

## Eliminating Stereotypes: Villages as Desirable Spaces for Partying among Spanish Youth<sup>☆</sup>

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**ABSTRACT** Most of the research on rural youth has focused on the material conditions that cause their migration to cities, but it has not tended to address sociocultural dimensions, such as those concerning leisure and what might condition the processes of migration among young people. The aim of this study is to contrast the discourse and representations that young people have regarding leisure with the festive practices that they carry out in Spanish villages. The fieldwork consisted of 13 discussion groups and 38 in-depth interviews ( $N = 118$ ), with participants aged between 15 and 24 years. The results show that: (1) young people construct their idea of partying through dominant, dichotomous and unequal rural–urban representations, demonstrating the presence of traditional stereotypes around rurality; (2) the village becomes desirable as a place for partying at specific times of the year, such as local festivals; (3) the practices of rural youth call into question this normative imaginary, as is also shown by their adaptation, belonging and agency in the construction and management of leisure. Getting rid of stereotypes about rurality and creating positive thinking about the leisure possibilities in villages can lead young people to see it as a space for opportunities and personal development.

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## Introduction

### Rural–Urban Dichotomy in the Study of Youth

Today, the urban is seen as complex, intangible and with an aura of prestige, in contrast to the rural, which is perceived as backward and obsolete (Panelli, Nairn, and McCormack 2002). This is essentially due to the dominant representations of the rural and the urban that have given rise to a dichotomous model in which a potent polarization is created of the two spaces through stereotypes and prejudice (Vogel-Scibilia 2012). The village–city relations of inequality and contrasts are explained as the result of a series of socioeconomic and/or political–institutional processes that are legitimized by the symbolic constructions that place cities as the normative model with regard to styles of behavior and the supply and demand of services (Fulkerson and Thomas 2019). Moreover, these constructions perpetuate a series of stereotypes that act against the positive social valuation of rurality and lead to an understanding that envisages it, among other things, as a dull place and not suitable for partying (Entrena 2008; Eriksson 2010).

On a theoretical level, we know that this rural–urban dichotomy has been widely questioned. We cannot assume that this is usable for carrying out precise analyses (Abbott-Chapman, Johnston, and Jetson 2015; Lucas 2013; Norman, Power, and Dupré 2011), but we have to take into consideration that the village–city division is still alive in the collective imaginary (Eriksson 2010). This organizes the way people have of understanding place and ends up determining many behaviors and expectations both of the actors involved in rural life and of other external agents (Ander and Wilińska 2020). The stereotypical view of rural life particularly affects young people, who end up seeing the village as a kind of cage where there is no place for progress or fun (Leyshon 2011). Many young people come to assume that their fate inevitably has to be one of emigration to the city because staying is considered a passive or negative act (Entrena 2008; O’Shea et al. 2019).

The mass exodus of young people has been well documented by the scientific literature, since it has been shown that the flight of the younger population has negative repercussions on the viability and vitality of villages (Terman 2020). Nevertheless, as Morales (2018) shows, an intangible element that is frequently forgotten in studies on rural depopulation is that of the motivations that are related to the concept of rurality held by young people, where the traditional negative view of villages has predominated and can have a huge influence of their decisions to emigrate.

Furthermore, it should be underlined that most studies focused on rural youth are quantitative and descriptive in nature, while there have

been few that have used a qualitative and ethnographic methodology, examining the sociocultural constructions that affect their feelings of rootedness and rootlessness (Baylina and Berg 2010; Llorent-Bedmar, Palma, and Navarro Granados 2021). Studies such as that by Little and Panelli (2003) have carried out analyses with gender perspective on rural geography. This variable constitutes a key dimension for understanding the selective and widespread migration of young people, since it is young women who make up the larger proportion of migrants due to the existence of greater gender inequality in villages than in cities (Díaz 2005; Dunkley 2004; Johansson 2016; Sampedro 2000). The study carried out by Donkersloot (2012), which explores gender power relations in rural Ireland through an ethnographic lens, explains how these are incorporated into the daily life of young men and women and affect their feeling of belonging. Likewise, the qualitative research carried out by Norman et al. (2011) with young people in a rural area of north-east North America shows how the village can reinforce traditional masculine and feminine roles by organizing the uses of spaces in an unequal way according to gender.

### **The Space for Partying and Alcohol Consumption among Young People from Villages and from Cities**

The practices and expectations of rural young people with regard to leisure and partying are coming to differ less and less from their urban contemporaries, in the same way as with other behaviors of rural society as a whole (Abbott-Chapman et al. 2015; Kraack and Kenway 2002; Leyshon 2011). Nevertheless, some particularities that characterize those who live in villages do still persist (Gastón 2016). These differences mainly concern the size of the place and the possibilities associated with those spaces (Canosa and Bennett 2021).

Previous studies, such as the ethnography carried out with 23 minors from villages in Sweden (Rönnlund 2019), conclude that rural youth show a higher tendency to self-manage their forms of leisure. It is argued that the consumption of alcohol and partying is not an ad hoc activity but is previously agreed upon and organized through the previously existent social relationships in these environments. Furthermore, rural parties are based on very precise behavioral codes, and relationships of inter-group solidarity exist that lead to greater mutual protection against excesses (Abbott-Chapman et al. 2015). According to Canosa (2018), rural parties are spaces of opportunity where young people remake the forms of nighttime leisure, which have been excessively normatized, commercialized, commodified and defined by a fundamentally urban industry of party-going.

