised for its lack of a clear definition, its focus on agriculture, for being UK centered with a limited discussion on the concept's applicability in other countries, as well as the lack of empirical evidence to support the theory of post-productivism (Evans et al., 2002; Mather et al., 2006; Wilson, 2001). For example, Evans et alia (2002) argue that post-productivism has reached a "theoretical cul-de-sac" (p. 325) where it contributes very little to the development of theory in agricultural research. As a response to this critique, alternative discourses have emerged. 'Multifunctionality' and the related concepts 'multifunctional agricultural regime' and 'multifunctional transition' have been put forward by many scholars (e.g., Bjørkhaug & Richards, 2008; Holmes, 2008; McCarthy, 2005; Wilson, 2001; Woods, 2011) because, they argue, these concepts better describe the ongoing changes in rural areas. For example, McCarthy (2005) sees multifunctionality as "the idea that rural landscapes typically produce a range of commodity and noncommodity use values simultaneously and that policy ought to recognise and protect that entire range of values" (pp. 773-774). As a concept, multifunctionality "better encapsulates the diversity, non-linearity and spatial heterogeneity" in rural society (Wilson, 2001, p. 96). Multifunctionality has been used to describe actual practices (i.e., reflecting reality) (McCarthy, 2005) and "as a model for understanding the dynamics of agricultural systems" (Woods, 2011, p. 81). Its origin has been acknowledged as being, in part, a semantic move to get past the epistemological deadlock of the productivist/post-productivist dichotomy, but the concept has developed to embrace social and environmental dividends of a multifunctional rural territory (Woods, 2011). The novelty of multifunctional rural areas can, however, be questioned as being ahistorical since it seems to forget a long history of very diverse activities in rural areas before the productivist era, e.g., second home ownership in the Nordic countries (Müller, 2011; Vespäläinen & Pitkänen, 2010).

Woods (2011) summarised three approaches to applying multifunctionality in rural geography: as an outcome of agricultural policy changes; as a measure of the degree of change (in action and attitude) at the farm level; and, as an overarching regional frame for rural change. However, empirical studies have reflected agricultural rural realities more than other rural realities, despite the fact that more inclusive definitions of multifunctionality incorporating, for example, social and environmental benefits exist (Woods, 2011). This broad perspective is also included in the term 'multifunctional transition', which Holmes (2008) argues can be used to understand contemporary rural change "in which a variable mix of consumption and protection values has emerged, contesting the former dominance of production values" (p. 211). This, he argues, leads "to greater complexity and heterogeneity in the use of rural space at all scales" (p. 212).

While the critique of post-productivism may be true for its usefulness in agricultural research it does not necessarily apply to research on rural transformation and change. For example, Mather et alia (2006) oppose the idea of rejection of post-productivism, since "there is empirical evidence for the occurrence of post-productivism on the basis of criteria suggested by various contributors to the debate" (p. 454). Instead they see post-productivism as having "sufficient potential [...] to be considered as a helpful concept in relation to the advancement of our understanding of land-use change" (p. 454). They argue that post-productivism is a better concept than the alternatives, such as multifunctionality, but admit there may be overlap (Mather et al., 2006).

Some researchers have already worked on developing the concept of post-productivism and have reached a clearer definition. For example, Mather et alia (2006) expand the focus on agriculture to also include forestry and land use change. They specifically argue that post-productivism should be perceived as "a *shift* in emphasis, and not as an absolute change from material production to service provision" (p. 451). From a policy perspective, Macken-Walsh (2009) refers to post-productivism as a model that promotes alternative forms of rural economic activity. According to her, post-productivism is one of three main paradigmatic changes in the contemporary EU rural development agenda, each with its own set of development challenges; the other two being economic diversification related to globalisation, and governance (from top-down to bottom-up). She claims that post-productivism has influenced rural policy with "an increased policy focus away from mainstream commodity productivist models of development towards high value-added and innovation in the rural economy" (p. 22). Accordingly, post-productivist programmes have emerged with a focus on environmental, economic and social sustainability, one such initiative being the LEADER programme (Macken-Walsh, 2009). Also, funding programmes under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) fuel post-productivism as a general alternative to agriculture across the EU, rather than basing policy on actual conditions in the diverse rural regions of the EU (Jansson & Wästfelt, 2011; Keskitalo & Lundmark, 2010). By taking such a view, the understanding of post-productivism as policy discourse comes into focus. Elsewhere, it has been noted that the post-productive perspective also comes into play in legislative and policy matters, such as when authorities wish to restrict land use through nature and heritage reserve formation (Lundmark & Stjernström, 2009; Svensson, 2009). Thus, there is a policy push towards post-productivism which is not sensitive enough to address the diverse rural realities which exist.

