The right to development.

Construction of a non-agriculturalist discourse of rurality in Denmark


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Abstract:
The paper argues for the existence of two powerful discourses of rurality in Denmark after World War II. The first one is termed the modernist-agriculturalist discourse. Although still influential in the current public debate, in Denmark as well as in other Western European countries, this discourse of rurality had its heyday in the 1960s. It is based on key-words, such as structural changes, development and vertical integration. Since the 1950s, it has belonged to groups of Danish farmers who use a productionist terminology in the public debate. However, the paper mainly focuses on a second discourse of rurality, established during the 1970s. Based on key-words, such as community, culture, environment and active citizenship, this terminology was applied and promoted by new non-agricultural elites in the villages and can therefore be termed the non-agriculturalist discourse of rurality. The paper shows how this new ‘family’ of powerful words was developed and promoted by The National Confederation of Village Communities in rural Denmark (Landssammenslutningen af Landsbysamfund or L.A.L.), established in 1976. Thus, from the late 1970s, members of this organization contributed to build and apply a peculiar L.A.L. vocabulary in their journal Landsbyen (“The village”) – a vocabulary which later was to be disseminated among the population and, finally, to have a significant impact on state politics.
1. Introduction

This paper deals with discourses of rurality in Denmark after World War II. As in many other Western European countries in this period (e.g. Woods, 1997), we are talking about two dominant discourses of rurality, namely an agriculturalist and a non-agriculturalist.

Although still important in Denmark, the agriculturalist discourse had its heyday in the 1960s. It belonged to a group of modern farmers who used a modernist-productionist terminology in the public debate. This terminology was mainly based on key-words that were taken from agricultural economics, such as development, structural changes, vertical integration, rationalization and centralization. And often these abstract academic terms were imported from abroad (Svendsen, 2002).

Partly as a counter-reaction, a second discourse was established during the 1970s. This ‘family’ of powerful words was applied and promoted by new non-agricultural elites in the villages. Similar to the agriculturalist vocabulary, the non-agriculturalist vision of rurality was expressed in academic words, although mainly taken from the social sciences, such as community, culture, natural development, and active citizenship.

Specifically, the article focuses on the new conceptual creations which occurred in the end of the 1970s. At that time, the urban newcomers and returnees to the Danish rural communities attempted to construct their own vocabulary in an effort to appropriate political power. In this struggle over words, they were led into battle by the nationwide association National Confederation of Village Communities (Landssammenslutningen af Landsbysamfund, hereafter designated L.A.L.). This organization was established in December 1976 and has until today promoted and further developed its characteristic discourse of rurality, based on certain ideological theories of the ideal way of living a rural life. Apart from newspaper articles, newsletters, agendas, reports etc., this has been done in the journal of this organization, entitled Landsbyen (“The Village”).

As is evidenced by articles in Landsbyen in the period 1977-78, the L.A.L. became one of the most important founders of a new, powerful conceptual universe among the rural population. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to show the genesis of a consistent universe of ideas, theories and concepts of rurality among the L.A.L. leading members by analyzing articles in Landsbyen 1977-78 – a discourse of rurality that quickly was overtaken by members of many local citizen’s associations in the villages, as well as by social scientists, state bureaucrats and local politicians. In this way, the non-agriculturalist formulations of rural identity and practice came to dominate the rural political debate in Denmark during the 1980s and 1990s, hereby challenging an agriculturalist terminology of an older date. At an overall level, and in the context of rapid changes in national economy, landscape and buildings, such a discursive shift mirrored the cultural transition of Denmark from a peasant society to an industrial, urbanized society.

Before the analysis of the L.A.L. rhetoric in Landsbyen 1977-78 (Sections 3-4), there will be a short review of existing literature on discourses of rurality and their effects on rural identities and realities (Section 2). Finally, I will compare the two
dominant discourses of rurality in post-war rural Denmark – the modernist-agriculturalist and the non-agriculturalist - as well as evaluate their effects on the public debate (Sections 5 and 6).

2. Discourses of rurality and theory effects

In recent years, a growing number of rural studies have stressed the importance of discourses of rurality in the construction of new rural identities and realities (e.g. Mormont, 1987, 1990; Hoggart et al., 1995; Woods, 1997; Ray, 1997, 1998; Herbert-Cheshire 2000; Woodward, 2001; Halfacree, 2001; Halfacree et al. 2002; Svendsen, 2002).

This reflects a general trend within social science research, where focus has been directed to classification, knowledge production and group identity. Thus, Bourdieu (1990: 134; 1977: 178) has spoken of “constitutive naming” and “theory effect”, Ian Hacking (1999: 80ff.) of “elevator words” and “nominalism”, while Bruno Latour (1999: 69) has recently described knowledge as an “operator”, which communicates a given culturally-based viewpoint about the relationship between things and words.

As my Danish case study will clearly show, knowledge and classification do not constitute neutral human tools. They express underlying power interests. As such, they will always operate as an integrated part in a social discourse which has consequences in the here-and-now. In an explanation of the terms “naming” and “theory effect”, Bourdieu puts it in this way:

The categories of perception, the systems of classifications, that is, essentially, the words, the names which construct social reality as much as they express it, are the crucial stakes of political struggle, which is a struggle to impose the legitimate principle of vision and division… a struggle for the legitimate exercise of the theory effect. (Bourdieu 1985: 198, 217)

The words always communicate a specific view on an event, as it is denoted by the old Greek word theorein, which literally means “to view”, “to contemplate” (as a spectator, for example a play). However, it is evident that a certain way of viewing and communicating the events of the world, a theoria, also contributes to define that world. In that sense, the introduction of new words have a direct impact on people’s (legitimate) world views and, hence, on reality itself – like it was the case with many of Marx’ inventions, such as “working class” and “class struggle”. Such abstractions often appear in a definite form: the working class, the class struggle, the development, the structural changes, etc. - a reification process that seems to confirm their transition from abstract academic concepts to legitimate ‘real’ things.¹

Within this logic and in a sociological perspective, Bourdieu (1990: 54) states that “politics is, essentially, a matter of words”. Consequently, groups and group identities can be seen as the outcome of words, i.e., “the instruments of the struggle for the definition of reality” (Bourdieu, 1977: 170), in the form of symbolic struggles:
Principles of division… function within and for the purposes of the struggle between social groups; in producing concepts, they produce groups, the very groups which produce the principles and the groups against which they are produced. What is at stake in the struggles about the meaning of the social world is power over the classificatory schemes and systems which are the bases of the representations of the groups and therefore of their mobilization and demobilization: the evocative power of an utterance which puts things in a different light (Bourdieu, 1989: 479).

Within recent rural studies literature, several authors have examined ‘theory effects’ from various perspectives. For example, research on rural restructuring (for an overview, see Hoggart and Paniagua, 2001), rural conflicts (Woods, 1998), governmental rural development strategies (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000) and powerful representations constructed and promoted by rural interest groups (Woods, 1997; Woodward, 1999) have implied a strong focus on discursive elements and their effect on rural identities and realities.

In particular, Michael Woods’ (1997) interesting case study on 20th century local politics in the rural county Somerset, England, clearly reveals how power in a local community is discursively constructed (1997: 457). Very similar to the Danish case presented in this paper, we here witness the historical formation of competing discourses, which have had “a real effect on the lives of local people” (1997: 472). So we see that, from the end of World War I until the 1960s, an “agricultural community discourse” dominated, enhancing narrow agricultural interests. However, from the middle of the 1970s, this discourse became increasingly challenged by an “environmentalist discourse” (1997: 458) belonging to the still more numerous and powerful service class consisting of urban thinking newcomers. In contrast to the indigenous people in the villages, these newcomers “were not exposed to the traditional discourse of rurality which regarded the countryside as a space of production, but developed alternative discourses, regarding the countryside as a space of consumption” (1997: 468).

