

# **Multifunctional Agriculture**

## **A Transition Theory Perspective**

*This page intentionally left blank*

# **Multifunctional Agriculture**

## **A Transition Theory Perspective**

**Geoff A. Wilson**



**CABI is a trading name of CAB International**

CABI Head Office  
Nosworthy Way  
Wallingford  
Oxfordshire OX10 8DE  
UK

CABI North American Office  
875 Massachusetts Avenue  
7th Floor  
Cambridge, MA 02139  
USA

Tel: +44 (0)1491 832111  
Fax: +44 (0)1491 833508  
E-mail: [cabi@cabi.org](mailto:cabi@cabi.org)  
Website: [www.cabi.org](http://www.cabi.org)

Tel: +1 617 395 4056  
Fax: +1 617 354 6875  
E-mail: [cabi-nao@cabi.org](mailto:cabi-nao@cabi.org)

© G.A. Wilson 2007. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronically, mechanically, by photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owners.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library, London, UK.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

ISBN: 978 1 84593 256 5

Printed and bound in the UK by Cromwell Press, Trowbridge, from copy supplied by the author.

# Contents

<b>List of tables and figures</b>	viii
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	ix
<b>List of abbreviations</b>	x
<b>1. Introduction</b>	1
1.1 A changing agriculture	2
1.2 Agricultural systems in transition: from productivism to post-productivism to multifunctionality?	3
1.3 Aims of the book: conceptualising multifunctional agriculture	6
1.4 Structure of the book	9
<b>Part 1 Conceptualising transition</b>	
<b>2. Theorising transition</b>	12
2.1 Introduction	12
2.2 Transition theory – theorising transition	12
2.3 Models of transition	15
2.4 Conclusions	20
<b>3. Transitions: social and natural science debates</b>	21
3.1 Introduction	21
3.2 Transitions from ‘isms’ to ‘post-isms’: insights into the debates	22
3.2.1 Fordism to post-Fordism	22
3.2.2 Socialism to post-socialism	26
3.2.3 Modernism to post-modernism	28
3.2.4 Colonialism to post-colonialism	30
3.3 Demographic, technological, environmentalist and evolutionary transitions	32
3.3.1 The demographic transition model	33
3.3.2 Technological transition	34
3.3.3 The transition towards environmentalism	37
3.3.4 Biological evolution theory	38
3.4 Transition theory and Cartesian dualistic thinking	41
3.5 Conclusions	42
<b>4. Reconceptualising transition: the complexity of transitory systems</b>	43
4.1 Introduction	43
4.2 Temporal linearity or non-linearity?	44
4.3 Spatial homogeneity or heterogeneity?	54
4.4 Global universality or complexity?	61
4.5 Structural causality or structure-agency inconsistency?	67
4.6 Applying transition theory to the evolution of agricultural systems	76
4.7 Conclusions	78

## **Part 2 From productivist to post-productivist agriculture ... and back again?**

<b>5. Productivist agriculture</b>	80
5.1 Introduction	80
5.2 Approaches underlying conceptualisations of the productivist/post-productivist transition	81
5.2.1 The genesis of debates	81
5.2.2 The temporal dimension of the 'era' of productivism	82
5.2.3 The UK-centrism underlying the p/pp transition model	82
5.2.4 Political economy and structuralist conceptualisations	85
5.2.5 Presentist interpretations of productivism as a form of modernity	85
5.3 The seven dimensions of productivist agriculture	86
5.4 Conclusions	95
<b>6. Post-productivist agriculture</b>	97
6.1 Introduction	97
6.2 Conceptualising post-productivism	97
6.3 The seven dimensions of post-productivist agriculture	101
6.4 Conceptualising the transition towards post-productivism	110
6.5 Conclusions	112
<b>7. 'Post-productivism' or 'non-productivism'?</b>	113
7.1 Introduction	113
7.2 Scientific critiques of the productivism/post-productivism transition model	113
7.3 Transition theory and the four fallacies of the productivism/post-productivism transition model	118
7.3.1 Transition theory and the post-productivist transition	118
7.3.2 Discursive barriers, UK-centrism and 'exporting' the post-productivist concept	119
7.3.3 The fallacy of temporal linearity	121
7.3.4 The fallacy of spatial homogeneity	142
7.3.5 The fallacy of global universality	148
7.3.6 The fallacy of structural causality	160
7.4 The productivist/non-productivist spectrum of decision-making	171
7.4.1 Deconstructing post-productivism	171
7.4.2 Towards a revised transition model: the productivism/ <i>non-productivism</i> spectrum	173
7.5 Conclusions	176

## **Part 3 Conceptualising multifunctional agricultural transitions**

<b>8. Contemporary conceptualisations of multifunctionality</b>	179
8.1 Introduction	179
8.2 Multifunctionality	180
8.2.1 The emergence of 'multifunctionality'	180
8.2.2 The genesis of the notion of 'multifunctional agriculture'	182
8.3 Current conceptualisations of multifunctional agriculture	185
8.3.1 Definitions	186
8.3.2 The economic view	189

