

***International Conference Meanings of the Rural – between social representations, consumptions and rural development strategies***

**28-29 September 2015, University of Aveiro, Portugal**

---

***Theme 2***

***AGRO-ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES: ONE EVALUATION FROM THE BASQUE COUNTRY***

**Patricia Campelo<sup>a</sup>, Beatriz Izquierdo<sup>b</sup>, Eduardo Malagón<sup>c</sup> and Guadalupe Ramos<sup>d</sup>**

<sup>a</sup>University of the Basque Country, UPV/EHU

<sup>b</sup>University of Burgos, UB

<sup>c</sup>University of the Basque Country, UPV/EHU

<sup>d</sup>University of the Valladolid, UVA

This paper focuses on the main outcomes provided by the evaluation of agro-environmental Measures within the Rural Development Plan for the Basque Country (1998-2013). The aim is to analyze the impact of agro-environmental actions on the operations of the farms. In this sense, we have made descriptive analysis by actions and we examine the discourses of different agents like public managers, experts and recipient farmers.

Making visible the environmental functions (and prejudices) of the agriculture has motivated the creation and development of a wide range of agro-environmental actions. The increasing pressure of the agricultural intensive production on the environment or the changes in the use of the land in the agrarian and rural zones during the eighties has contributed to the emergency of the environmental questions in the field of the agrarian politics.

But the expansion of agro-environmental actions also answered to the difficulties of the agrarian conventional policies to face to another type of pressures, domestic pressures (increase of the budget expenditure and generation of surpluses) and external ones (commercial multilateral negotiations). With the approval of the Agenda 2000 in 1999, the agro-environmental actions happened to be one of the principal instruments of the politics of rural development.

In the Basque Country (CAPV), the agro-environmental actions are being applied from 1996. From 2000 the agro-environmental actions joins the politics of rural development, as another instrument for the preservation of the mountain agriculture that faces dynamics of urban increasing pressure (Murua, J.R. et al., 2005).

The main results of the research show that the agro-environmental actions applied in the CAPV during the period 1998-2013 has followed an adaptive path towards the progressive changes that took place in the PAC more than a response to the needs or agro-environmental problems detected in the Basque agriculture.

After fifteen years of application of agro-environmental actions it is possible to conclude that the changes in the behaviors and in the improvement of the agricultural practices have been insufficient and they have produced slowly. It is necessary to improve the design of instruments of agro-environmental politics in order to stimulate the agrarian producers to introduce changes in their practices towards more environmentally respectful models and technologies.

Obviously, the deficiencies in the design have affected the execution. The limited scope of many of the applied measures demonstrates that, in case of the CAPV, the application decentralized of these agro-environmental programs has not supposed an added value in the design of the policies. On the other hand, the transition towards more sustainable models of agrarian production from the environmental point of view would allow obtaining a social additional legitimacy for the actions of support to the agrarian sector. Another reflection is the role that the farmers have to play in the design and application of the agro-environmental policies. They have perceived the agro-environmental actions as a “peculiar instrument” removed from the productive logic t they are accustomed, and its motivations, application and effects are, at least, diffuse. The recovery of the social legitimacy of the agrarian activity and of the public intervention on the sector and the rural way happens for achieving that these other functions of the agriculture are visualized. Nevertheless, the coherence of these interventions would be top with a design of the different instruments of the policies of rural development that was favoring the synergies between the different measures (investments’ economical helps, compensatory indemnifications, commercialization, etc.), depending on its contribution to the maintenance of the diverse functions of the rural context.

Finally, to remark the importance of the tasks of evaluation thin the application of the agro-environmental policies for an early detection of the problems and weak points, and for his

eventual correction and improvement. In addition, the information derived evaluations actions would facilitate a deep reflection on the role that the different instruments play, improving their scope and efficiency.

## **References**

- Deverre, C. (2008). Social implications of agro-environmental policy in France and Europe. *Sociología ruralis*, 35(2), 227-247.
- Díez, M., Izquierdo, B., & Malagón E. (2010). Uso de la evaluación en un contexto de múltiples agentes: el caso del plan de desarrollo rural del país vasco. *Gestión y análisis de políticas públicas*, 4, 137-160.
- Gupta, A. (2014). Transparency in Global Environmental Governance: A Coming of Age? *Global Environmental Politics*, 10(3), 32-52.
- Mortimer, S.R. et al. (2008). *The agri-environmental footprint index: users' manual* (version 1).
- Murua, J.R. et al. (2005). Las políticas de desarrollo rural en la CAE: un balance. *Ekonomiaz*, 60, 90-109.