Similarly, we will see in the following how, in rural Denmark, a discursively established rurality dominated by farmers’ interests – i.e., an agriculturalist discourse of rurality – gradually became more and more challenged by a non-agriculturalist discourse of rurality belonging to the newcomers.

3. Establishment of the National Confederation of Village Communities

The drastic decline in the number of local, business-oriented associations in rural Denmark through the 1960s makes it increasingly irrelevant to speak of the famous Danish, agricultural co-operatives by the 1970s – a co-operative movement that from the second half of the 19th century had had an all-pervasive impact on economic and cultural life in rural Denmark (Svendsen and Svendsen, 2000, 2001). In pure demographic terms as well, the rural districts were being drained of their inhabitants.
It was primarily the young farm workers who were made redundant, as was the case in many other Western European countries. Generally, the transition from agriculture to industry happened relatively late in Denmark, in comparison to early industrialized countries such as England and the USA. Therefore, it was primarily during the 1960s and 1970s that significant numbers of Danish farmers were made redundant.

Consequently, during this period the rural dwellers were to a great degree transformed into labor reserves for the larger towns, where both former farmers together with small-holders working part time in agriculture, as well as many newcomers and returnees adapted to a commuter lifestyle.

3.1. Construction of a new rural identity

From the early 1970s, however, there arose in many areas a new network of urban newcomer-dominated residents’ and citizens’ associations to fill the vacuum left by the rationalized economic co-operatives. As already mentioned, The National Confederation of Village Communities (L.A.L.) became an important coordinator and inspirational source for these networks. L.A.L. saw its role as that of bringing new life into the eroding parish and village communities.

The L.A.L. movement should be seen as one of the outcomes of a major trend in Denmark in the 1970s, namely the left-wing and environmentalist political ideology that predominated in the public sphere during this decade, and which was most radically promoted by Danish intellectuals. Thus, right from the start, the construction of a new, socialist inspired rurality in Denmark was conceived by academics, who consciously had chosen to move from the cities to small beautiful villages in order to realize their visions of the ideal way of living. The dream of a new rural way of life was literally architect-designed by these young intellectuals and formerly urban dwellers. Thus, after 1970, architects – together with sociologists and anthropologists, primarily – verbalized their dream of a new rural life in an amazing number of publications, including newspaper articles, rural political agendas and scientific articles, reports and books.

A good example is architect and village newcomer Poul Bjerre, who early made important contributions to the non-agriculturalist discourse of rurality. Thus, in a book entitled Village Politics – State Politics (Bjerre, 1974), he spoke about a decentralized humanistic society in balance (balancesamfund). This ideal society could only be established in village communities, in contrast to the both socially and physically polluted life in the cities. Following Bjerre, this could be stated as a scientific fact, as it could be scientifically proven that human beings were born with a need of social values (socialt værdibehov). Moreover, this biological need could only be satisfied in the form of what Bjerre termed a ‘flock-social’ (floksocial) life in the villages.

In a more or less modified form, such rhetoric has been adopted and utilized during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s by leading L.A.L. members from the end of the 1970s. Thus, glorifying a traditional and ‘naturally’ social way of living in the countryside, L.A.L.’s later chairman, Ole Glahn, has given the following characterization of the rural districts’ ‘third-world’ status in relation to the urban areas:
The village parish is relegated to delivering raw materials and labor to the towns, where secondary agricultural production now takes place in large units. A consequence of this development is that residents of the countryside no longer have the possibility to get to know each other via the work they perform. In former times, many people worked together, for others or for themselves. It brought them closer together. Formerly, many local workers had a host of local meeting places, all of which served a certain purpose: the smith, the mechanic, the carpenter, the baker, the dairy shop, the butcher, the doctor, veterinarian, grocer, the co-operative store, the barber, hairdresser, bicycle shop, shoemaker, saddle maker, parish council office, school, and the like.

There are very few villages which have more than 3-4 of these functions left (Glahn, 1985: 173-174).

Apart from the influence from left-wing academics, the form of argumentation of the members of the residents’ and citizens’ associations during the 1970s is to a great degree reminiscent of the trade unions of the workers’ movement. Accordingly, these members sought to exercise direct influence on the local and regional political decision-making processes, especially via an influence on the “local plans”, i.e., the public institutions’ physical planning in the individual local areas. For example, in 2002 a former chairman of the residents’ association in the village of Sandager on the island of Fuen told me in an interview that he decided to establish the association in 1978, because he thought that the village at that time “needed such an organ in order to make sure that the village residents could meet and discuss common issues”. However, this small-holder had long been reluctant to take this step, he admitted to me. The reason was that he did not like the various local councils, parish and citizens’ associations which had been established on Fuen after 1970 on a “negative foundation” and as “demonstrations of protest” against the new, large scale municipalities.

The associational networks, the former chairman refers to, consisted mainly of young, well educated newcomers from the cities. Here, the terminology gradually obtained a special ideological character. Primarily, this was due to the energetic efforts of the Confederation, which via its journal *Landsbyen* (“The Village”), and from 1990 its member journal *Landsbynæt* (“Village News”), had exercised a significant influence on the rural dwellers’ conceptual universe.

In the first issue of *Landsbyen*, from February 1977, the two objectives of the new association are revealed in its statutes: “to support the work being done to re-establish, preserve and further develop the village communities and the environment and culture they represent”, and “to support the efforts to provide the citizens with local influence, local co-responsibility and local possibilities of co-operation” (Landsbyen, 1977, no. 1: 2). In other words, the L.A.L. sought to promote local participation, which by far the greater part of the rural dwellers – newcomers as well as ‘natives’ – felt they had lost in the period from 1960 to the years following the 1970 reform in municipal administration, which reduced the number of self-administering municipalities from 1300 to 273 (cf. Figure 1).
L.A.L.’s means of promoting local influence was to pursue what was called “natural development” in the villages, i.e., an idea of neither too much nor too little development, but rather a harmonious well-balanced development (see e.g. Landsbyen, 1977, no. 2: 10).

These basic themes were already highlighted in the very first sentences of the new journal *Landsbyen*:

What does a resident in a village do when development has stagnated, where the school is to be closed down and when the parish becomes too little to support a priest, where the merchants are forced to close one by one and the associational life stagnates and dies out? Or a village where development goes much too quickly and threatens to drown the original environment, where the municipal administration imposes their plans on the local inhabitants and does not consider that a life in a suburb with over 3000 inhabitants is perhaps not exactly what the residents had dreamed about? (Landsbyen, 1977, no. 1: 1)

This idea entailed a break with the modern-productionist world view which had characterized an agrarian-dominated population in the 1950s and 1960s. There was now an open reaction against the idea that no one can fight ‘structural changes’ or ‘the development’, partly via expressions such as “putting on the brakes” and “changing the direction of the development”. However, the new rural inhabitants operated within the same evolutionary mind set which achieved popularity after the Second World War, and which in the decade of the 1960s was linked to a technical-academic conceptual universe based upon key concepts such as “structural changes” and “structural development” (Svendsen, 2002, 2002a).