8.3.3 The policy-based view	192
8.3.4 Holistic interpretations	197
8.4 Cultural interpretations and the spatiality of the multifunctionality concept: neo-liberalism, trade issues and political retrenchment	202
8.5 Multifunctionality and (the lack of) theory	207
8.5.1 The early appropriation of multifunctionality by policy-makers	208
8.5.2 The weakly theorised nature of multifunctionality debates	209
8.6 Conclusions	211
<b>9. (Re)conceptualising multifunctionality</b>	<b>213</b>
9.1 Introduction	213
9.2 Multifunctionality and the productivist/non-productivist boundaries of decision-making	214
9.2.1 Reconceptualising multifunctionality	214
9.2.2 How does the multifunctionality spectrum differ from other conceptualisations of multifunctionality?	218
9.2.3 The multifunctionality spectrum: conceptual implications	221
9.3 Multifunctionality and the boundaries of ‘agriculture’	223
9.4 Weak, moderate and strong multifunctionality: a normative view	227
9.4.1 Conceptualising ‘weak’, ‘moderate’ and ‘strong’ multifunctionality	228
9.4.2 Farming systems and the multifunctionality spectrum	240
9.4.3 Policy and strong multifunctionality	247
9.5 The geography of multifunctionality	254
9.5.1 The spatial scales of multifunctionality	255
9.5.2 Nested hierarchies: the ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ expressions of multifunctionality	263
9.5.3 Global level multifunctionality?	266
9.6 Conclusions	269
<b>10. Multifunctional agricultural transitions</b>	<b>271</b>
10.1 Introduction	271
10.2 Exploring transitional potential: constraints and opportunities for multifunctional decision-making pathways	271
10.3 Multifunctional transitions at farm level	283
10.3.1 Path dependency, system memory and farm-level multifunctional transitions: some conceptual issues	284
10.3.2 Farm-level multifunctional transitions: two hypothetical examples	292
10.4 Managing transitions	297
10.4.1 Conceptualising multifunctional agricultural transitions over time	298
10.4.2 Managing multifunctional agricultural transitions	306
10.5 Conclusions	319
<b>11. Conclusions</b>	<b>321</b>
11.1 What this book has attempted to do	321
11.2 How this book can serve as a platform for future research	323
11.3 And finally: throwing down the gauntlet ...	327
<b>References</b>	<b>329</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>363</b>

# List of tables and figures

## Tables

Table 5.1.	Dimensions of productivism	87
Table 6.1.	Dimensions of post-productivism	99

## Figures

Figure 2.1.	The six basic models of transition	15
Figure 2.2.	S-shaped stepped transition model	19
Figure 2.3.	Linear-Deleuzian transition	19
Figure 6.1.	The productivism/post-productivism transition model	111
Figure 7.1.	Temporally simultaneous productivist and post-productivist transitional pathways	139
Figure 7.2.	The productivist trough	142
Figure 7.3.	The productivism/non-productivism spectrum of decision-making	175
Figure 7.4.	Transitional fallacies and the productivism/non-productivism spectrum	176
Figure 9.1.	Multifunctionality and the productivism/non-productivism spectrum of decision-making	214
Figure 9.2.	Deleuzian transitional pathways and the multifunctionality spectrum	223
Figure 9.3.	Multifunctional agricultural and rural spaces	224
Figure 9.4.	Weak, moderate and strong multifunctionality	229
Figure 9.5.	Multifunctional quality and farm diversification pathways	231
Figure 9.6.	Policy and the multifunctionality spectrum	249
Figure 9.7.	Spatial scales and the nested hierarchies of multifunctionality	256
Figure 10.1.	Funnel diagram and the adoption of strong multifunctionality decision-making pathways	272
Figure 10.2.	Multifunctionality decision-making funnel for different farm types	273
Figure 10.3.	Multifunctionality decision-making funnel for different farm ownership types	278
Figure 10.4.	Multifunctionality decision-making funnel for different country clusters	279
Figure 10.5.	Multifunctional farm-level transitional trajectories	284
Figure 10.6.	Multifunctional transitional trajectories (Farm X)	285
Figure 10.7.	Transitional shifts, decision-making corridors and transitional ruptures	288
Figure 10.8.	Multifunctional transitional trajectories (Farm Y)	295
Figure 10.9.	Corridors of multifunctional decision-making pathways over time in the developing world	300
Figure 10.10.	Corridors of multifunctional decision-making pathways over time in the developed world	301
Figure 10.11.	Corridors of multifunctional decision-making pathways in Western Europe <i>ca.</i> AD 1500-2150	303

# Acknowledgements

Ideas contained in this book can be traced back many years and are, therefore, bound to leave a long trail of intellectual and other debts. In particular, a book that focuses on thoughts, ideas and theories can not be successfully written without the help of many individuals who have critically commented on various aspects of the book.

My biggest debt of gratitude is to my wife Olivia Wilson who supported this book project throughout, had to endure my long ‘absences’ while writing, who was asked regularly to comment on lines of thought developed in the book, and who gave crucial editorial advice on the final draft. Special thanks are also due to Clive Potter who provided invaluable constructive criticism on conceptual issues developed in Part 3, to Karlheinz Knickel who critically commented on approaches used in the book, and to Jonathan Rigg for comments on issues related to agricultural change in developing countries. One of my biggest debts of gratitude is to Jacqui Dibden who not only unearthed important materials on multifunctionality, but also commented critically and enthusiastically on ideas developed here. I also wish to thank Peter Shanahan for crucial help with bibliographical searches. During stages of writing, this book also benefited from intellectual support and critical comments from various academics and friends including, in particular, Raymond Bryant, Rob Burton, Richard Perkins, Chris Cocklin, Michael Redclift, James Sidaway, Peter Wilson and Jochen Kantelhardt. Thanks also to my PhD student Rob Hopkins whose work on energy descent pathways has informed some of the conceptual ideas developed in Part 3.

Ideas for this book were also tested at various conferences, seminars and workshops, and I am grateful to all those who commented critically and asked probing questions. This includes the many people who attended my inaugural lecture in 2004 (University of Plymouth, UK) in which the idea of a multifunctionality framework was first exposed to critical scrutiny, but also the 2004 Environmental Economic Geography workshop at the University of Köln (Germany), the 2004 conference of the International Geographical Union (Glasgow, UK), the 2004 Anglo-German Rural Geographers meeting at the University of Exeter (UK), the rural research workshop at the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie (Berlin, Germany) in 2005, and the 2006 Anglo-French Rural Geographers meeting in Vichy (France) where ideas from Chapters 9 and 10 were exposed to critical scrutiny for the first time.

