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"Socio-Ecological Transformation from Rural into a Residential Landscape in the Matadepera Village (Barcelona Metropolitan Region), 1956-2008"

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Mediterranean countries are experiencing the fastest rates of urban sprawl in Europe, and concern about potential negative environmental effects is increasing. This expansion is occurring in a context of declining rural activities, where highly diverse cultural landscapes are giving way to homogenous low-density housing developments and entirely new forms of human-nature relations. In the present study we offer an analysis of the socio-ecological transformation of Matadepera, a wealthy suburb of metropolitan Barcelona that evolved out of a rural village inhabited by poor peasants who farmed rain-fed cropland and managed the forest. By cross-checking data from land-cover maps, documentary sources and semi-structured interviews with elderly local peasants, we managed to gain a detailed understanding of the driving forces behind land cover transformation and give voice to perceptions of landscape change among a quite neglected social group. Our results indicate dramatic urban sprawl onto former fields and woods over the last decades, driven by a combination of different factors. They also show that oral sources can yield information on landscape changes not available from any other kind of source. Moreover, by recovering valuable and so far neglected personal memories we hope to provide further stimulus to policy actions aimed at charting a more balanced development path for the area.

— Text from The White Horse Press website

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Source URL: http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/7551
Print date: 11 November 2026 04:30:14