However, we can find the main distinctive features regarding alcohol consumption among young people from villages and cities in relation to the spaces of consumption and the planning around quantity. Ander and Wilińska (2020) reveal that alcohol consumption in villages tends to be more measured and planned than in cities, due to the self-organization that characterizes this form of leisure, which leads young people to plan beforehand the amount of alcohol they are going to drink. Nevertheless, research carried out by Gastón (2016) shows that the new generations from villages are going to “pubs<sup>1</sup>” where self-management of leisure time does not take place. This may mean a change in trend that is worth considering.

Regarding age and gender, we also find studies that reveal differences in consumption between villages and cities. One of these particular features concerns the starting age. Some studies suggest that rural young people begin to consume alcohol at an earlier age, and this means that the number of minors using alcohol is higher than in cities (Gastón 2016). In this regard, previous studies such as Valentine et al. (2008) show the importance alcohol plays in the local culture as key to rural young people’s starting to drink from a younger age.

Looking at gender and alcohol consumption in villages, one previous ethnographic study by Campbell (2000), conducted in rural bars in New Zealand, incorporated theoretical ideas of gender performativity to reflect the conversational cockfighting and disciplines of drinking of young men to ensure a particular version of masculinity. Elsewhere, Leyshon (2008a) took a qualitative approach to analyzing how young women in rural southwest England employ strategies to move between spaces, as well as experimenting with alcohol and alternative femininities, thus questioning acceptable gender roles and expectations, and revealing how this experimentation affected their sense of rural belonging. In rural Spain, the gender perspective of the ethnographic study by Pavón-Benítez (2022) demonstrated how alcohol abuse by young women could result in unfavorable judgments against them more than for young men. In villages, such consequences could come to be perceived more intensely due to the close-knit relations and greater social control. Thus, we see how “place matters,” not only in relation to the consumption of alcohol and other drugs (Jayne, Valentine, and Holloway 2017) but also regarding the gender dimensions of these types of consumption (Törrönen, Rolando, and Beccaria 2017).

<sup>1</sup>In Spain, a “pub” refers to a bar that also has a license to play music and often stays open until later.

### **The Use of Technology and Alcohol in Rural and Urban Parties**

As well as the above, we need to consider the importance that online social networks have in the spread of alcohol consumption (Ceballos et al. 2018; Savolainen et al. 2020). The results of recent studies show how the use of social networks such as Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and WhatsApp are directly related to the increase of social attitudes and norms that tolerate and promote a positive perception of alcohol consumption among young people (Vranken et al. 2020). Likewise, a study that brought these dynamics together in villages of Extremadura in Spain (Pavón-Benítez, Romo-Avilés, and Sánchez-González 2021) concludes that young rural people are not excluded from these models of leisure and the public exhibition of alcohol consumption that is the current trend; rather, these affect both cities and villages.

In this regard, in terms of the level of use of networks and cellphones, there are no differences in the frequency and type of behavior between rural and urban young people (Gastón 2016), but some particular characteristics in content can be observed. Waite and Bourke (2015) reflect on the importance that networks have among youth for the representation and modeling of the image of the rural environment where they live. It has also been shown that young people share content in which they dramatize the pleasures and activities of daily rural life (Fisker et al. 2022). This particular content differentiates rural from urban youth on social networks (Leyshon 2008b).

Social networks are sources of self-representation and identity creation, in such a way that they are of fundamental importance for the presentation and promotion of the self for young people (Pavón-Benítez et al. 2021). However, rural young people do not always manage to gain prestige because the most highly rated content revolves around the city and not the village (Entrena 2008). The urban, the city, is understood as a dynamic space full of opportunities. The rural, in contrast, is perceived as a backward and static place, holding attraction neither for the development of a prosperous social and professional future (Camarero et al. 2009) nor for the enjoyment and online sharing of leisure time and partying (Llorent-Bedmar et al. 2021).

In summary, and based on what we have shown, the previous research on rural youth has predominantly addressed the material determinants of villages that lead to their emigration, such as the lack of infrastructure or services (Gastón 2016; Llorent-Bedmar et al. 2021). However, the sociocultural dimension has remained unexamined, particularly in relation to the festive leisure practices of the young population. Hence, the main aim of this study is focused on

comparing, through a qualitative approach, the discourse and representations that young people have regarding leisure with the practices of partying that they undertake in Spanish cities and villages. In order to achieve this, we question whether there are differences between rural and urban leisure, or if there are particular dynamics or alcohol consumption patterns in villages, and whether the perceptions about partying are guided by stereotypes. We believe that studying the sociocultural aspect in the accounts of young people could be of vital importance for understanding how it affects their rural exodus and the general consideration of villages as inappropriate spaces for the development of their lives.

### Methodology

This study is based on the application of two qualitative research techniques carried out in fieldwork that was undertaken from January to December 2021. Overall, we held 13 discussion groups and 38 in-depth interviews with young people. The total sample—purposive in nature—comprises 118 participants from two age groups (15–18 and 19–24 years) and diverse profiles as regards social class, rurality, sexual orientation, ethnicity and religiousness (Table 1). Due to the pandemic situation, the fieldwork was carried out both offline and online, in order to comply with the different types of healthcare restrictions in place during the research period.