A book like this can not be written without the supportive environment of research-led institutions that also reward ‘blue sky’ research not linked to the generation of overhead income. I, therefore, both wish to thank the Department of Geography at King’s College London (where the first part of this book was written) and the School of Geography at the University of Plymouth for providing academically stimulating work environments and, in particular, for enabling me to find the time beyond the duties of teaching and administration to successfully complete this book.

I am also indebted to staff at the cartographic unit of the School of Geography (University of Plymouth), in particular Brian Rodgers who produced the 26 figures and who patiently addressed regular suggestions for changes to these figures as the conceptual framework gradually unfolded. I would also like to thank my editor Nigel Farrar for help with editorial aspects, but also for rigidly enforcing a maximum length for this book which has led to a much sharper and more succinct storyline. I am also indebted to Tracy Ehrlich for help with preparing the camera-ready copy.

Finally, I also wish to acknowledge the beautiful landscape of south Devon where I and my family live, which has not only invited me to take relaxing breaks along the coastal footpaths while writing, but which has also greatly inspired me to think about the challenges of agricultural and rural transitions in a strongly multifunctional rural setting.

# List of abbreviations

AEP	Agri-environmental policy
BML	Bundesministerium für Ernährung Landwirtschaft und Forsten (Germany)
BSE	Bovine spongiform encephalopathy
BVEL	Bundesministerium für Verbraucherschutz, Ernährung und Landwirtschaft (Germany)
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy (EU)
DEFRA	Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (UK)
EEC	European Economic Community
ESA scheme	Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme (EU)
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
GAEC	Good agricultural and environmental condition
GATT	Global Agreements on Tariffs and Trade
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GM crops	Genetically modified crops
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
MAFF	Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (UK)
NCOs	Non-commodity outputs
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
p/np	productivist/non-productivist
p/pp	productivist/post-productivist
RDR	Rural Development Regulation (EU)
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (UK)
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Policies
SFPs	Single Farm Payments (EU)
UK	United Kingdom
URAA	Uruguay Round Agreement on Agricultural Trade
USA	United States of America
WTO	World Trade Organisation

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This book has emerged out of two key arenas of concern that have influenced recent research and thinking on conceptualisations of agricultural and rural change. The first is a growing dissatisfaction with the uncritical and weakly theorised use of the notion of ‘multifunctionality’ in contemporary debates on agricultural change. The last 20 years or so have seen the use of this term in a wide variety of contexts, spanning a wide spectrum of proponents from policy-makers to rural stakeholder groups and from politicians to non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Yet, none of these debates has shed sufficient light on *what* the notion of multifunctionality implies, *who* the beneficiaries should be and *how* it ought to be put into practice – in other words, the notion of ‘multifunctionality’ has remained undertheorised and poorly linked to wider debates in the social sciences. The second issue revolves around a growing dissatisfaction with the proposed transition from ‘productivist’ to ‘post-productivist’ agriculture. Although there is growing criticism of this postulated transition, it is assumed by many that agricultural systems *have* moved to a post-productivist era, and that we are now firmly embedded in this new ‘post-ism’ that has left the legacy of environmental degradation and agro-business orientation of the previous productivist model behind. Yet, many studies have highlighted that there is little empirical evidence to support the notion of a transition towards post-productivism.

The aim of this book is to bring these two seemingly separate concerns together by (re)conceptualising agricultural change from a transition theory perspective. First, I will analyse to what extent the reductionist notion of a proposed transition towards post-productivist agriculture holds up to scientific scrutiny and propose a *modified productivist/non-productivist model* that better encapsulates the complexity of contemporary agricultural and rural change. Second, I will *theoretically anchor* the notion of ‘multifunctionality’ within these debates and will, for the first time, conceptualise multifunctionality as a transitional process of agricultural/rural change embedded in a spectrum bounded by *productivist* and *non-productivist* actor spaces. I will highlight that only by linking these different arenas of investigation can the notion of multifunctionality begin to make sense and, eventually, become a robust and tangible *normative* concept to be used by decision-makers at various spatial scales to protect, shape and change contemporary agricultural and rural spaces. Third, I also wish to use the new framework as the basis for a *plaidoyer* against economic interpretation of multifunctionality simply as an ‘externality’ issue, against the predominant productivist agri-business model that continues to dominate agriculture in advanced economies and that increasingly influences agricultural practices in the developing world, and against the globalisation of agro-commodity chains that, in my view, weakens global agricultural multifunctionality pathways.

## 1.1 A changing agriculture

Ever since humans embarked on the domestication of plants and animals some 10,000 years ago, agriculture has gone through fundamental changes. Such changes have been associated with changing technologies, changing attitudes, and with changing food markets and consumer demand. The invention of the plough about 3000 years ago, for example, allowed the planting of previously unusable areas, resulting in the rapid spread of agriculture into large and often densely forested regions. Mechanisation of agriculture from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, together with the increasing globalised nature of agro-commodity chains, meanwhile, enabled much more efficient and labour-saving forms of agricultural production, resulting in ‘industrial’ agriculture often characterised by mass production of uniform and standardised food products (Mazoyer and Roudart, 2006). Such changes, and many others that agriculture has experienced over thousands of years, have been fundamental and arguably even ‘revolutionary’. However, some researchers are arguing that these processes pale into insignificance when compared with changes that have occurred since the Second World War, and that developments over the past 50 years have been more dramatic and far-reaching than anything that affected agricultural production in previous millennia (Mannion, 1995). Some commentators even argue that we are facing the end of conventional ‘agriculture’ that had, as its sole purpose, the production of food and fibre, and that a new agricultural regime may be emerging that has much wider purposes, including the ‘production’ of nature and new spaces for leisure (Braun and Castree, 1998), and that sees the modern farmer as a person who is as much an environmental manager as a producer of food and fibre (Marsden, 1999a).

