

FOREIGN AND SPANISH MIGRANTS TO CATALAN RURAL AREAS (1996-2006): AN END TO DEPOPULATION OR NEW MIGRATORY SPATIAL PATTERNS?

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since 1996, international migration has been generating 70% of Spain's demographic growth. Though rural areas have been receiving international migration's impact, they have obtained little attention. New locally significant volumes of young foreign immigrants are however reaching these areas and this poses new questions: is a rural demographic recovery possible? What will be their impact on existing flows? Or in other words, will these international migrants substitute the diminishing Spanish population or stimulate its recovery. Will these new flows increase differences between «dynamic» and «backward» rural areas?

This paper precisely intends to analyse the situation in small Catalan municipalities so that the latter questions can start to be answered. A typology of villages according to the impact local demographic dynamics received from these new flows will also be built, using *Padrón Continuo* data. Even though most studies define rural municipalities as those with less than 10,000 inhabitants, here the limit has been established at 1,000 inhabitants, which means that out of the 946 Catalan municipalities, 496 have been included, that is to say, nearly half of them. These locations are generally situated in inner Catalonia, away from the metropolitan area of Barcelona and the coast, and occupy a significant part (51.4%) of the region. Approximately 200,000 people live in these small municipalities (197,958 according to the January the 1st 2006 *Padrón*) representing 2.8% of the Catalan population. 15,000 of them would be foreign residents, or in other words, 7.4% of the total rural population.

2. FOREIGN IMMIGRANTS' INCREASING ROLE IN RURAL CATALONIA'S DEMOGRAPHIC DYNAMICS

Between 1996 and 2006, small municipalities have grown, significantly changing their former demographic dynamics. Many of the villages with less than 1,000 inhabitants in 2006 had started to recover population (growing, between 1996 and 2006, by an 11%), ending the 20th century long population loss. This last decade's population increase in 19,649 inhabitants implied regaining their mid-1970's figures.

One of the main explanatory elements in this new positive trend is international migration. Even though 7,265 out of the 19,649 new residents are Spanish (a 4% increase), 12,384 are foreigners (multiplying by five their former numbers), which would be responsible for 63% of the rise. As a consequence, while in 1996 only 67% of the Catalan municipalities with less than 1,000 inhabitants had foreigners, in 2006 this percentage attained 95%. Moreover, during this period, 90% of the analysed municipalities were touched by this increase, though 48% of them reduced their Spanish population. Taking both groups into account, two out three rural municipalities grew and 30% of them lost population.

Foreigners living in municipalities with less than 1,000 inhabitants and those dwelling bigger ones do not absolutely have the same origins. While in the former case more than half are Europeans, in the rest of Catalonia these only represent 25% of the foreign residents. The proportion of Africans in smaller and larger municipalities is quite similar, but percentages of Americans, and particularly Asians, would be higher in the latter. Moroccans and Rumanians, the most numerous and widespread foreign nationalities in Catalonia, can respectively be found 694 and 677 municipalities, 252 of which have less than 1,000 inhabitants.

3. SETTLEMENT PATTERNS BY ORIGIN

Foreign nationality groups are unequally distributed throughout the rural Catalonia, clearly pointing out four areas: 1) relatively small villages in the Alt and Baix Empordà: 44.3% of their foreigners would be EU citizens (mostly French, German, and British) and, Africans and Americans, on their side, would be newcomers; 2) interior municipalities within Tarragona province: Europeans (EU members or not) and Africans would be the main origins to be found here; 3) the more tourist Pyrenees and pre-Pyrenees villages: Americans, Europeans, and, to a minor extent, Africans, would be particularly abundant here. 4) Finally, Segrià and Urgell (Lleida province) agrarian plains: there are basically non-EU European and African nationals, and extremely few Americans and EU citizens.

Summarising, EU nationals would predominate in the Empordà and Tarragona's interior villages, while there are also significant amounts of them in the Pyrenees. Non-EU European citizens would be abundant in all four areas, but particularly numerous in Lleida and in Tarragona interior municipalities. Africans are also present in all four areas, but less in the Pyrenees, where Americans are much more relevant. These would also particularly reside in the Empordà. Finally, Asians are only significant in very few municipalities. In conclusion, foreigners would not just be concentrated in some specific areas but widely spread throughout rural Catalonia and come from many geographical areas.