Data collection through discussion groups and in-depth interviews was carried out by the project research team. This was a multidisciplinary team made up of researchers from different disciplines, with qualifications and experience in the field of Social Sciences and Public Health at five Spanish universities (University of Granada, University of Seville, University of Jaén, University of Castilla la Mancha, and University of Oviedo).

The inclusion criteria of the sample were that the participants be consumers of alcohol with open or private Instagram accounts. It should be specified that in Spain, as stipulated by the Ministry of Health and established by law, children under the age of 18 cannot buy or consume alcohol. Until now, the regulation of this issue has been left mainly to the autonomous communities that make up the country, which, in the legitimate exercising of their powers, have drawn up laws that, in general, prohibit the sale of alcoholic beverages to minors and impose fines in the event of infringement. However, this legal measure has been shown to be insufficient for adopting effective policies that prevent the accessibility of alcohol for minors. Due to this, for many years, there has been demand for a *basic national regulation*

**Table 1. SocioDemographic Variables of the Sample**

Gender identity	Man	39,8	
	Woman	57,6	
	Non binary	02,5	
Age	Mean	19	
	Median	20	
	Mode	16	
Self-perceived social class	High	01,7	
	Middle-high	15,3	
	Middle-middle	56,8	
	Middle-lower	24,6	
	Lower	01,7	
Educational attainment	Without studies	03,4	
	High school	17	
	Baccalaureate	30,5	
	VET basic	00,9	
	VET Medium/Higher Level	13,6	
Sexual orientation	University	34,8	
	Heterosexual	75,4	
	Homosexual	05,9	
Religion	Bisexual	18,6	
	Yes	44	
Practicing religious <sup>a</sup>	No	55,9	
	Yes	40,4	
Self-perceived ethnic group	No	59,6	
	Yes	08,5	
AA.CC	No	91,5	
	Andalucía	69,5	
	Asturias	09,3	
	Castilla La Mancha	04,2	
	Extremadura	09,3	
	Galicia	00,9	
	Islas Baleares	00,9	
	Islas Canarias	00,9	
	Madrid	01,7	
	Murcia	00,9	
	Navarra	00,9	
	País Vasco	00,9	
	Valencia	00,9	
	Environment	Rural	36,4
		Urban	63,6
Social media use	Everyday	93,2	
	Almost daily	6,8	
Social media <sup>b</sup>	Instagram	99,2	
	Facebook	27,1	
	Twitter	55,9	
	Telegram	17	
	YouTube	84,8	
	TikTok	62,7	
	WhatsApp	99,2	
	Tinder	8,5	
	Others	5	

**Table 1. Continued**

Alcohol consumption	Everyday	0,8
	Almost daily	8,5
	Weekly	28
	Occasionally	51,7
	Other	11

<sup>a</sup>Who answered “yes” in the previous question (Religion).

<sup>b</sup>Multiple choice.

that addresses this serious public health problem in a comprehensive way and with a multidisciplinary perspective (Sureda, Trapero, and Cantero 2021). A draft bill, called the *Anteproyecto de Ley de prevención de los efectos negativos del consumo de alcohol en menores* [Draft Bill for the Prevention of the negative effects of alcohol consumption by minors], currently in development, adopts a broad regulatory framework that encompasses measures of protection for minors in relation to alcohol consumption.

We gained access to the population through snowball sampling, primarily using informal networks and access to the education system: high schools, universities, and youth groups and associations. In order to decide upon the age of the participants, we followed the definition of youth given by the United Nations (1985), which, noting that there was no unanimous definition, set it as the population aged between 15 and 24. This is the age range wherein the special moment of transition from childhood to adulthood is found, when the individual goes through the construction of identity and incorporation into wider social life.

In order to categorize and define what a village and a city are in the participant sample, we use the definition established by Camarero and González (2005), since it has attained broad consensus in our area of knowledge in Spain. This defines a village as having “a population numbering below 10,000 inhabitants,” and thus, a city is understood as having a population above such a number.

The fieldwork began in January 2021, when we carried out the first discussion group online, which was recorded and literally transcribed. We began the process by drawing up a draft script for the discussion group and intentionally dividing the groups based on prior research on the subject under study. From their analysis, we proceeded to the correction and reorganization of the themes to be included in the debate, and to creating the rest of the groups ( $N = 13$ ). We first introduced ourselves and briefly explained what the research project was about. We sent them the link to the EDIFEM website, where they



could read the project objectives, the universities involved and the research group we form a part of (<https://sites.google.com/go.ugr.es/edifem>). On the website, they could also access the contact details of each researcher in the group.

The government health restrictions that were then in place led the research team to seek different ways of building relationships and trust without having face-to-face contact (Lupton 2020). In our case, following introduction using email and WhatsApp, we began receiving responses from the people who were interested in participating, providing them with the informed consent for them to fill in and sign, which was then returned duly completed before beginning the discussion group. All of these steps were carried out online.

The day of the group discussion, just before starting, we provided the participants with the link to a Google Docs in which we collected basic information such as name, autonomous community and city, age, contact details, level of education, type of alcohol use and type of social network use. Ibáñez (2015) states that discussion groups should last one hour, since beyond that, the discourse starts to be repetitive. In our case, due to the obligation to hold the sessions online, they had a longer duration of between one and a half and two hours.