The purpose of this book is to analyse this recent *transition* from agriculture as a producer of food and fibre to that of agriculture as a producer of what has been termed *multifunctional* products and spaces – a transition that goes well beyond traditional understandings of what ‘agriculture’ is about. I will argue throughout this book, that we may be at a crucial threshold in human interaction with the countryside and agricultural production, as, for the first time, a new *consciously orchestrated* multifunctional agriculture may begin to take shape in both the developed and developing world. As Marsden (2003: ix) emphasised, “to say that the nature of agriculture, and its role in rural development is at something of a crossroads is both to understate and to reaffirm many of the debates that have been articulated in both academic and policy-making circles for more than a decade”. Before analysing the possible emergence of *multifunctional agriculture*, we will need to investigate the nature and pace of this possible transition. The underlying theme of this book will, therefore, be focusing on understanding ‘transition’, both from a theoretical and practical vantage point. I will place particular emphasis on recent debates surrounding the notion of a possible transition from a *productivist* to a *post-productivist* era over the past 50 years – debates that have particularly dominated theorisations of agricultural and rural issues in the English-speaking world since the late 1980s. I will argue throughout that the conceptualisation of multifunctional agriculture is only possible when considered against the background of debates on the transition to post-productivism.

Although ‘multifunctionality’ in agriculture has been discussed for decades as an emerging issue, these discussions have focused largely on policy change, macro-economic considerations and the economics of farming, and have remained relatively uncritical and, in my view, atheoretical. As a result, ‘multifunctionality’ currently means different things to different people (similar to the notion of sustainability) and has, so far at least, only had limited policy relevance as it lacks a thoroughly grounded widely acceptable conceptualisation. I will, therefore, argue that only by contextualising multifunctionality in the context of debates on the transition from productivism to post-productivism will it be possible, first, to understand what multifunctional agriculture is about, and, second, to anchor the notion of multifunctionality theoretically in the context of agricultural change. If this is done successfully, then I hope that this book will also contribute towards making the notion

of ‘multifunctional agriculture’ a more conceptually grounded – and therefore more policy-relevant – term than it is at present.

## 1.2 Agricultural systems in transition: from productivism to post-productivism to multifunctionality?

Over the last 50 years or so, global agriculture has witnessed profound changes in food and fibre production, actor spaces, policy frameworks, food regimes, ideologies, and impacts on the environment. Food production has increased dramatically so that today more than six billion people can, in theory at least, be adequately fed. Many agricultural systems have also seen dramatic structural upheavals, including the rapid decline in agricultural workforce in most advanced economies, with the concurrent destabilisation and restructuring of many rural communities. This has been accompanied by the substitution of subsistence farming patterns with cash crop production for export in many regions of the developing world, and the concurrent dismantling of often sustainable traditional farming systems. This has also led to an overall increase in environmental degradation linked to over-intensive agriculture. As Pretty (2002: xi) reminded us, “something is wrong with our agricultural and food systems”, best exemplified by nearly 2 billion hectares of land worldwide now classified as heavily degraded (Wilson and Juntti, 2005). In recent years, much theoretical and conceptual work has attempted to understand these changes, both in the developed and developing world. Indeed, in the Anglo-American context, the last 20 years have seen the emergence of some of the most interesting and challenging theoretical debates about the nature, changes and future trajectories of modern agricultural and rural systems from a variety of economic, social, political and environmental stances.

The most powerful theoretical concept to emerge has been the notion that modern agriculture has moved from a *productivist* to a *post-productivist* era (Cloke and Goodwin, 1992; Marsden *et al.*, 1993). Holmes (2006: 143) argued that the concept of the post-productivist transition is “currently the only overarching conceptualization of the rural transition”. From an advanced economies perspective, the productivist era has been described as lasting from the end of the Second World War to about 1985. It has been broadly characterised as a period when the main preoccupation of agriculture was maximum food production to ensure national or regional self-sufficiency, as a time when agriculture held a central ‘hegemonic’ position in society, and as an era characterised by a small but powerful and tight-knit agricultural policy community. In addition, productivism has seen a ‘strong’ state with predominantly top-down policy-making structures, and with farming techniques that have often relied on the application of high external inputs and the use of heavy machinery that have caused severe environmental degradation in intensively farmed regions. In developing countries, the ‘productivist’ era is often allied to a concern with achieving ‘food security’. In the 1960s and 1970s in particular, and reflecting the general Malthusian pessimism of the time, notions of food security in developing countries were couched in highly productivist terms (Wilson and Rigg, 2003).

For some advanced economies, it has been argued that the transition to a *post-productivist era* began in the 1980s and has lasted to the present day (Mather *et al.*, 2006). As Chapter 6 will highlight, post-productivism has generally been seen as the ‘mirror-image’ of productivism. Thus, for advanced economies, post-productivist agriculture has been characterised by: a reduction in the intensity of farming through extensification, diversification and dispersion of agricultural production; an associated move away from agricultural production towards ‘consumption’ of the countryside; the loss of the central position of agriculture in society characterised by ‘contested’ countrysides; a widening of the agricultural community to include formerly marginal actors at the core of the policy-making process; and a weakening of the state role in policy-making powers with a more inclusive

model of governance that also includes grassroots actors. Simultaneously, farming techniques in the post-productivist era are seen to be more in tune with environmental protection through reduced application (or total abandonment) of external inputs (e.g. organic farming). During the post-productivist era the main threats to the countryside are generally perceived to be agriculture itself rather than urban or industrial development.