3. Post-productivism, post-production and rural realities

Based on a synthesis of the current state of research and a development of some of the issues raised in the literature, the following section outlines some possible theoretical extensions and applications, as well as giving examples of the diverse rural realities which exist.

The review above demonstrates an inherent complexity in the concept of post-productivism: depending on the definition and focus, different conclusions are drawn. A fundamental problem inherent in the post-productivism discourse is that 'post-productivism' is often used in the sense of describing current processes in rural areas (i.e., reflection of reality). Instead it should be regarded as representing a new set of ideas, a way of looking at change in rural areas that also affect policy, for example, with regards to nature protection and forest management. Without the recognition that this conceptual confusion exists, the debate on post-productivism becomes misdirected. Equally, the concepts of post-productivism and multifunctionality are incomparable

since they do not describe the same process or state (i.e., normative goal versus on the ground reality). Multifunctionality can in this way be seen as a manifestation of post-productivism as discourse. There is a distinct difference between the post-productive activities present in rural areas and post-productivism as a set of ideologically-shaped imaginations and visions that is present in regional development programmes, environmental policy, forestry and agricultural regulations and hence in the public mindset. These differences need clarification in the academy if they are to carry meaning in the lived reality of rural dwellers. Notably, these imaginations have already had some effect on the redistributive actions in policy aiming at rural regional development and diversification. The policy discourse on post-productivism has led to an increased amount of funding for actions that promote environmental and sustainable development in rural areas, more grants and other support for tourism businesses, as well as new forms of reserve formation such as Natura 2000.

A major problem with regards to the confusion of discourse and reality is the perception of post-productivism as a transition (i.e., the 'post-productivist transition') which implies that productivism and post-productivism are stages, one stage replacing another stage (e.g., post-productivist activities replacing agricultural production). One of the main arguments against post-productivism is the lack of empirical evidence that a post-productivist transition has taken place considering the continued existence of farm production associated with 'productivism' (e.g., intensification, concentration and specialisation) (e.g., Evans et al., 2002; Mather et al., 2006). However, this contradicts the view of coexistence between productivism and post-productivist action and thought (e.g., Wilson, 2001) and thus they are better perceived as concomitant processes of change.

The single sector focus on agriculture of much previous research does not reflect the current trends in rural areas affected by changes in value systems and life-styles, such as population distribution, mobility patterns, entrepreneurship and the shift of emphasis from production of commodities to non-commodity uses of land (Lundmark, 2010). For example, few studies incorporate the new consumption patterns of urban people and rural tourism at a theoretical level linking rural studies and economic development to more diverse activity in rural areas (the notable exception is Hoogendoorn, 2010). With better understanding of how external and internal forces affect rural development, the chance of achieving successful tourism development is higher. There is a particular need to recognise the fact that widespread *-isms* affect global development in different ways, from labour market regulations to environmental standards. This implies a theoretical development of post-productivism which should also include developing countries.

It has also been argued that in certain advanced economies the countryside is in the post-productive stage of development, a state indicating a fundamental change in the way the rural economy is organised. For example, rural areas have more or less left behind traditional natural resource uses such as agriculture, forestry, and related industries (Jansson & Wästfelt, 2010) for other types of activity and production modes, including natural carbon sequestration, biodiversity protection, and tourism and recreation opportunities. Milk and meat production, the felling and processing of trees within the highly-mechanised agriculture and forestry sectors, and related industries, are deemed backwards and should be replaced by a service and experience-oriented resource use not least because it would reduce negative impacts of global change on rural areas (OECD, 2006). Thus, tourism has emerged as one of the new, and potentially dominant, industries in the new rural landscape (Lane, 2009; Müller & Ulrich, 2007). This reasoning is based on assumptions of a general shift from large-scale production based on low-cost oil, energy-intensive materials, and mass consumption, to small-scale, diversified production, as well as on the observation that many agricultural and forestry businesses in rural, and especially peripheral, areas have shut down in the last few decades (Martin, 1994). This development is supported by public funding in many countries. However, in many cases, regional development funds may be better spent on supporting existing industries and thus redressing the legacy of 'spatial-blindness' due to top-down policies (Rodríguez-Pose, 2010). The territorial approach of the OECD's (2006) 'new rural paradigm' is a step in the right direction and its local focus and bottom-up approach will most likely lead to further divergence in