Once the analysis of the content of the discussion groups was underway, we began the in-depth interview process with the participation of the whole research team. We also prepared a draft interview script that was tested by the researchers in an in-person group meeting, in the same way that we intentionally divided the sample with the aim of covering the greatest discursive heterogeneity possible.

The first pilot interview was conducted online in October 2021 and was recorded and literally transcribed. After its analysis, we proceeded to correct and reorganize the themes to be included in the script, and then began to carry out the rest of the interviews. Due to the fact that in the discussion groups the participant profile we had managed to contact was more adult (19–24 years), for the interviews, we gave priority to seeking younger profiles (between the ages of 15 and 18). Intersectionality guided the sample search, through diverse profiles in terms of age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, rurality and self-perceived social class.

As a result of the loosening of the pandemic healthcare restrictions, and because all the discussion groups were held online, we decided to prioritize conducting the interviews in person, with the aim of creating a climate of trust and intimacy that would enable communicative depth and fluency between the researchers and informants. Overall, 38 interviews were carried out: 9 online and 29 in person. The in-person

interviews were audio-recorded, while those held online, using the Google Meet platform, were video-recorded.

Following the grounded-theory model (Glaser and Strauss 1967), we carried out a constant analysis of the information throughout the fieldwork. All the results were added to a common database (Nvivo 12), categorizing the information following the same coding system both for the discussion groups and the in-depth interviews (Figure 1).

The research was granted approval by the Ethics Committee of the University of Granada (1944/CEIH/2021). All participants in the project consented voluntarily to being interviewed, receiving information on the study and a letter of commitment to confidentiality signed by the research team. The participants signed an informed consent form. In the case of minors, the consent of their legal guardians was also required.

## Results

### Young People's Idealization of the Party Space in the Rural and the Urban

The results of the discussion groups and in-depth interviews undertaken in this study show that villages are not desirable places for partying. The young people and participants, who reside both in villages and cities,

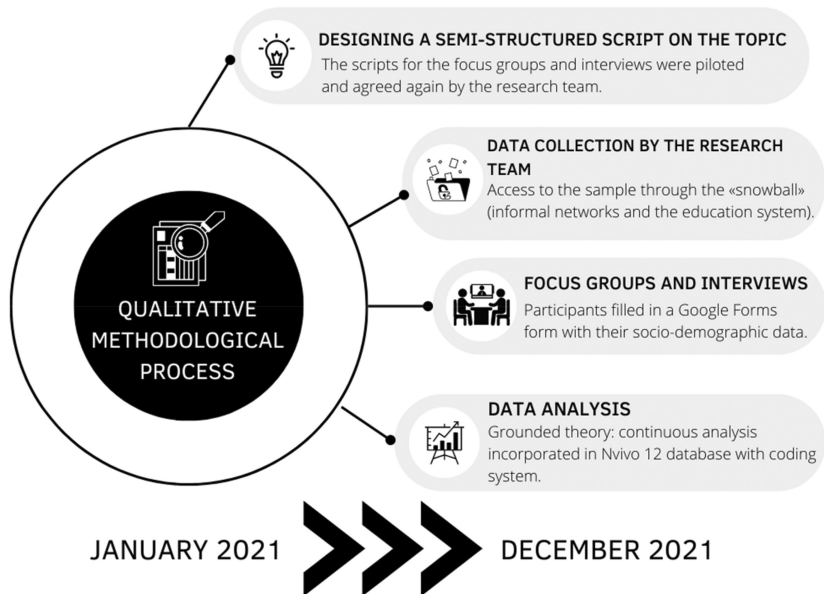


Figure 1. Qualitative Methodological Process.

define the rural party with qualifiers such as: lifeless, quiet or even non-existent, in contrast to and beneath the urban model of reference. What is understood by “party” and “going out partying” is measured in urban code, with three essential elements to be considered. These are the presence of: (1) nightlife venues, namely bars, pubs and nightclubs; (2) en masse coming together and meeting of young people; and (3) use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs. Spanish villages often fail to meet these requirements due to demographic imbalances such as the lack of a young population or the lack of a nighttime economy, as is shown in the following:

in a village, you don't normally go out partying, you simply go to someone's house or somewhere outdoors. And in the city you normally go to nightclubs (female, 20 years old, urban). About the village, yes it's true that partying is a little less lively. Here in Graná [Granada city] there is much, much more atmosphere, many more nightclubs. And in terms of atmosphere, well it changes a lot... In the village it's like that, you tend to go to the bars or to a pub, there aren't any nightclubs there. And sometimes, for example, this weekend, they set up in a farmhouse, they put up like a disco and everything, everyone from Alcalá goes (male, 18 years old, rural).

Along similar lines, the participants from this study state that in villages they carry out other types of leisure activities more associated with outdoor plans, which conforms to that stereotype of the rural idyll as a place of nature and tranquility. This comes with the assertion that “partying” is something else that necessarily involves drinking alcohol, through which they generate emotions such as disinhibition and group fun that characterizes a party atmosphere. In the following comments by two young city dwellers, we can see, first, the reflection of the traditional stereotype of the rural idyll, with the idea of the simplicity of rural life made implicit with negative connotations (“they are happy like this”); and second, the dissociation of the rural dynamics of leisure time from the leisure time that is typical of the city nightlife environment:

but not ever going out partying in the village, yes going to the swimming pool or anything else and socializing and getting to know all the villagers, which is easier... they are happy like this, going for a bike ride and then stopping, I don't know, going to snack sunflower seeds on a bench, by way of saying something, as they're not going to go out partying and be continuously drinking alcohol... Then they would all get together in the square and talk until... it was

until very late, as though you were partying, but without a party atmosphere (male, 19 years old, urban). In the village they like that more, at midday and enjoying the sun, and often hook up in the afternoon and the night. Here in contrast I think it's more a night thing and going to some nightclub, or some pub. Because there, of course, in the villages there isn't much variety either, I mean, there aren't many pubs and clubs like here, so... (female, 21 years old, urban).