Issues surrounding the transition from productivism to post-productivism have also recently been highlighted by work that has attempted to assess how applicable this transition is outside the UK. Seminal works include Holmes' (2002, 2006) and Argent's (2002) analyses of the applicability of the concept of post-productivism in the Australian context, Jay's (2004) work in New Zealand, and recent work on the 'transferability' of the concept to the European situation (Wilson, 2002). Reference to 'productivism' and 'post-productivism' is now burgeoning in the context of agricultural and rural research in advanced economies to such an extent that for some it is becoming the accepted orthodoxy for conceptualising recent agricultural change (e.g. Ilbery and Bowler, 1998). Post-productivist theorisations of agricultural change have risen to such prominence that they have prompted Roche (2003, 2005), in recent reviews of 'rural geography' in *Progress in Human Geography*, to situate research on 'rethinking post-productivist rural spaces' as one of the key themes preoccupying rural scholars at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As this book will amply demonstrate, there is an inherent danger in uncritically accepting such seemingly 'straightforward' and 'linear' concepts of societal change (see Chapter 7 in particular), echoing Evans *et al.*'s (2002: 325) critique that "given the discussion in rural geography on the use of dualistic notions of Fordism and post-Fordism, it is rather surprising that a similar debate and critique has not been forthcoming in relation to the notion of a shift from 'productivism' to 'post-productivism'. The commonality of the term's usage is matched conversely by minimal theoretical contouring". For developing countries, meanwhile, Sen's (1981) work echoed debates that emerged in advanced economies surrounding the notion of a transition to post-productivism. Sen's work on famine, for example, led to increased nuancing and locally grounded definitions of 'food security', emphasising household food security and food systems. Arguably, by the end of the 1990s a 'post-productivist' view may have emerged for some developing countries that emphasised the multiple and shifting ways with which individuals and households achieve food security. Thus, food security in the South has moved from the global and the national scale to the household and the individual, from a food to a livelihoods perspective, from objective indicators to subjective perception, and from production to 'consumption' of the countryside (Wilson and Rigg, 2003).

In this book, I will refer to this postulated transition as the **productivist/post-productivist transition model** (hereafter the 'p/pp transition' or 'p/pp model'). Debates on the possible applicability of this model have undoubtedly added an interesting new conceptual dimension to agricultural/rural research – a field that was, for a long time, seen as having relatively static theorisations of agricultural and rural change (Cloke, 1989; Buttel *et al.*, 1990). Marsden (2003: 100) argued that these debates have shown "the utility of theory for guiding research, policy and more effective interpretation of the contemporary rural economy". In particular, debates on the p/pp transition have brought together a wide array of researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds including rural studies, geography, history, sociology, economics or social psychology, to name but a few (e.g. Buttel *et al.*, 1990; Van der Ploeg, 2003). Yet, several years after the first widely publicised discussions of a shift towards post-productivism, and at a time when further profound changes in agricultural/rural arenas at local, national and global scales are taking place, it is time to re-evaluate existing conceptualisations (Goodman, 2004). Such a re-evaluation is particularly important in light of the almost ubiquitous (and relatively uncritical) use of the term '**multifunctional agriculture**' in both academic and policy-related literature. As Durand and Van Huylenbroek (2003: 16) suggested, "multifunctionality has been introduced in recent years at different occasions as a leading principle and new paradigm for the future development of agriculture and rural areas". Similarly, Marsden (2003: 88) argued that "the

farm as a multi-functional business is emerging in many rural regions". Yet, as Chapter 8 will highlight, the notion of multifunctionality has only relatively recently (early 1990s) been used by researchers as a key concept for understanding the complexity of agricultural change. Current understandings of multifunctionality are *reductionist* and based on relatively narrow *economic* and *policy-based* approaches predicated on structuralist interpretations of agricultural and rural change. McCarthy (2005) rightly asked whether the notion of multifunctional rural geographies is 'radical' or merely 'reactionary'.

I will argue that the narrow structuralist interpretations of multifunctionality have suffered from *discursive insularity* that has confused rather than clarified what multifunctionality could be about. 'Multifunctional agriculture' is still understood mainly as a policy-led *process describing* current agricultural trends, rather than as a *concept explaining* agricultural change, and is still largely embedded in *structuralist* theory rather than informed by *normative* concepts (Andersen *et al.*, 2004). Clark (2003: 225) suggested that "no formal meaning of multifunctional agriculture exists, which clearly poses difficulties for researchers analysing this new ... paradigm". Delgado *et al.* (2003: 28) also emphasised that "the concept of multifunctionality is still being formed ... Even the different countries supporting it do not interpret it the same way". Similarly, Di Iacovo (2003: 122) argued that the "multifunctionality of agriculture is not yet totally explored", while I recently suggested that the "concept of 'multifunctionality' currently remains poorly conceptualised, and more work is needed in the future to further sharpen this possible alternative/extension to the productivist/post-productivist model of agricultural change" (Wilson, 2005: 117). Losch (2004: 338) argued that the notion of multifunctionality "is never tackled head-on", and that it is "becoming simultaneously a subject of negotiation, a foil or a reference point for the formulation of alternatives". As a result, Knickel and Renting (2000: 512) argued that researchers "must improve their understanding of multifunctionality", while Buller (2005: ii) suggested that "what is missing is a more holistic evaluative framework for assessing the broader multifunctional contribution of agriculture". Such concerns have not only come from English-speaking commentators. Lardon *et al.* (2004: 6; my translation) argued from a French perspective that "multifunctionality is a concept that is not easy to grasp", while Rapey *et al.* (2004b: 49; my translation) emphasised that the characteristics of multifunctionality have often been defined in very general and variable terms, depending on disciplinary biases and research objectives, highlighting that "we need to simplify the meaning, characterisation and representation of multifunctional agriculture".