### 3.2. The activists behind the new network

Who were the leading forces behind this identity-related, conceptual re-orientation out in the rural districts? And what did they want?

These new networks of passionate activists in the villages consisted primarily of recent arrivals and returnees, especially the younger and middle-aged people who had lived for many years in the towns, where they had acquired an education. They had now become employed out in the rural areas, mostly in the public sector and service professions.

Most prominent among these activists were those trained at teachers’ colleges. Carsten Abild, the chairman of L.A.L.’s first board from 1977, was a 35-year-old teacher in the village of Bredstrup. He grew up in Bredstrup and after many years moved back to the village in 1975. Similarly, L.A.L.’s vice-chairman Ole Glahn, a 30-year-old instructor at a teacher’s college, had returned to his natal village of Viskinge in
1974. Also the other board members consisted of relatively well educated returnees, primarily. These people’s mission was to change the situation in the rural areas by spreading information and experiences about life in the Danish villages so as to mobilize the rural population. As such, it was nothing less than a “popular movement” with roots far back in “the traditional peasant culture”, a “local community movement”. This view is also reflected in the subtitle of the journal *Landsbyen: Tidsskrift for Landsbysamfundsbevægelsen* (The Village: Journal of the Village Community Movement).

Such a peasant or village culture, it was said, had its roots in Danish agrarian history: in the old feudal village community up to about 1800 and especially in the village life during the classic era of the Danish rural co-operative movement in the latter part of the 1800s.

The statements from L.A.L.’s chairman and vice-chairman nevertheless bear witness to the fact that the board members did not all agree that the popular movement should predominantly be a more political interest-group movement, or whether it should simply disseminate information about culture and living conditions in the villages. This situation is also reflected in the above mentioned statement of the association’s objectives.

Chairman Carsten Abild seems from the start to have represented L.A.L.’s moderate wing, which preferred co-operation and dialogue with local authorities, i.e., a voluntary principle. In contrast, vice-chairman Ole Glahn represented a more aggressive, revolutionary faction which desired to exert political pressure on public authorities, i.e., a more extortionary principle.\(^3\) As will be shown, the two factions came to represent, respectively, a rural cultural-historical wave (the Abild faction) and a ‘red-green’ wave (the Glahn faction).

Although there was not always agreement about the means to be utilized toward the outside, there was agreement regarding the main goal, namely, in the style of the Norwegian, populistic village movement, led by sociologist Ottar Brox, to preserve and to further develop the village communities (see e.g. *Landsbyen*, 1977, no. 10/11: 17). Similarly, there was agreement on the means to be used internally, within the individual villages. Here a mobilization of the village inhabitants would take place in the form of an effective information campaign based on an ambitious journal and the issuing of publications by its own publishing house, *Landsbyens Forlag* ("The Village’s Publishing House").

Most importantly, however, the L.A.L. activists seem to have been in agreement about utilizing the same concepts within a cohesive terminology which could disseminate the new messages. In contrast to the native rural inhabitants, these largely newcomers and returnees had made a conscious choice to move back to the countryside. For example, board member Ann-Dorte Rørby, who moved to the village of Jelling, commented that her migration to the countryside was “exclusively with the goal of living in a village community” (*Landsbyen*, 1977, no. 1: 10). Yet now all these ex-urbanites had become impatient about realizing their dreams of the natural life in the countryside.
4. The dream of an active natural community

As already mentioned earlier in this paper, it seems that the very words – and here not least the more or less abstract concepts which dominate the public debate – have a great significance for the extent to which different groups succeed in appropriating political power. In other words, a groups’ aspirations for appropriating power seem to be contingent upon the ability of its members to legitimate concepts and arguments in the public debate.

As is clearly evidenced by the Danish case, the success of rural groups in obtaining political power – and, hence, of acquiring both material as well as immaterial forms of capital – thus appears to derive from and be created by the verbalization of these interests within unique dynamic, social processes in time and space. In this way, it is through a struggle about words in the public space that groups are able to promote and legitimate precisely their own identity and hereby, in a broad sense, serve their own interests.

4.1. The L.A.L. terminology

The new dominant concepts as they appear in Landsbyen from 1977, can on first sight seem overwhelming. The articles reveal a large vocabulary of abstract and relatively heavily ideological concepts as well as a high frequency of repetition of the individual concepts. A typical example is an eight-page article from April 1977 about development in the village of Heltborg (Landsbyen, 1977, no. 3: 5-13). Here the word “development” appears 14 times, “community” 13 times, “environment” 9 times, and “active” 6 times. In addition, we encounter value-loaded concepts such as “technocrat”, “local democracy”, “inequality”, “local community”, etc.

Beyond expressing a concrete strategy of actions to serve the rural population, these concepts articulate some of the basic, more implicit values behind the so-called “village community movement”, namely, the view of people as social and equal beings who thrive best in small accessible village communities. This view was reiterated by Carsten Abild in the inaugural issue of Landsbyen in February 1977:

I see the creation of the National Confederation as a form of popular movement which builds upon a knowledge that we are not satisfied just by living a materialistic way of life for ourselves. Instead, we should focus more on togetherness with others and creating satisfactorily intelligible societies where the individual can thrive. (Landsbyen, 1977, no. 1: 3)

This view was fully shared by vice-chairman Ole Glahn, who formulated this universal truth in even sharper terms:

By a conscious change of the objective for social development, I believe, we can create a more humane existence. And this is connected to the idea that I view man as a social being who feels best in togetherness with other people. (Landsbyen, 1977, no. 1: 3)
The idea of a “natural community” in the village clearly took its point of departure in an opposing view of an unnatural and unhealthy life in the towns. In this way, city life was implicitly viewed as a negation of village life: urban sheer and egotistical pursuit of material goods, in contrast to the “sustainable” village community, which rested on values such as “independence”, “solidarity”, “local democracy”, “self-sufficiency”, “ecology”, “non-material values”, etc.

Here the L.A.L. came to operate with two classical concepts of culture: a pessimistic one based on an idea of evolution as involution or degeneration, and an optimistic idea of culture based upon evolution as a movement toward humanity’s redemption, i.e., the Christian idea of paradise. On the one hand, we find the unclean, infected culture of the towns, a culture alien to nature and therefore alienating; on the other hand, there is the “rich cultural life” in the villages, i.e., the pure, uncontaminated life which links itself so close to nature that culture seems to melt together with nature. When new terms such as “village environments” (contrasting with the “concrete environments” of the big cities) were incorporated in the L.A.L.’s rhetoric, it was therefore a view of the pure pristine, rural culture existing side by side and in harmony with nature (though paradoxically enough, even the concept of “environment” had apparently been taken from the urban sociologists’ studies of suburban life). Hence, in comparing life in the villages with that of the big cities, we read that:

The children and the youth in the villages are most often characterized by their rapid incorporation into the community. This means that the children learn to get on with each other together with that they obtain an active and meaningful place. In many villages, there also exists a rich cultural life marked by the community house and the school, and by the close contact one has with each other. Furthermore, the villages are characterized by their close proximity in relation to nature, which also means that agriculture is the most significant occupation … A large portion of the children and youth in the big cities are affected by concrete environments and “TV-culture” (a culture marked by passivity and lack of community). This makes violence and vandalism become a part of the harsh everyday life in the big city. Furthermore, the towns are marked by pollution and dangerous, burdensome traffic. (Landsbyen, 1977, no. 1: 5)

4.2. The active community

Compared to the 1960s, the ideas of a new village community as they took form in the latter part of the 1970s distinguish themselves with their high ideals about equality, naturalness, sustainability and non-materialist cultural values.

