



Alternative countrysides: Anthropological approaches to rural Western Europe today

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This volume takes a fresh anthropological look at a central but neglected topic: the profound changes in rural life throughout Western Europe today. As locals leave for jobs in cities, they are replaced by a variety of incomers including neo-hippies, lifestyle-seekers, eco-activists and rural labour migrants from beyond the EU. Contributors to this book examine the consequences of these major shifts in rural populations, and analyse the creation of new modes of living rurally and emerging forms of social organisation. As incomers' dreams come face to face with residents' realities, they detail the clashes, the misunderstandings and the forms of cooperation between groups of old and new residents.

The essays within this book provide detailed ethnographic examinations, drawn from areas in Ireland, France, Spain, the Basque Country and Italy, of the unexpected, myriad ways in which contemporary rural life is developing. The contributions critically investigate regionalists' politicisation of rural life, rurality and heritage, and discuss the ways locals take advantage of EU monies to prop up existing hierarchies, or to challenge them profoundly. By making us rethink 'the rural', they reconceptualise the encounter of the rural and the urban. Written by an international collection of well-established social anthropologists, the studies reveal the power of a 'bottom-up' approach. They expose the on-the-ground consequences of and reactions to grand EU-restructuring policies, which at times threaten to turn the countryside into a manicured playground for escapee urbanites.

As a novel, significant contribution to our understanding of rural lives in Western Europe today, this book will appeal to academics and students in anthropology, migrations studies, human geography and rural sociology.

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