While there is an *implicit* assumption that 'multifunctionality' is a relatively clear concept that both describes and explains processes of agricultural change, there are few *explicit* explanations and definitions of multifunctionality. Garzon (2005: 1) emphasised that the "multifunctionality of agriculture has been a question debated at international level for more than two decades and yet is not a generally accepted notion". McCarthy (2005: 778) also emphasised "that land use is necessarily multifunctional is hardly a novel idea; the challenge is rather to theorise the emergence and significance of contemporary articulations of 'multifunctionality'". Clark (2003: 247) similarly emphasised that, currently, "there is no definable blueprint of the characteristics of multifunctional [farm] businesses", while Peterson *et al.* (2002: 423) referred to the "continuum of views on multifunctionality, generating an impasse that will be difficult to resolve". Further, Vatn (2002: 312) argued that "the concept of multifunctionality seems to have somewhat different meanings in the literature", while Holmes (2006: 145; emphasis added) suggested that "only over the last two or three decades have Western, market-oriented modes of rural occupation revealed a marked trend towards *overt recognition* of multifunctionality". The result has been a fragmented notion of multifunctionality largely predicated on its relevance for *policy-based* decision-making, characterised by short-termism, weak theorisation and pragmatism. There continues to be a pronounced lack of *critical theoretical debate* about 'multifunctionality' in social science research, and we are currently left with an understanding of the term that has not yet

gelled into a *coherent workable framework* for fully *understanding* contemporary multifunctional agricultural and rural change.

This book echoes both Cloke and Goodwin's (1992) earlier suggestion that there is a need to theorise the complexity of agricultural/rural change in a more satisfactory manner and Delgado *et al.*'s (2003: 28) call for giving multifunctional agriculture "a content that is politically possible, socially suitable, and economically efficient". It further addresses Marsden's (2003: 142) recent concern that "while ... there is a recognition ... about the integrative and holistic nature of the new processes of rural change, the approaches thus far have yet to theoretically develop an approach which begins to guide a clearer understanding of the processes which are making things different in the ... countryside". Similarly, it takes into account Buttel's (2001) call for more theoretical innovation in agricultural/rural research, away from the flurry of rich empirical work that, although important, has tended to create a relatively random set of micro-empirical studies, thereby possibly losing sight of the 'big picture'. Finally, it also addresses Knickel and Renting's (2000: 526) call that "the increasing recognition of the complexity of rural development processes should be accompanied by the adoption of more multidisciplinary, holistic approaches". Current shortfalls in our understanding of multifunctional agriculture emphasise that we urgently need a *new* concept of multifunctionality that is conceptually and theoretically better anchored in current debates on agricultural change than has hitherto been the case. In particular, we need a model of multifunctionality that is *holistic* and goes beyond mere economic and policy-based understandings, and that is applicable not only in a European context but also *globally*. Academic and scientific debate needs to *re-appropriate* the notion of 'multifunctionality' from policy-makers who have used the term in rather cavalier fashion, expose it to more thorough theoretical analysis, and reconceptualise it into a notion that can be used to *explain* what is happening in the countryside.

### 1.3 Aims of the book: conceptualising multifunctional agriculture

The aims of this book are to, first, shed a critical light on the p/pp transition model, and to analyse whether 'post-productivism' is the best theoretical framework to conceptualise contemporary agricultural change. Second, this will be used as a theoretical and conceptual springboard for analysing the concept of a transition towards multifunctional agriculture that may provide a more robust 'alternative' concept describing contemporary agricultural change. As this book will highlight, several issues have emerged that threaten the robustness of the p/pp transition. It has been argued that the bipolar assumption of the transition does not fully encapsulate the diversity, non-linearity and spatial heterogeneity that can be observed in modern agricultural systems (Wilson, 2001, 2002). Instead, I will suggest that the notion of *multifunctional agriculture*, rooted in a revised *productivist/non-productivist* model, may be a more appropriate concept to describe and comprehend contemporary agricultural/rural trajectories. I will argue for a significant reframing of conceptualisations of agricultural change and for the dispelling of the myth that modern agriculture is now well and truly post-productivist. In particular – inspired by visionary approaches to multifunctionality by authors such as John Holmes (Australia), Karlheinz Knickel (Germany), British researchers Terry Marsden, Jules Pretty, Julian Clark and Clive Potter, US researchers James McCarthy and Gail Hollander, and French commentators Hélène Rapey, Bruno Losch, Sylvie Lardon and Patrice Cayre – I will challenge existing understandings of multifunctional agriculture that see it merely as an economic or policy-based *process* and suggest, instead, that multifunctionality should be understood as an overarching normative *concept* that both describes *and* explains contemporary agricultural change.

The analysis will be based on what has been loosely termed *transition theory* (Pickles and Smith, 1998; Rotmans *et al.*, 2001). Through the lens of this theory we will be able both

to identify the inherent weaknesses of the p/pp transition model and anchor the notion of multifunctionality theoretically as a crucial part of, and possible alternative concept to, this postulated transition. As Holmes (2006: 159) argued, “the concept of a multifunctional rural transition invites positioning within current theory on the role of place and space in contemporary society”. Similarly, Goodman (2004: 10) reminded us that many current academic debates “overlook the complexities of transition, its uneven spatial and temporal intensity, and the possibility that processes of change may not engender convergence”. Chapters 2-4 will highlight that transition theory provides a particularly useful framework to assess whether modern agricultural systems have moved towards post-productivism and/or multifunctionality, as it places the nature, pace and processes surrounding ‘transition’ at the heart of the investigation. Transition theory will help us understand how agricultural systems have changed over the last 50 years, why these changes have occurred, and the form that this transition has taken. It will also help us understand whether a *full* transition to post-productivism has occurred and whether this transition has been linear and homogenous. I, therefore, wish to take theorisations of agricultural change beyond the confines of mono-disciplinary approaches, and the lens of transition theory provides an ideal *multi-disciplinary* platform from which to assess, re-evaluate and reconceptualise current thinking on agricultural change.