The introduction of these concepts set the new movement apart from the agriculturalist discourse that had dominated totally until about 1970. As already mentioned, after World War II, the Danish farmers had adopted a productivist terminology from abroad based on key concepts, such as development, structural changes, rationalization, centralization, and vertical integration. Moreover, since the late
19th century, the farmers’ world view had been strongly influenced by a major rural, agriculturalist movement, the Danish Co-operative Movement, consisting of a large number of consumer co-operatives, co-operative dairies, slaughterhouses, grain and fodder associations, etc. (see also Svendsen 2002; Svendsen and Svendsen, 2000, 2001; Chloupkova, Svendsen and Svendsen, 2003).

The “natural, active community” for which L.A.L. propagandized should, firstly, arise from below, from the grass roots, as it was often formulated. As distinct from the 1960s, it was here a case of a “local struggle” against the influence exerted by non-local representatives in the form of politicians and various experts, encapsulated in the concepts of the “centralists”, the “bigwigs” or “armchair philosophy”.

Such expressions reveal the very generalized feeling of powerlessness among those living in the countryside, a feeling that their parish-based, rural self-government had gradually withered away since the end of the 1950s, culminating in the 1970 reform of municipal administration. First it was ‘our’ schools which disappeared, then ‘our’ dairies, shops, etc., and finally, the municipal administration office—a closure of village institutions that is still going on today, especially in the more marginal rural areas in Denmark. This feeling of powerlessness was practically suppressed in the 1960s’ debates about rural life, especially within the co-operative movement. Seen in this light, the village community movement established during the 1970s has been a logical counter reaction.

Yet the quotation also reflects an attempt to spread a new moral message among the inhabitants of the rural areas, as new times - new moralisms.

As was the case prior to the First World War and in the 1960s, efforts were made to disseminate this message via several internally connected slogans which on first sight appeared simple and easily intelligible, but which on closer inspection show themselves to be extremely diffuse: abstractions constructed on the basis of the concrete interests of a specific group. In the main organ for the dissemination of these slogans, *Landsbyen*, the text was supported by illustrations of a propagandistic type (cf. Figure 2) – precisely as in the 1960s centralization and rationalization campaigns conducted in the journal of the Danish co-operative farmers’ movement, *Andelsbladet*, then promoting a new modernistic, agriculturalist world view.

In this way, a terminology of the 1960s centered around the key concept “structural changes” was supplemented with – and partly replaced by – a new legitimate world view among the rural dwellers. Instead of the “laws of development” and the neutral testimony of the numbers – termed the “speech of the numbers” (*tallenes tale*) – the agricultural experts and leaders were talking about during the 1960s, an urban inspired discourse now prevailed, centered around “the natural, active community”.

[Figure 2: Illustrations from Landsbyen, Journal for the Village Community Movement. Source: Landsbyen, 1977, no. 8: 8; no. 9: 5, 6; no. 10/11: 7, 11. Overall, the illustrations mirror the glorification of a harmonious rural past that L.A.L. wanted to restore. The ghost signifies the so-called village death (*landsbydøden*), caused by a close down of local institutions and a decline in population]
It thus became natural to be active and unnatural to be passive. Although the L.A.L. members generally distanced themselves from the experts, they nevertheless used L.A.L.-leaning experts to support their arguments, a contradiction they clearly acknowledged in the first issue of *Landsbyen*. Apparently because most L.A.L. members were themselves educated in the cities, they were clearly very conscious of the increased impact which expert assistance could bring to the association in the struggle against the centralists, and here especially the Danish administrative authorities.

How could the experts provide support to all the arguments about the natural, active community? And how could they sanction a view of part of the rural population as “passive” or “against nature”? They could do so primarily by employing Marxist-inspired scientific terminology as support to the predominant red-green wave which lay at the roots of the L.A.L. movement as it took form in the late 1970s. This ideological linking of ecology and socialism (or more precisely, egalitarianism), was attractive especially to the newcomers and returnees, who through their educations in the towns had been trained to understand and utilize such an urban-style rhetoric.

It was not only the two aforementioned consultants who helped develop the red-green rhetoric within the Confederation. Outsiders such as the above mentioned architect Poul Bjerre and novel writer and former history student Ebbe Kløvedal Reich also helped to expand the L.A.L.’s conceptual universe in this direction. Bjerre believed that the L.A.L.’s “main problem” was their inability – in contrast to the Marxist theoreticians – to distinguish and select between “real politics” and “idea politics” and, in line with this, between a “system adaptive” and a “system transcending” line (*Landsbyen*, 1977, no 10/11: 12). Bjerre writes:


Bjerre opted for an activist line on the basis of the theory rather than the adaptive strategy based on pragmatism and co-operation. In similar terms, other socialist academics argued that for “our health”, “late capitalism” must necessarily yield to “the collective unity”, i.e., the local community (*Landsbyen*, 1977, no. 8: 3). In March 1978, sociologist Jon Sundbo sought to disseminate the same message by analyzing “the contradiction between the local community and the capitalist form of society” (*Landsbyen*, 1978, no. 2: 10), etc.

Such concepts were largely imported from an international vocabulary which was especially predominant in Western Europe at that time, not least in the Nordic university environments within the social sciences. However, the very idea of local community as a delimited, homogenous unity, was a continuation of the ideas which had predominated in the Anglo-Saxon community research tradition of the 1920s and 1930s.

Endogenously, within the Danish rural population, passages from *Landsbyen* reveal the influence exerted by the red-green experts on the native rural population.
Hence, an activist from among the elder generation of ‘indigenous’ village inhabitants in the small village of Bjernede sought to use and to partly reformulate the new terminology. This man was small-holder Carl Wiese, who, attending the congress of consumers’ co-operatives in 1965, had criticized the idea of dissolving the local associations and taking away the sense of responsibility from “us little people out here in the countryside” (Andelsbladet, 1965: 1501). In an article entitled “We Must Change Our Attitude about Life” (Landsbyen, 1977, no. 10/11: 9-10), Wiese lamented the demise of economic co-operation in the countryside, calling for “new forms of community.” “The collective way of life”, declared the 70-year-old Wiese, who for more than 40 years had cultivated his tiny piece of land but was now jumping into local history and local politics, “is nothing new. My parents also talked about it, but if it is to function as a working community, the workplaces must be moved out here, where the labor force is.” The former chairman of the home handicrafts association and consumers’ co-operative in Bjernede argued that the villagers’ future depended on that “we change attitude, abandoning egotism and finding another measure of value for life than money.”

The expert statements were most clearly integrated into the rhetoric of the more radical Glahn faction. Here, one could observe the most wide-ranging desires for a “dynamic and active community” (Landsbyen, 1977, no. 10/11: 20). What could be termed the “active citizen paradigm” within the L.A.L. and related organizations up to the present had begun to take form.

In the 1960s, active local patriots in the associations struggling against organizational centralism had often been condemned as harmful reactionaries (bagstræbere). From the latter half of the 1970s, the situation reversed itself: those who were not active in associations and not local patriots risked being viewed as harmful reactionaries by the more ‘progressive’ L.A.L.-inspired activists in the rural districts, the latter consisting primarily of red-green and/or traditionally-oriented newcomers and returnees, who often for many years had resided in the towns and cities.