It is clear that the collective imaginary of rurality continues to be dichotomously distant from the city with regard to partying, the people, the places and leisure time; it is pervaded by negative connotations about the material determinants of villages. It is defined by what it does not have rather than by the difference; as a synonym of boredom, everydayness and nature; as associated with the small, and with social and parental control. In contrast, the city is seen in terms of variety, plurality and liberty, and is associated with the big, independence and anonymity. This is nothing but a reflection of the existing relations of inequality that position the city as the norm and the rural as beneath, reviled:

the city, being much larger, offers a massively greater amount of possibilities. Above all, regarding leisure time, the number of venues, of places you can go to, more freedom... there is more independence as well... there is no nature in the city... and there is huge variety... it is therefore less boring. And yet, in the village, once you, for example, can no longer go to the beach or go to any place, to the countryside, for whatever reason, you tend to get bored, I mean, it's more likely you get bored because there are fewer options (male, 18 years old, rural).

With regard to the places and dynamics of alcohol consumption, the participants state that in villages they have more get-togethers on the street, whereas in the cities, they tend to go to pubs and nightclubs more. Frequenting the fashionable places and trying the drinks that are the trend (normally spirits), along with their current dynamics (booking rooms or balconies in nightclubs), are symbols of social status that show higher purchasing power and give more prestige. In this regard, according to the words of the following rural interviewees, drinking in a bar helps to create a desirable image, while drinking on the street is unpopular, and is associated with social groups at risk of social exclusion—people with drug dependencies, people who are troublemakers and/or commit crimes:

It depends on the place, of course. Because you're not going to appear in a photo on the street where you're drinking from a liter bottle like a junkie sprawled on the street. I don't know, I don't like it much (male, 16 years old, rural). What people post the most is when the server brings them bottles on the balcony or whatever, they do post that. Or it depends, if it's a party, like, that's more village-style, then you see people who are more in gangs, so maybe there tends to be history with everyone together, like that with their liter bottles and their stuff. [Int.: By more in gangs you are referring to...] Like as a way of saying, more delinquent. [Int.: And you say that you've seen that more in the villages?] Yes, in the villages, you don't see it so much in the city... maybe you can see it when a friend who goes up to Granada for the weekend, or... they post that they've rented a balcony in a nightclub (male, 16 years old, rural).

Similarly, aside from this stigmatized image of drinking in the street marked by discourses of social desirability, other stereotypes related to rural villagers' ability to hold their drink, or their strength or coarseness in drinking in the street, appear in the accounts of the participants. Within the collective imaginary about the rural, it is perceived that they drink—and hold their drink—more. In the words of the following interviewee, moreover, the idea emerges that this is a characteristic behavior of rural men:

in [rural] villages, I have really realized that the people can like quote unquote hold their drink so much more and I remember one who, well, I reckon he'd already reached a point, which I think is already alcoholism, and that maybe in one night he alone would drink a bottle. It's always a bottle of Larios [gin], I'm telling you, I don't know how I... I drink three [shots] and already I'm like dead to the world. And in the village it's like so much more, they drink much more, they consume much more (female, 20 years old, urban). in the village we're more rural, in the village we're able to drink on the street. However, in the center of Granada, you can't. There, unless you go up to the viewpoints... but most people go to pubs, to the nightclub, rather than drinking on the street, more so now it's cold, so yes, and aside from that here there aren't many pubs anyway (female, 16 years old, rural).

Nevertheless, the expansion and incorporation of technology and social networks in the daily life of young people have brought about unprecedented change, and the access to and use of them is not restricted by place of residence. Even so, publications and advertising show the city

as the ideal and desirable space for youth enjoyment and partying. Thus, the people who participated in this study have commented that those who go to the city and participate in fashionable places increase their social status:

the atmosphere is much bigger, there are more people, and yet in the village it's not the same atmosphere as there is in a city, nor are there as many people as there are in a city... for example, in the music, there are more bands and they're like more famous. There are people who use social networks more too, because as they have more support and that place is better known, and being better known it's like there's more people and they like to go online just for that (male, 17 years old, rural).

Parties are thus mediated by technology; in fact, it is not enough merely to go out, but they have to show and demonstrate it on social networks in young people's drive for popularity, sociability and approval. Nevertheless, once again, the hierarchy and inequality established by place of residence is made visible. City life is shown as prestigious and according social status, whereas rural life is a symbol of backwardness. The stigma therefore also exists online. Through the following account, we can see the need to maintain a desirable image that is imposed by consumer societies, measured by variables such as age, social class, place of residence, and gender:

if I don't leave a record of being out partying, it's as though I had never gone out if people don't know that I've gone out partying, it doesn't count, it's like, I don't know, like I can't cross it off the list... even if it's faked, no one knows, right?... I think it's a question of age. Like, if kids are 15, 16 years old... when they're starting high school... so that my friends from home see that I've been to a city to study and I go out more than back home, or for them to see how many friends I've made at college... as you're showing that—you know?—you have a different level of life and like more cool and more socially accepted... us people who have lived in villages and have to go to the city to study, it's like, 'hey, I'm going to leave to go to college and you're staying here in village', and I don't have the same life as in village, so that they see how I'm doing in terms of social status... the people that post their photos on social networks drinking alcohol and all that, want people to know they are living better than back in their village, and that they go out partying and all that to look cool (female, 24 years old, rural).