One of the aims of the book will be to go beyond UK/Euro-centric conceptualisations of multifunctionality and to investigate whether and how theorisations such as post-productivism and multifunctionality may also find applicability in the developing world. I wish to explore how easily the concept of multifunctionality can be ‘exported’ to the situation in the South, partly as a response to the scarcity of previous efforts to link theoretical themes of agricultural change between the advanced and the developing world (Wilson and Rigg, 2003), and partly inspired by Pretty (1995, 2002) whose seminal work on regenerating global agriculture is one of the few examples that elegantly moves between both the advanced and developing world without losing sight of the dramatic changes facing agriculture, farmers and rural society in any location on Earth. Although transition theory has often been combined with *scenario building* based on notions of path dependency and transitional trajectories, it is not the aim of this book to engage into a large-scale discussion of future scenarios, but Chapter 10 will include a discussion of the challenges faced by different decision-makers about the best management strategies for future agricultural multifunctional transitions. I also hope to contribute to contemporary thinking about societal transitions as a whole. In particular, I wish to address the question how current debates on the transition to post-productivism in agriculture and rural society compare with other ‘parallel’ (and, at times, not so parallel) debates on transitions from ‘isms’ to ‘post-isms’. How can we conceptualise transition as both a process of social and environmental transformation? Here, my background as a *human geographer* is vital, as the discipline of geography – possibly more than any other social science discipline – enables insight into a variety of sociological, economic, political, cultural, environmental and spatial dimensions that form key building blocks of conceptualisations of the p/pp transition and multifunctional agriculture.

As the title of this book implies, the focus will be largely on *agricultural* rather than *rural* multifunctionality. This is deliberate, although I will also analyse repercussions for rural areas, in particular when discussing conceptualisations of multifunctionality in Chapter 9. I acknowledge that it is increasingly difficult to conceptually separate these two terms, especially if we wish to extend discussions beyond the UK where understandings of the ‘rural’ can differ considerably from UK-centric interpretations. Throughout, I will consider the difficulty in applying notions linked to the p/pp transition model and multifunctionality to *both* the ‘agricultural’ and ‘rural’ realms. The rural focus will be particularly evident with regard to some of the key transitions that underpin notions of post-productivism and multifunctionality, such as changing ideologies towards agriculture, changing spaces of agricultural actors (who synonymously are also rural actors), agricultural policies (that

cannot be easily separated from rural policies), and food regimes and agro-commodity chains (that can rarely be understood in their entirety by focusing on agriculture alone). Multifunctionality will not only be conceptualised in light of the p/pp transition model for agricultural change, but also with regard to multifunctionality issues beyond the farm gate.

I acknowledge that the terminology ‘multifunctional agriculture’ is far from ideal, particularly as its emphasis on ‘agriculture’ may indicate (to English-speaking readers) an over-emphasis on agricultural production and, therefore, on traditional ‘productivist’ notions. Nonetheless, if the notion of multifunctionality is to be broadened beyond advanced economies, the more neutral terminology of multifunctional *agriculture* (as opposed to rural) may be more appropriate. The starting point of any critique of the p/pp transition model and for any conceptualisation of multifunctionality has to be *agriculture*, as it is within this framework that these terms were initially conceptualised (Cloke and Goodwin, 1992; Ward, 1993). Agricultural activity is still one of the key vectors for ensuring a close and lasting connection between society and the land(scape) and continues to be an important type of land use in most parts of the world (e.g. over 50% of the total territory of the European Union is classified as ‘agricultural land’). When referring to ‘agriculture’, I will use the traditional definition of agriculture as the economic sector in charge of *food and fibre production*<sup>1</sup> with its associated actors, institutions and politics (Le Heron, 1993). Yet, it is also this seemingly ‘precise’ definition of ‘agriculture’ that lies at the heart of the investigation in this book. Chapters 7-10 will show that the seemingly ‘clear’ boundaries of what constitutes ‘agriculture’ – and, concurrently, the distinction between ‘agricultural’ and ‘rural’ – are increasingly blurred (Woods, 2005). In Chapters 9 and 10, for example, I will argue that a conceptual non-productivist territory that lies ‘beyond agriculture’ may exist within a broader spectrum of multifunctional agricultural pathways, and that the notion of ‘agriculture’ itself can never be completely divorced from notions of *productivism*.

This book should, therefore, be of interest to a wide audience including both agricultural *and* rural researchers, but particularly to those who are interested in issues of agricultural change, agricultural/rural theory, and, at a broader scale, in theorisations of societal change and transition. The novel theoretical framework adopted here is designed to provoke further debate and comparative enquiry integral to theory building from any disciplinary vantage point. It is also hoped that this book will provide an effective intellectual groundwork, following on from seminal publications on the p/pp transition and multifunctionality highlighted above, that will stimulate further theoretical and empirical explorations of agricultural transitions. It will already be obvious to the reader that I want to write about ideas, debates and conceptual approaches, rather than stating ‘facts’. Many subject areas will, therefore, only briefly be mentioned, left unfinished or may not be as fully explained as could be. Although I will assume some background knowledge on agricultural change, food networks, agricultural and rural policy, agriculture and conservation issues, and on the role of specific actors and stakeholders in various agricultural and policy-making processes, I hope, nonetheless, that there will be sufficient discussion of pertinent debates to implant further ideas and to stimulate thought, discussion and further reading. As a human geographer, I also particularly wish to emphasise the importance of geography and spatial patterns in the conceptualisation of multifunctional agriculture, and throughout this book the *geography* of productivism, post-productivism and multifunctionality will, therefore, be an important underlying theme.