The leading activists in the villages – the new guarantors of progress so to speak – therefore became those, who within the residents’ and citizens’ associations came forward to do battle against the external enemy, i.e., the centrally oriented politicians and officials outside the local communities, whose nearly absolutist domination, according to Carsten Abild, had been caused by several unfortunate factors such as the “municipal reform, materialism, television isolation, subordination to expertise and technocrats, politicians’ misunderstood views of being master and not servant”, etc. (Landsbyen, 1977, no. 3: 3). And the village’s new heroes became those who actively participated in the village “work community” and “leisure community”.

Opposed to the village activists stood the new reactionaries, i.e., the village inhabitants who isolated themselves from the community; those who simply remained passive and resigned toward a development that no one could resist anyway. Thus, Glahn stated in 1978:

The time has passed where each one can be content with his own affairs and sooth his deep-going social needs by material acquisitions. The era of the car and the television as compensation for our emotional needs is coming to an end.
We do not thrive from it, and it is too costly for society. We must therefore use our time in another, more sensible way, by being together with our fellow residents on projects for the common benefit. The flourishing which the citizens’ associations, residents’ associations, environmental groups, etc. have obtained, are a precise expression that the human need for social togetherness centered around work and leisure cannot be suppressed. As an organization we must support this. (Landsbyen, 1978, no. 4: 8-9)

4.3. Cultural and physical urbanization

The consequences of the ideological and conceptual urbanization of the Danish rural districts, of which the L.A.L. has been the exponent, can be best summarized as a major change in cultural identity, a process conditioned by various internal and external factors which takes place even today, and which have real influence on the behavioral patterns of the rural populations.

In the era following the municipal reform, a rural identity thus seems to have gradually taken form on the terms set by the newcomers and returnees. Even the word “local” obtained a new significance after 1970, and the term “local community” quickly became an emotional concept used both in political argumentation as well as in social science research (Korsgaard, 1997: 431).

This change in identity was accompanied by a change in the patterns of co-operation. In quantitative terms, this change was reflected in the increasing number of associations dominated by the newcomers and returnees. On one hand there were more associations with an interest-group character, such as residents’ and citizens’ associations, parish associations, urban guilds, parish guilds, citizen guilds, village guilds, local councils, homeowner associations, various environmental associations, groups promoting ‘general well-being’ (trivselsgrupper), etc. On the other hand, there emerged within cultural life various newcomer-dominated amateur theatre clubs, youth clubs, athletic associations, etc.

The change was also reflected in the quality of the associational activities, i.e., in the new unique character of co-operative relations, a character distinctly marked by life in the towns, and the urban dwellers’ ideas of a good life in the countryside.

The changes in identity and in patterns of co-operation have again had influence on rural settlement patterns, which is partly reflected in the emergence of new community buildings such as culture centers, community houses and multi-function activity halls, and in new dwelling forms in the countryside such as subdivisions of single-family homes, hobby farming and low-income public housing projects.

This not yet completed process of change in rural dwellers’ identity, rural practice and settlement can be viewed as both a cultural and physical (settlement-related) urbanization. If one chooses to view the process on the basis of the conceptual universe of the newcomers, however, a more precise label would be urban ruralizations, i.e., the phenomenon whereby urban dwellers settle in the villages in order to legitimate and later fulfill their own views of the authentic country life, in idea and in practice, as well as purely physically, in the settlement.
However, the new “localist” (*hjemstavn*) movement in the latter part of the 20th century is characterized by its attraction to all groups. Hence, innumerable local museums and local historical associations have popped up in recent years, often with the support of both urban newcomers and native-born villagers. In contrast, it seems to be primarily the newcomers and returnees who have endowed the word “development” with a new content. They insist on what has often been labeled the *right to development*, understood as the right to receive public funds in order to preserve and further the development of a village culture which, without being ensured such natural development, runs the risk of dying out.

In this way, the change in cultural identity also entails a shift from *duty* to *demand*, i.e., a transition from a pre-modern agriculturalist feeling of obligation to feed the rest of the population to a now prevailing demand to be provided for. In this sphere as well, L.A.L. contributed with more or less scientifically inspired terminology and arguments.

### 4.4. Dying cultures

It was especially the two words “culture” and “development” which in the 1970s came to be interwoven key terms in the L.A.L. members’ attempts to reconstruct – or in their own understanding: to create, protect and preserve – an identity as rural dweller.

As for the concept of culture, there was the tendency, as already mentioned, to idealize a presumed traditional, rural culture based on collective values, in contrast to a decadent urban culture based on individualism and egotism. Here it was a case of a desire to “preserve” or “protect” village culture against the harmful effects of urban culture. In this connection, there was talk of the danger of the “dissolution of village culture” of “the community going up in smoke”, of the necessity to “protect the local community” and to “save the traditional peasant culture”. Or as board member Niels Winther Petersen expressed it in October 1977: “the unilateral emphasis on material goods [constitutes a danger for] independent, small, locally democratic communities [built upon] the cultural cornerstones, school, church, community house, and a rich associational life and small artisan firms” (*Landsbyen*, 1977, no. 9: 14). There appeared associations whose only goal was to maintain the old village culture, such as, the Association for the Revitalization of Village Culture in Vesthimmerland (*Foreningen til levendegørelsen af landsbykulturen i Vestsunland*). Similarly, in some cases there was mobilization for the “protection” or “defense” of the villages’ core institutions, such as occurred in February 1976 in the parish of Nørre Nærå-Bederslev. This defense took the form of a ‘group for well-being’ (*trivselsgruppe*). One of the group’s founders was future L.A.L. chairman Carsten Abild, who explains:

A year ago, when the residents in Nørre Nærå-Bederslev parish…decided to stand together, it was indeed an entirely spontaneous and genuine expression of defense. A defense with the goal of saving the parish’s priesthood, the school, associational life, the remaining three local shops, building locales for youth as well as the elderly - for residents as well as newcomers - the pride of the parish, the seven village ponds, the artisans, unity in the parish, traditions and values -
in short, the future of Nørre Nærå-Bederslev. It is a defense of an environment - of a way of life and a culture, the Danish peasant culture. (Landsbyen, 1977, no. 1: 3)

Taking Abild’s statement at face value, it should be expected that, in such crisis situations, a rapid and effective mobilization with broad support from all segments of the local population would take place. Thus, Abild concludes:

The situation in Nørre Nærå-Bederslev is not much different than the situation in other villages across the country. In some places they have grappled with the issue, as we have - in other places they tackle the issue differently. In some places they have given up, in other places nothing has yet been done. In some places much can still be saved. In no place is it yet too late. (Landsbyen, 1977, no. 1: 3).

The notion that cultures can fall apart exists within social anthropology, where studies of non-European peoples may speak of threatened or dying cultures. From the 1970s, actions began in many Danish rural districts to keep alive a dying culture, even awakening the dead cultures to life, precisely as the anthropologists have endeavored to keep alive the dying non-European peoples or at least their culture’s legacy.