the socio-economic make-up of rural Europe going forward. This suggests that certain post-productive islands will grow while a manufacturing or extractive focus will remain elsewhere.

Post-productive evidence can be observed in different contexts while it should be noted that the vast majority of rural land is still considered to be in a productive or industrialised use (Hedlund, 2014), although some land has also been turned into nature reserves or otherwise taken out of production. Modern forestry and highly mechanised agriculture are self-explanatory evidence of the persistence of the productive. However, modern agriculture and forestry does not have the ability to create many jobs, a challenge directly related to rural depopulation. This can, in turn, be seen as a background to extensive use of older buildings as second homes which in turn has created a demand for services, particularly related to tourism.

It is important to consider the rural realities discussed above and to develop a framework for empirical work which is inclusive of these realities. For example, the increase of second homes and the presence of second home owners (e.g., Hoogendoorn, 2010); the changes in labour and SMEs within the tourism and recreation sector (e.g., Brouder & Eriksson, 2013; Müller & Brouder, 2014); and the increase in land area devoted to nature protection (e.g., Lundmark & Stjernström, 2009) could be indicative of post-productive changes. However, there is not necessarily a causal connection between, for example, tourism and post-production in terms of production mode. Different types of tourism in different settings could therefore result in varying interpretations. For instance, a ski resort in the mountains could be more appropriate to include in a productivist framework while areas with high conversion of second homes into permanent ones, such as in the Swedish archipelago, could be regarded as places of post-production.

The post-productive debate has surely been given undue attention for what is, at the regional level, a marginal, even if growing, phenomenon. A better understanding is important because the oft-cited conflicts over land use are being used to develop a misguided, conflict-centric discourse (cf. Lundmark & Stjernström, 2009; Smith & Krannich, 2000; Svensson, 2009). In light of this situation, there is an urgent need to interrogate, not whether, but how the countryside is seen as an arena for *production* and/or *consumption*, or as a landscape that *has been* or which *shall be*.

4. Concluding remarks

The lack of a comprehensive framework for studying rural change has been acknowledged by rural scholars and was a factor in the development of multifunctionality as an alternative to the 'post-productivist transition' (cf. Mather et al., 2006; Woods, 2011). While proposing a new framework is not the goal of this paper, a call for clarifying the competing frameworks is warranted. Post-productivism is a normative concept and should be studied as such. Similarly, post-production and productive activities are important elements of a multifunctional rural economy and should be measured accordingly. Since post-productivism is a strong part of policy discourse, it cannot simply be defined away or usurped by other frameworks such as multifunctionality. Instead, post-productivism must take its rightful place at the level of discourse and policy formation, important realities which have a direct impact on change processes at the local level.

Future research should include developing a theoretical framework of post-productivism where modes of agricultural production and extraction of raw materials are considered as part of the changing economy in rural areas. The goal should be *one* common definition of post-productivism, one which is sensitive to the geographical diversity of rural areas across the globe. While reaching a global consensus will be difficult, the academic discussion will open up for interesting exchanges on development paths and different land use patterns in developed and developing regions. The new knowledge gained will feed more effective (regional) rural policies.

Meanwhile, multifunctionality will develop as the most effective framework for assessing on the ground realities across various rural regions. However, it may be necessary to adapt the framework to take different spatial scales, as well as economic, political, social and environmental conditions into account. Ultimately, post-productivism seems better aimed at broader geographical scales and policy discourse, while multifunctionality will be needed to

address the empirical gaps at more localised levels. Making such a distinction will help to shift the focus of rural geography from debates around rural discourse to active analysis of rural diversity and change.

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