---

<sup>1</sup> Fibre production refers to agricultural fibre plants (e.g. cotton, flax or linseed), not to the production of fibre from forestry which is usually treated as a separate economic sector (see Robinson, 2004).

## 1.4 Structure of the book

The structure of the book mirrors the theoretical orientation based on transition theory. It provides a step-by-step approach in three distinctive parts that aims to provide the theoretical background for conceptualising transition and introducing the reader to ‘transition theory’ (Part 1), discusses debates on the transition from productivist to post-productivist agriculture and deconstructs unilinear assumptions about the nature of this transition (Part 2), and introduces ‘multifunctional’ agriculture as a concept theoretically embedded in productivist and non-productivist action and thought (Part 3).

Part 1 will begin with an overview in Chapter 2 of what ‘transition theory’ means and will outline key models of transition. Chapters 3 and 4 will then analyse key debates and theories surrounding the notion of transition. Specific emphasis will be placed on analysing different models of transition, and on highlighting key debates surrounding the possible transition from ‘isms’ to ‘post-isms’ in the social sciences (e.g. Fordism to post-Fordism or socialism to post-socialism). In particular, I will show in Chapter 4 that current debates on the transition to post-productivist agriculture share many similarities with debates about ‘other’ transitions. I will highlight that, parallel to many other debates on transitions, conceptualisations of post-productivism need to take into account issues of temporal non-linearity, spatial heterogeneity, global complexity and structure-agency inconsistency currently lacking in debates of agricultural change.

This will form the basis for understanding why we may need to question the seemingly ‘simple’ notion underlying the p/pp transition model (Part 2). In order to set the wider context for the debates, Chapters 5 and 6 will analyse issues and debates surrounding conceptualisations of ‘productivist’ and ‘post-productivist’ agriculture. These chapters will pay particular attention to several inter-linked dimensions that have formed the basis of conceptualisations of the post-productivist transition. Chapter 7 will then broaden the discussion by linking the debate on the p/pp transition to parallel debates on ‘other’ transitions discussed in Part 1. The chapter will outline the strengths and weaknesses of the p/pp transition model, and specific emphasis will be placed on analysing the assumptions of linearity, homogeneity, universality and causality. Acknowledging that the p/pp transition model has made a vital contribution to current debates on agricultural transition, I will suggest that post-productivism should not be seen as the ‘end-point’ of agricultural change, and that, instead, the notion of a productivist/*non*-productivist spectrum of decision-making forms a better non-linear conceptual model for understanding agricultural change.

Part 3 will build on this discussion by arguing that, on the basis of the critique of linear and directional assumptions underlying the post-productivist transition model, the notion of a multifunctional decision-making spectrum bounded by productivist and non-productivist action and thought better encapsulates the non-linearity and heterogeneity of agricultural systems. I will begin Part 3 by critically examining contemporary conceptualisations of multifunctionality (Chapter 8). Chapter 9 will then *theoretically anchor* the notion of multifunctionality in the context of the productivist/*non*-productivist decision-making spectrum discussed in Chapter 7. This will enable us to investigate in more detail the conceptual boundaries of multifunctional agricultural and rural systems. I will suggest that discussions about multifunctional agriculture have to imply *normative* and *subjective* value judgements and, based on the conceptualisation of weak, moderate and strong multifunctionality, I will argue that the strong multifunctionality model is qualitatively and morally the ‘best’ model to follow and implement. Chapter 9 will also investigate the geography of multifunctionality with specific emphasis on the multi-layered nature of multifunctional processes from the local to the global. Chapter 10 will analyse issues linked to multifunctional agricultural transitions over time. As the focus will be on transitional processes, there will be strong interlinkages between Chapter 10 and Part 1. Chapter 10 will highlight that it is possible, based on the new multifunctionality framework developed in Chapter 9, to identify the transitional potential of individual farms and individual nation

states. The chapter will also investigate the key issues of path dependency, transitional corridors, system memory and transitional ruptures for the understanding of multifunctional transitional processes in both the developed and developing world. The chapter will conclude by discussing how the strong multifunctionality model could be implemented, by whom it should be orchestrated, and will discuss various challenges facing future decision-makers in the quest towards strongly multifunctional transitional pathways. Chapter 11 will conclude the book by highlighting the key arguments of the reconceptualisation of multifunctionality, and by arguing that more empirical work will be needed in future to further substantiate theoretical and conceptual issues of multifunctional transitions.

Inevitably, the complexity of the argument presented in this book will make for lengthy reading, especially for those interested in agricultural/rural issues or multifunctional agriculture and less familiar with transition theory and debates on societal change. Readers who may find themselves getting bogged down in Part 1 (transition theory), or in debates on the transition to post-productivism (Part 2), may wish to skip ahead to Chapter 8 to read immediately about multifunctional agriculture itself. However, the argument in this book is based on a logical ‘storyline’ that is intended to narrow down the argument from the broad (transition theory) to the intermediate (deconstructing post-productivism) to the specific (conceptualising multifunctional agriculture), in which each component builds on the others and may, therefore, make less sense on their own. As a result, I hope that this book will not only form an important reference point for readers interested in agricultural and rural issues revolving around multifunctionality, post-productivism and the nature and pace of global agricultural change, but that it will also act as a trigger for future theoretically informed empirical work on conceptualising societal transitions in general.