4.5. Natural development

The result was that the 1960s’ evolutionary terminology within the Danish co-operative movement was retained, though in modified form. Rather than a global developmental race toward higher living standards, the word ‘development’ was now viewed as an effort to reach a higher degree of human happiness, which – as we have seen – could best be achieved via the communalism of the small society. Several of the new leading village inhabitants desired or even demanded “well-being” and “life quality” via human togetherness and an “ecologically correct co-operation with nature”, to use Glahn’s terminology (e.g. Landsbyen 1978, no. 4: 13). He described “natural development” as follows:

In general, I could imagine that development would proceed so that people who especially want to be in common with others, e.g., in agriculture or in connection with the exploitation of alternative energy, join together in villages, partly because the people who value community and solidarity higher than their own interests in their walled off neighborhoods [ligusterkvarterer] would tend to move to the villages. Here the legislation must not place itself as an obstacle to new forms of ownership in agriculture or for new forms of land parcellization, etc. On the contrary, it is one of L.A.L.’s tasks to ensure legislation which supports such a development. (Landsbyen, 1978, no. 4: 8)

However, ‘development’ did not lose its meaning as progress in material living standards. Hence, the aforementioned Abild article about Heltborg describes how a
stagnating population and a rapidly declining number of school pupils had led to “an acute need for development” (Landsbyen, 1977, no. 3: 1). In this connection, it was argued that the municipality should allow the selling off of new lots for single-family homes, such that the town could maintain its population and thus ensure its various services. Precisely as in the 1960s, the time factor was utilized in the argumentation. The development clock was ticking, and it was necessary to act before it was too late:

Not everyone in Heltborg agrees that such a new housing area is the best solution to the village’s problems. But on the other hand, it is primarily time that matters. Something has to happen in Heltborg, and it has to happen soon. (Landsbyen, 1977, no. 3: 1)

For Abild, the main idea was that one should “preserve and further develop the active community,” summarized in the concept of “the village environment”. It later appeared that many of the village residents in Heltborg believed that the 72 house lots were too much all at one time. They did not want underdevelopment, i.e., they did not want development to “stagnate”, but on the contrary neither did they desire any “overdevelopment” in the form of “too drastic” development (e.g. Landsbyen, 1977, no. 3: 9ff.).

It appeared that several citizens’ associations were struggling with the same problems as in Heltborg. At this point, the notion of “natural development” was introduced into the L.A.L.’s terminology – a somewhat diffuse concept, the function of which was to communicate the desire to simultaneously protect and further develop. Stand still, and nevertheless move. Seek backwards to the cultural roots, and nevertheless keep up with the modern progress. Accordingly, in dealing with local authorities L.A.L. inspired, ‘ruralized’ village dwellers began to suggest “natural development in the villages”, “natural development of democracy”, “even and calm development”, “a degree of development”, “a reasonable development” which could ensure that [the village] did not slowly die out as an active local community”, etc. etc. 

The problem here was clearly that the idea of a natural development was characterized by an ideologically determined content as part of a new discourse of rurality among the village population. Judging from the many conflicts between the newcomers and the native inhabitants during the last thirty years, such natural this and that had meaning only for the former group, whereby the second group was predominantly skeptical toward the rhetoric of equality and naturalness.

5. Farmer protest versus newcomer protest

At an entirely general level, the rationalization of economic co-operation in the Danish rural districts in the 1960s seemed to have led to greater dependence on people outside the rural district communities, in both economic and cultural terms. Culturally, it was already the case, as mentioned, that the waves of new residents and returnees, who began to settle in the more or less depopulated villages in the late 1960s, stimulated an urbanization process. This identity-oriented urbanization,
or cultural urbanization, derived from the spread of an urban-style world view regarding the good life in the countryside.

As we have seen, there was an effort to actualize this world view – the dream of the active rural community – via certain moral imperatives which were viewed as ‘natural’ (nature, apparently, being valued more in recent years than it ever has been before in history, at least discursively). These imperatives can be classed in terms of three specially unique and nevertheless internally connected concepts: an active citizen concept which touched upon the internal relations in the village (everyone ought to be active); an egalitarianism concept, which also affected the internal relations (everyone ought to be equal); and several concepts which could be summarized by what could be called a ‘victimization syndrome’, and which concerned the external relations (the locals are being repressed by non-local centralists).

Such a new rural dweller identity was – and is – formulated and promoted within and outside the villages by the new network of local activists, typically organized in citizens’ associations, residents’ associations, unofficial village councils, various networks of EU fundraisers etc. During the last 25 years, nationwide organizations such as L.A.L., Landsbyer i Danmark (Villages in Denmark), Landdistrikternes Fællesråd (Joint Council of Rural Districts) and the Folkeligt Institut for Udkantsforhold (Popular Institute for Conditions in Marginal Areas) have contributed to coordinating and organizing these local efforts.

Moreover, my current fieldwork on new rural groups in Denmark traces, how this cultural urbanization process reveals itself in practice. For example, in the village of Hellested on Zealand, new ex-urbanite residents have established a citizens’ association and are in these years trying to revolutionize the community by introducing new rural concepts, centered around words like “green”, “active”, “shared” and the slogan that summarizes this world view – “a whole and active life in a whole and active local community” – as well as introducing new rural strategies, such as workshops, establishment of green areas in the village center, preserving cultural historic places and monuments, the arrangement of a multitude of social events “for all inhabitants”, etc. However, more than in one instance, such urban terminology and practice have involved serious conflicts with the native population – in Hellested as well as in many other villages.

More dramatically seems the confrontations between ex-urbanites and natives in a marginal rural area such as Lolland. Here, quite another urban group consisting of poor uneducated, young families living on public means and attracted by cheap housing, i.e. a kind of new rural proletariat, is increasingly being isolated and stigmatized by the native rural dwellers, who describe the urbanites’ behavior as “chaotic” and “abnormal”, their speech as “unintelligible” and their mentality as “quarrelsome” and “restless” and “not like us at all”. At the same time, native politicians and public servants are using urban expressions, often inspired by L.A.L. and similar organizations, such as “village environment” and “active participation”, although cleansed from Glahn-Marxist undertones.

As such, all contemporary Danish, rural identities can be seen as embedded in – or, at least, influenced by – urban terminology and practice. Furthermore, this process can be traced historically. Thus, several of these cultural urbanization tendencies can be
traced back to agrarian protest movements where, as a supplement to the traditional core expressions, we find the use of terms such as “struggle”, “equality”, “necessity to stand together” and “solidarity”.

Such trade unionist expressions were pervasive in the publications issued by the well-organized agrarian protest movement of the 1930s known as *Landbrugernes Sammenslutning* (Farmers’ Confederation, hereafter known as L.S.). At its height in mid-1932, this rather aggressive interest organization had around 100,000 members, comprising about one-sixth of all Danish farmers (Brogaard, 1965: 18). The trade union aspects were also prominent in L.S.’s successor organization, *Landbrugernes Fællesorganization* (Joint Organization of Farmers, or L.F.O), whose publication, *Landbosamvirke* (“Rural Co-operation”) appearing from 1966, was a means of exerting political pressure and promoting narrow business economic interests.

What was the content of this cultural urbanization, of which L.A.L. was an exponent? Examining, within a comparative perspective, issues of the L.F.O. journal *Landbosamvirke* from the latter half of the 1960s, it is possible to find some kind of answer.