### **Villages as Desirable Places: Local Fiestas**

In contrast to the idea of the village as a boring and quiet place, we have been able to see, through the accounts of the young rural and urban participants, how there are some exceptional factors; villages can also become places of freedom and suitable for party-going. This is the case of local festivities, normally celebrated in summer and during holiday months, where the urban precepts for recognizing a party—having greater excesses, higher attendance and the coming together of young people—are met, and which are organized by village halls and other bodies, with open-air dances, tents and street drinking that revolve around alcohol consumption:

it gets a lot bigger in summer and at Christmas. Like, I have those two high points: summer and Christmas. Summer because of the fiestas of the villages... so those summers my capacity for drinking alcohol increases or not, and it's because of that, because as all us friends get together in the summer, so come on, what are we going to do? We go out around the village and then we go out partying to the dances and so on. In the village in summer and in December when most, because it's when all the friends of the village get together (female, 24years old, rural).the Saint's Day Fair... that's about getting blind drunk continuously, I think that it's maybe it's more... you get more drunk... It also depends on who you get together with, because, I don't know, I've got together with people and I say: 'I can't keep up with your pace because it's like getting drunk 24 hours.' And the next day they carry on drinking and I say, 'no way!' I mean, starting to drink at 9 in the morning (female, 22 years old, urban).

Moreover, there is a normalization of the portrayal of village festivals on social networks, since they become desirable destinations, drawing in large numbers of people and involving greater excesses. Sharing this, therefore, becomes an inclusive and integrating practice for young people. Furthermore, the nature of exceptional circumstance that surrounds these events, which in most cases only take place once a year, means that many young people meet up again with friends and family members who live in the city the rest of the year, which generates a greater desire to share and experience the party around excesses.

Boy 1: if you've been at the village fiestas, then all the stories are going to be about the night before, from twelve at night until five in the morning of people dancing, people filming themselves, drinking... And it's totally normal... because I look at Instagram and see what people have published, right? ... It's as simple as take

out the phone, enter, record, post... Then go online at night, and see who's given you a like, and so on... It's like an act that people have now, like, it's a habit, you know? In their life. Boy 2: ...see the bar with a load of shots and... this is what we're going to drink, and then how about a "Boomerang," toasting the drink... And sure, what we're not aware of is that maybe this story is of a girl who's 16 years old, who is with her friend in the village bar and, well, in the end you're showing it as something completely normal... Boy 3: the usual of my village fiesta from two years ago, that you get stuck in... You drink even the water in the flower vases, and come and take photos with someone, photos with someone else... And then you wake up and you're on half of Instagram, and I'm like saying, "but when did I take this photo with this person?" But well, that's it. (Discussion Group, 19-24 year-old men, rural and urban).

### **Toward a New Festive Rurality among Young People**

Despite the presence of many stereotypes in the accounts and imaginary of the young people who participated in this study, many of their practices and experiences about the possibilities for partying in villages call this consensus into question, specifically regarding the flexibility of venues, the capacity for collective self-management of spaces and consumption, and improvisation for partying, all of which show great dynamism. In terms of places or venues for partying, the results of the interviews and discussion groups have revealed a huge variety, both outdoors or public (parks, countryside, mountains, beaches, vacant lots, car parks) and indoors or private (basements, farmhouses, garages, private land, isolated country houses), which vary according to the local spatial configurations and that involve the traditions and customs of Spanish villages. In the cities, however, partying is more restricted to the partying zones where the nighttime economy venues are concentrated. The participants of this study demonstrate this as follows:

In a city, let's see, what's normal, you see the people jammed into a nightclub or already dancing a bit, because in a nightclub it's crowded and it's an enclosed space, so it's clear that everyone's bunched up and you can't dance, but in the countryside... they drink, they have street gatherings... they're freer, they're in a big circle drinking, talking, chatting, playing... I had an experience like that, as we just went for a walk while we drank and it's a new thing that's happened to me (male, 19 years old, rural). [Int.: And before you mentioned that you went drinking in the countryside]... Yes, not always but yes, sometimes we go...to some



nearby mountain that's remote and there aren't many people and if there are people, well, you know them or they're friends of friends... It's peaceful with the music or whatever (male, 16 years old, rural).