First, it is interesting to observe how the ‘victimization syndrome’ pervaded both *Landsbyen* in the years 1977-78 as well as *Landbosamvirke* during the years 1967-68. Hence, it is characteristic of both L.F.O. and the L.A.L. a decade later that they felt themselves to be victims of an injustice imposed upon them by the outside society. Society had been guilty of “neglect”, as it was said. Furthermore, people in both groups felt that one reason they had been neglected was that they had been too trusting, too yielding toward the remainder of society. Hence, both forms of argumentation contain a more or less understated thesis that the country-dweller had been fooled by the city-dweller, and that it is time to remove the blinders as quickly as possible and demand one’s rights. “We demand compensation”, was thus the persistent slogan within the L.F.O. Hence, a February 1967 editorial entitled “The Situation Is Becoming Acute!” raises the threat of a farmers’ production strike:

> On the part of agriculture, we are again witnessing how the other occupational groups via ultimatum-type demands seek to arrange the economic social structure of the future without taking into consideration the conditions which have dominated in the country’s largest net foreign exchange producing occupation, agriculture. This occupation first enters the picture at a much later moment, where one is so busy speaking of the necessity to exhibit public spiritedness... Time after time, [agriculture] has shown itself willing to show public spiritedness, and it has been very costly for the occupation, both in money, loss of agricultural workers, and in the form of increased labor input. (Landbosamvirke, 1967: 23)

Among both the L.F.O. farmers and the L.A.L. urban-cum-village activists, the demand for compensation (i.e., money) was accompanied by considerable impatience. Both groups felt that they had been tolerant for too long, and that it was getting too late (the clock of ‘The development’ was ticking, and The development was not going in the right direction!). In this connection, both groups viewed themselves as pioneers in a
popular movement and, hence, as representatives for a new and better era. At an October 1968 L.F.O. meeting in Denmark’s second largest city, Aarhus, vice-chairman Alfred Larsen, himself a farmer, declares:

Now the signals must be changed. If the old men [the leaders of the agricultural organizations] will do it, then good. But if they won’t, then a new man must stand on the farmer’s croft, someone who dares to look forward and enter the work for the organization of agriculture, which will be needed by those who remain… Today’s meeting… should portend a new era where farmers are no more to be considered, as before, a pariah caste. Danish agriculture can certainly be worthy of its history. (Landbosamvirke, 1968: 215)

Moreover, it is characteristic that both the L.A.L. and L.F.O. activists felt that the struggle was uneven, especially because the experts were found in the enemy camp. As a counterweight to these false campaigns, one must therefore conduct effective counter campaigns. In both organizations, then, there was an effort to legitimate their words and their messages in the public debate.

So we understand why participants in the October 1968 L.F.O. meeting became so bitter over the lack of media coverage. In the words of a report of the meeting in Landbosamvirke, one could “justifiably not understand that they would not transmit from a meeting where up to a thousand farmers were assembled, when they are always on the spot if just a half-dozen long-hairs and long-bearded left-wingers are running together on a street corner in Copenhagen” (Landbovirke, 1968: 207).

Though there were clear similarities between the peasant protests of the 1960s and the newcomers’ protests of the 1970s, there are nevertheless also decisive differences. Precisely the previously cited expression “the country’s most net foreign exchange generating occupation” seems most clearly to reflect the fundamental difference in the self-understanding of the two groups.

Whereas the newcomer-dominated interest organizations since L.A.L. have demanded economic compensation on the basis of a moral-ethical argument (maintenance of countryside values), L.F.O. concentrated almost exclusively on the economic-physiocratic argument. The other social groups should not – like milking a cow – “fight over milking the Danish farmers”, simply because they could not afford it (Landbosamvirke, 1967: 116). It was socio-economically demonstrable that the entire society “needed” agriculture, such that farmers were and became society’s most important provider or - as it was often expressed - “pillar of society” (Landbosamvirke, 1967: 193, 167).

It was thus the simple urge for survival that the farmers in Landbrugernes Sammenslutning (Confederation of Farmers or L.S.) and subsequently in Landbrugernes Fællesorganization (Joint Organization of Farmers or L.F.O.) found themselves inspired by the workers’ movements of the cities, or as member of L.S.’s organizational committee, the farmer A. Hartel (1934: 22), expressed it in 1934: “to follow the same occupational path which had advanced the workers’ estate”. However, Hartel added remarks about a “change in mentality”: “Only reluctantly will the liberal brought up
and thinking peasant acquire those obligations which follow with membership in a trade union: solidarity, discipline and economic sacrifice”.

Thus the farmers, steeped into their own self-understanding, continued on the path of duty (not at all adopting the ‘craving mentality’ belonging to the urban population!). They were still in possession of a traditional rural identity, they were “uncontaminated” by urban culture. They continued to, as it was often expressed, “exhibit public spiritedness”, though this willingness to sacrifice continued to be grossly exploited by the rest of society, led by the industrial occupations and the growing group of functionaries in what was seen during the latter half of the 1960s as “the dance around the golden calf” (Landbosamvirke, 1967: 163). Nor on the part of the politicians could one find any understanding. Thus, the L.F.O. activists and several other farmers believed that they could be made “scapegoats” for an overheated economy which was caused by the other social groups’ dance around the golden calf and not by the massive state subsidies given to Danish farmers (Landbosamvirke, 1967: 47).

That the farmers did not desire to be lumped together with socially revolutionary, left-wing urban protesters, is also indicated in the minutes of the meeting held in Aarhus in October 1968. Significantly enough, this struggle over words at the meeting was followed by a protest demonstration heading for a television studio in Aarhus, where an appeal was delivered to the press protesting the lack of coverage by journalists and the farmers’ subsequent bitterness about being “silenced” (Landbosamvirke, 1968: 203).

In Landbosamvirke, the report of the meeting repeatedly mentions that “everything took place in calm and dignity”, that “the traffic regulations were respected and that the farmers walked “two by two” in perfect order, etc (Landbosamvirke, 1968: 203). At this point, however, the L.F.O. people were surrounded by (negatively-oriented) journalists, which in Landbosamvirke was found to be “significant indeed”:

[Now] where there was a bit of sensation in the air, the press showed up. The cameras flashed and the pens gave off sparks. It was thus the sensation which is needed in the society of our day. We have to learn more from this if we want to be heard. We are simply much too nice people. (Landbosamvirke, 1968: 203)

6. Theory effects

The protesting farmers thus believed that on the basis of an economic argument about agriculture as ‘the most important net foreign exchange earning occupation’, that they had a demand for compensation, an argument still popular today.5

The rationalization of local workplaces (and hereby also the social meeting places), however, meant that the non-agriculturalists among the Danish rural population gradually obtained a potential legitimating problem towards the Danish state, which since the early 1960s had increasingly transferred subsidies to the rural communities in the form of price supports for agricultural production, regional development subsidies and similar programs directed towards what could be rightly called Denmark’s
‘domestically underdeveloped population’, i.e., those living in the countryside (Svendsen, 2001).

Since the 1960s, the rural population seems not to have been able to manage on their own, especially in pure economic terms. This general lack of economic sustainability has meant that the argument about the Danish rural population as indispensable breadwinners and – as derived from this – important “cultural bearers” has gradually lost its importance.

What arguments can the rural dwellers instead marshal to steadily obtain a part of the welfare resources from the Danish state and from the EU? A newcomer-dominated and interest-group like association such as L.A.L. had already found a solution to the problem in the 1970s: the rural dwellers should systematically and continually conduct a symbolic struggle in the public debate. By utilizing slogans as weapons, they could legitimate a new rural dweller identity which they could ultimately capitalize upon. The result is a new message: society (including the EU) has a moral duty to provide for the rural populations. I.e., the direct opposite of what had formerly been the predominant view among the protesting farmer-dominated population in the rural areas who were, themselves, providing for the rest of society.

In contrast to the era before 1970, the locally based, economic self-organization in the Danish countryside has been definitively abandoned. Now words like “natural”, “environment”, “equality”, “local democracy”, “cultural values”, “active community” and “well-being” play a central role for the new, powerful networks in the rural areas, paralleling the importance of “structural changes”, “vertical integration” and “rationalization” for the farmers of the 1960s, perhaps even a greater role. It thus seems primarily to be the very rhetoric, the concepts, which must act to release funds from the various public support schemes doled out by the surrounding society and hereby bring the rural population closer to their objective: the right to development.

Did this morally based, symbolic struggle have any effect on the political decision-making processes after 1970? Judging from the millions of DDK in Danish state funds released for regional development from 1970 to 1980 (cf. Figure 3), the campaign appears to have been successful. An even more concrete outcome of pressure from L.A.L. and kindred organizations is the establishment of the so-called Rural District Foundation (Landdistriktspuljen) in 1994 – a permanent foundation that, following the homepage of the Ministry of the Interior, was aimed to “improve the possibilities of development in the rural areas”, and which was allocated 22 million DKK in 2001.

[Figure 3: Regional development (egnsudvikling) in Denmark, total project expenditures 1970-1980 in millions of DKK.
Source: Annual reports from Regional Development Council (Egnsudviklingsrådet)]

Even more important, however, it appears that the L.A.L.’s formulations in fact slipped into the public debate and hereby obtained a permanent impact on the political agenda; “the right to development” and the associated rhetoric came to be normal and natural concepts in the state production of knowledge, visible, for example, in the publications of the Danish Institute for Social Research (Socialforskningsinstituttet), in
proposals, white papers, political agendas, etc. This seemed to be the case, for example, with the “active citizen” imperative, the idea of an egalitarian community and the thesis of “natural development” (implying the ‘victimization syndrome’). Another example is the Developmental Center for Popular Enlightenment and Adult Education (Udviklingscentret for Folkeoplysning og Voksenundervisning), founded in 1986 with the purpose of evaluating the “10-point program” for adult education and popular enlightenment. The first results from the centres’ evaluation of the DKK 133.6 million 10-point program was published in the report At overskrider grænser (Crossing boundaries), which according to an observer could just as well have had the title, “back to the local community” (Korsgaard 1997: 431). Here it was concluded that the trend is “heading back in the direction toward the community of neighbourhood and family” (ibid.). At a more general level, the new ideas were reflected in the Law on Leisure Time implemented in 1970, and which in reality was a law on subsidies for recreational activities.

However, it is important to add here that not all rural dwellers have taken the new terminology to their hearts although, obviously, they cannot possibly avoid making up their minds about it. One typical example is the already mentioned village of Hellested in Stevns, a rural area south of Copenhagen on Zealand. Here, the board of the citizens’ association – mainly consisting of newcomers from Copenhagen – apply a characteristic L.A.L. inspired rhetoric, whereas the indigenous people are clearly skeptical when listening to all these rather academic (although powerful, it is acknowledged!) words. Examples are the poor local participation in a workshop arranged by the citizens’ association – a DKK 100,000 project funded by the above mentioned Landdistriktpulje and starring L.A.L.’s former vice-chairman and chairman Ole Glahn as guest speaker. Or the hostile attitude among the indigenous people against the boards’ plans of allocating land to spare-time small-holders in order to attract new settlers from the urban areas. At this point, the natives clearly feel that their village is being ‘taken over’ by invaders from the Copenhagen area.

[Figure 4: “Life in the village” (Liv i landsbyen). Illustration and slogan in connection with a list of state subsidies and other funding of new rural initiatives, addressed to L.A.L. fundraisers.

Such local antipathy against new formulations of rural identity and reality, as we witness in Hellested, often involves conflicts between urban thinking and agrarian thinking groups – the first one verbalizing rurality within a non-agriculturalist, the other within a modernist-agriculturalist conceptual universe, although, as has already been mentioned, with clear overlaps.

So we see that, since the latter half of the 1970s, the L.A.L. activists and their associates have increasingly challenged the farmers’ way of conceiving and expressing rurality and rural life. As such, they have to a great extent succeeded in molding the public debate in Denmark and thereby in legitimating their own world view in the public space with the possibility to harvest the various forms of profits which followed. For sure, at the beginning of the new millennium, rural non-agriculturalist organizations like
L.A.L. tend to resemble more and more well-organized interest groups, the main purpose of which is to obtain state subsidies for their members – a tendency that is reflected on the L.A.L. homepage May 2002 (cf. Figure 4). What did not completely succeed for the protesting farmers in the 1930s and 1960s seems to have completely succeeded for the newcomers and returnees since the 1970s.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued for the existence of two distinct discourses of rurality in Denmark since World War II. These discourses have had significant influence on the identities and realities of the Danish rural population and, consequently, on human practice.

The first one was termed the agriculturalist discourse of rurality. Although still important today, its almost hegemonic power peaked during the 1960s. Based on key-words, such as structural changes, structural development, vertical integration, rationalization and centralization, it mainly served to enhance production interests of farmers. However, since 1970 this agrarian terminology has been increasingly challenged by a second that can be termed: the non-agriculturalist discourse of rurality. This terminology bases on key-words, such as community, culture, active citizenship and environment. It mainly belongs to newcomers in the Danish villages – often well educated people, who want to promote recreational, environmental and local political interests, not seldom at the expense of the interests of farmers.

The main purpose of the paper was to shed light on the construction of the non-agriculturalist conceptual universe during the 1970s. At that time, a non-agrarian village community movement took form, inspired by the red-green terminology prevailing at the Danish universities. More specifically, it has been shown how this new discourse of rurality was developed and promoted by the national-wide organization The National Confederation of Village Communities (Landssammenslutningen af Landsbysamfund or L.A.L.) that had been established in 1976. Thus, from the late 1970s, members of this organization contributed to build and apply a peculiar L.A.L. vocabulary in their journal Landsbyen (“The village”). Finally, it was shown how important elements of this L.A.L. terminology later was to be disseminated among the population, and how this involved real effects on rural identities and realities at the local level, as well as on rural political debates and agendas at the national level.

References

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1 An illuminating example here is the word “structural changes” that was invented in the 1920s and developed in a debate in The American Economic Review during the 1930s. Especially after World War II, it was finally adopted as a key-word in agriculturalist discourses in Western European countries like Denmark, translated into “strukturendringer” (Danish), “Agrarstrukturwandel” (German), “changement
structurel” (French), etc. (cf. Svendsen, 2002a).

2 I have encountered 30 of such reports and books published in the 1970s, here not even including a large number of publications on other rural issues, but with a similar rhetoric.

3 In presenting the very first issue of Landsbyen, one senses this degree of difference between the two. For example, Glahn explicitly characterizes the association as a tool for political pressure: “Through the National Confederation we can spread our ideas and experiences and thereby alter the course of development, among other things by influencing the politicians” (Ole Glahn cited in Landsbyen, 1977, no. 1, p. 3).

4 “Agriculture cannot continue to be served by professors, wise men [expert advisors] and other theoreticians unilaterally asserting that the Danish social household can do without the occupation of agriculture, since the opposite is undoubtedly the case” (Landbosamvirke, 1968, p. 143).

5 This can be seen, for example, in a supplement section to the national daily newspaper Jyllandsposten (May 5th, 2001) entitled “Agriculture over All Borders”. The supplement, published by the Danish Agriculture Council (Landbrugsrådet), was clearly an attempt to give Danish agriculture a better image among the population.