Furthermore, they talk about the village as a space that gives a safer and more personal, intimate approach when it comes to creating recreational spaces. Party plans are agreed upon and prepared collectively between friends, and they create their own dynamics of leisure according to their interests, the availability of spaces and openness to improvisation. This reveals the agency of the young people in their negotiation of rural spaces and adaptation to the medium for the construction of leisure time. Additionally, regarding the close relationships created in villages, the participants mentioned how this can be decisive as a protective factor in alcohol consumption, creating positive emotions such as trust, safety, care and reciprocity in the face of excesses:

I go and drink in a park here in Utrera, and there are loads of people there, especially younger than I am, 14 or 13 years old, and once a girl was alone and was ill, and we took her into my group of friends and led her to a bench. And the girl didn't want to vomit, but we had to stick our fingers up [her throat] so she would be sick and then she fell down and we called her mother, and the mother came and took her to hospital... because like everyone we all know each other there, from going out on the weekends and the like, it's difficult for something bad to happen to you... because I know that, just as I help everyone who I find is in a bad way, so they are going to help me if I'm ever sick (male, 16 years old, rural). In a [rural] area, so, they don't care about social networks, everyone talks to everyone. Everyone knows each other, everyone gets on... and they tend to be more sociable, more open to talking... So yes it's true that you notice the atmosphere of the village more when it comes to these things (male, 19 years old, urban).

As we can see in these extracts, villages provide a greater feeling of trust and safety based on close relationships and on the knowledge of the place they are operating in. This also has an effect on the parental control of young people's families:

I notice a feeling of greater safety and knowledge in villages, whereas in Seville maybe I go out around there, and apart from the fact that everything is quite a lot more spread out, I can maybe get a bit nervous, you know? Me in a village I've never felt nervous... as

a general rule you know what there is and you know the people and I... at least me, I feel safer (male, 22 years old, urban).

### Discussion

Our findings have made evident how young people maintain a view of the village in relation to partying that fits the stereotypes of “rural idyll” and “rural boredom,” in agreement with other previous studies (Leyshon 2008b; Nairn, Panelli, and McCormack 2003; Shucksmith 2018; Ward 1990). These two images of the rural are complementary in the imaginary of young people, as shown by Haugen and Villa (2006) and Rye (2006). This stereotype that there is nothing to do in villages is likewise in line with the results of Llorent-Bedmar et al. (2021) and Gastón (2016) in Spain, which showed how the discourses of young people focused on the lack of nightlife venues and of young people as decisive factors for partying, due to the demographic imbalances that condition daily life in villages.

These results are in contrast to other previous research, such as that by Norman et al. (2011), which revealed how the participants relied on dominant discursive constructions on leisure to repeatedly proclaim the binary distinction between village and city, seeing the city as a space of restrictions and the village as a space of freedom. Our data also differ from the recent qualitative study by Canosa and Bennett (2021) set in Byron Shire (Australia), which explores the partying practices of rural youth as a necessary escape from the dominant nighttime economy and a rejection of the overregulated forms of leisure associated with urban environments.

Another of the stereotypes that has emerged in the discourse of the young people in this study, and which is in agreement with previous studies such as that by Jayne, Valentine, and Holloway (2011), concerns rural people’s ability to drink large quantities of alcohol or their coarseness in doing so. As with Campbell (2000), this is understood as a characteristic behavior of village men, as a symbol of hegemonic masculinity within their social imaginary. In terms of the stereotype of village life as a symbol of backwardness, our results are consistent with other studies (Camarero et al. 2009; Halfacree 2020; Panelli et al. 2002; Pedersen and Gram 2018).

All of these stereotypical representations of rurality are marked by ideas of lack or deficiency, more than ideas of difference in comparison and under the referential urban model, due to the unequal city–village relations in the collective imaginary (Fulkerson and Thomas 2019; Vanderbeck and Dunkley 2003). Our results have shown how young men

and women try to respond to the dominant moral geography in order to find their identities and achieve belonging to their places: “a continuous struggle to hold at bay the connotations of deviance, isolation and failure embedded in prevailing discursive constructions of both the countryside and city” (Leyshon 2008b:21).

Nevertheless, we have established that rural young people imagine and inhabit spaces of partying and establish their own limits in the processes of negotiating their identities, as Ander and Wilińska (2020) have shown. The practices that the participants recognize carrying out therefore call into question and challenge the traditional representations of rurality, revealing young people’s contradictions and ambivalences within the context of global and local hybridization. In this regard, Nairn et al. (2003) demonstrate that, although binaries such as rural–urban and inclusion–exclusion provide the means of initial categorization, they do not adequately describe the complexities and contradictions of the daily worlds of the young people in villages and cities. Thus, young people’s capacity for action contradicts any simplistic definition of inclusion or exclusion performing dynamic socio-spatial processes. This capacity for agency of young people in the negotiation of their spaces, outside adult-centric or paternalistic ideas that deny young people’s responsibility and self-management, has already been shown by previous studies devoted to rural geographies (Abbott-Chapman et al. 2015; Norman et al. 2011; Rönnlund 2019). Kraack and Kenway (2002), in turn, use the concept of “geometries of multiple differences” to explain the clashes in the identities of contemporary rural youth between the labels “traditional” and “contemporary” caused by the complex interaction of current temporal and spatial changes. The qualities of “good” and “bad” are reconstructed through these intersections of “old” and “new” values, involving new modalities of integration and fragmentation in the processes of modeling identities and the acquisition of youth status.

In terms of alcohol consumption, we have seen how young people shift between responsibility and control, self-esteem and reputation in order to be safe and protected. Along these lines, looking at rural Denmark, Herold, Hunt, and Antin (2020) show the relationship that occurs between young people’s feelings of belonging and the locally rooted practices of consumption. Similarly, the studies by Leyshon, such as the one cited herein (2011), devoted to examining young people’s identities in rural England, have already revealed the diverse strategies taken up by the young to move between spaces, such as country pubs, and to experiment with alcohol, affecting their sense of belonging in the countryside in the processes of transition toward a public social life, far removed from the private context of family protection. In relation to alcohol

consumption and its portrayal in social networks by today's youth, our data are in line with the study by Pavón-Benítez et al. (2021) carried out in rural Spain, which shows how these practices become important identity elements that contribute to their social inclusion.

It is, moreover, worth mentioning that in all that constructed collective imaginary of the village, there are implicit assets that are not given relevance, due to being considered of less value in the normative ideology (Halfacree 2020; Norman et al. 2011)—that is to say, everything that only occurs in the village and never in the city. For example, the local fiestas of villages have particular sociocultural elements that cannot be found in city fiestas, such as the stronger ties bound to the identity of family and place, the traditions that surround these events, and meeting with people who live outside the village, as evidenced by previous studies conducted in Spain, such as Gastón (2016) and Hewitt et al. (2020). Furthermore, parties in the countryside and in the intimate contexts that occur in villages escape from the restrictions or limitations that exist in the city, having less danger, less dependency on recreational rules and lower financial costs, as other research has shown (Abbott-Chapman et al. 2015; Ander and Wilińska 2020; Canosa 2018; Canosa and Bennett 2021).

The recent study by Llorent-Bedmar et al. (2021) shows the feelings of inferiority and rootlessness experienced by rural youth regarding their job prospects and leisure opportunities. The authors believe that the fostering of young people's feeling of belonging to be of particular importance for dismantling ideas such as: "living in the countryside is the worst thing that can happen to young people." Changing the discourse regarding rural contexts and building up the importance of the rural social space is presented as a challenge and an opportunity for the new generations (White et al. 2011). The aim is to reduce the difference between the rural and the urban through positive images that fit well with their interests and future prospects (Honkaniemi et al. 2021).

### Conclusions

This study has focused on learning about the leisure experiences and sociocultural perceptions regarding partying that young people today who belong to Spanish villages and cities construct. This study contributes to our understanding of the realities and imaginaries of rural youth regarding festive leisure, as a key dimension to take into account in research on rural depopulation, and which will help us to rethink the strategies for action and approaches designed to halt the mass exodus of this cohort. This paper shows:

First, how the young people construct their idea of partying through the dominant, dichotomous and unequal country–city representations, evincing the presence of traditional stereotypes around rurality under a paradigm of urban superiority, in terms of class, prestige, social desirability and power. Social networks heighten that social imaginary and also offer young people an expansive gateway through which they can show themselves carrying out popular party patterns.

Second, it shows villages as places of opportunity and desirability for partying in at certain points of the year when the party is made public and goes from being an “intimate” affair of the peer group to multitudinous gatherings (fairs, open-air dancing, patron saint’s day fiestas) because it resembles the urban model by creating a space for young people to (re-) meet and gather, with uses and abuses of psychoactive substances, just as it occurs in the city all year round.

Third, the contradictions between the prevalent, stereotyped social discourse and the distinctive possibilities of these contexts for festive leisure-time practices that their young people engage in, outside of the mainstream urban nighttime economy. That is, although on the one hand, due to social desirability, villages are not considered suitable for parties—or not as suitable as cities—on the other hand, the variety of spaces and the flexibility and improvisation of rural young people in partying call this imaginary into doubt, and also reflect their adaptation, belonging and capacity for agency for the construction and management of leisure time. Furthermore, the closeness of relationships and the support in villages, along with knowledge of the space, give this group and their families’ security, as well as being protective factors against the excesses of alcohol. This has implications for the preventative practice and risk reduction of this psychoactive substance in Spanish villages, as these are useful elements that can be incorporated into public policies. In addition, our results indicate that the challenge posed by young people’s relationship to alcohol, in terms of its sale, use and behaviors of risk associated with its use and abuse are no longer exclusively a physical phenomenon but have spread to the virtual environment. The proposed national comprehensive legislation on this matter (Ministerio de Sanidad, Consumo y Bienestar Social 2018) must certainly pay particular attention to this, and come up with strategic objectives that consider the most up-to-date empirical evidence.

Understanding the presence of stereotypes of rural spaces with regard to partying is essential for working on the crisis of the rural model, where the exodus of young people is more and more acute and not always conditioned by material factors. Accepting the idea that villages are sad and boring places, although it is implicit in the discourse of young people

that this is not always the case, conditions the departure of many of them and reinforces in some way the perceived problems of these places. Therefore, the cultural aspect, what people perceive as rurality, conditions and (re-)creates a stigma that, in many cases, conceals and distorts the real possibilities that rural spaces offer.

Collecting the accounts and experiences that young people have with regard to the environment in which they live, examining the prevalent sociocultural constructions in their social discourse, not only provides us with a more complex view of leisure that is faithful to the reality of villages but also raises the importance of introducing this variable into designing plans for rural revival. This study thus contributes to the opening up of a new field of study in which to examine the possibilities of villages through the theoretical deconstruction of stereotypes tied to key aspects such as partying, which is of fundamental importance in youth processes of identity, and other negative sociocultural constructions that might have some relation to emigration. In this regard, new research areas that introduce the sociocultural variable as a cause of rural emigration, along with material factors, could be of vital importance. This can generate positive thinking that leads young people to see those places as a space of opportunity, both for the utilization of their social relationships through leisure and for their personal and professional development.

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