4. FOREIGNER AND SPANISH POPULATION GROWTH: A RURAL MUNICIPALITY TYPOLOGY

As the paper's main aim was to establish demographic dynamics aiding scarcely populated Catalan areas get spatially redefined, municipalities with less than 1,000 inhabitants have been classified according to Spanish nationality and foreign population growth levels. Three variables (Spanish, foreign and overall population change between 1996 and 2006) have been used to group the 496 municipalities into 6 categories through hierarchical clusters.

In summary, while 80% of the villages (categories 1, 2 and 3) have very small increases or even loose population, only 20% (categories 4, 5 and 6) significantly grow. These municipalities with increasing population are basically located at quite specific areas: 1) near Barcelona or Tarragona-Reus metropolitan areas, which means that the suburbanisation process continues expanding; 2) Empordà and Baix Ebre interior small villages which are relatively near the sea; and 3) certain Pyrenees or nearby touristy and residential municipalities. The rest, it should be insisted, would have negative growth or an stagnated population.

Type 3 and 4 municipalities have the highest foreigner shares. In 2006, levels respectively attained a maximum of 11% and 18.7%. The proportion of foreigners highly increased in both village categories, while Spanish residents left, even reaching negative growth. Type 4 municipalities would be the only case where the percentage of foreigners is higher than for Catalonia as a whole. In type 5 and 6 municipalities, Spanish population grows more than that of foreigners. However, the latter already reach 7%. Finally, the smallest percentages, combined with a negative or really small Spanish population growth, would be found in the first two types of municipalities, respectively 3.8% and 6%. In summary, despite representing half of the analysed population and more than 70% of the municipalities with less than 1,000 inhabitants, they are the most «backward» locations.

These village's demographic dynamics, and the effect of recent foreign and Spanish-citizens migratory flows on them, are reflected on their demographic pyramids. Category 1 and 6 pyramids would obviously be the extreme cases. While in the first case ageing is serious (29% of the population is over 65 and those under 15 only represent 9% of it), in the second, the percentage of elderly people only attains 13% and those under 15 would reach 17%. In the latter case, migrants, mainly young or young adult Spanish people, would dominate the population structure. The other categories' pyramids show intermediate situations. Finally, the high amount of both foreign and Spanish men in rural areas should also be underlined.

5. CONCLUSIONS

One of the aspects we intended to analyse was whether international migration was putting an end to rural depopulation and therefore rural population was starting to recover. Results would indicate that the answer is basically positive, though nuances should be also introduced. Despite villages up to 1.000 inhabitants have recovered an 11% of their 1996 population, they continue to have negative natural growth, loosing 5% of their initial population for this reason. Therefore, population changes have basically been due to immigration in general and international migration more specifically, as the latter represents

63% of the net population increase and more than a 40% of the migratory balance. However, the question remains whether they will stay in rural agricultural areas once they have entered the Spanish labour market, have a legal residence permit, and are able to apply for better jobs.

Despite the general growth context, a wide variety of local situations are to be found. Although 90% of the municipalities have negative natural growth, two out of three gain population due to migratory inflows, which mitigate or sometimes even counteract the above mentioned decline. Nevertheless, as Spanish population is scarcely dynamic, many locations continue to loose population (category 1 municipalities) or hardly grow (categories 2 and 3). In summary, 80 % of the rural municipalities belong to these first three groups and therefore, even though rural depopulation has been, to a certain extent, stopped, most villages do not show much demographic strength. Moreover, they continue to show elderly demographic structures. Even though immigrants have particularly rejuvenated category 3 and 4 population structure, ageing continues to be their and the rest of group's dominant feature. Those belonging to category 6, basically suburban municipalities, would be the only exception. As Spanish strong migratory flows reach these locations, they have a younger population structure than Catalonia as a whole and a positive natural growth.

Finally, we would like to address the issue of whether these spatially diversified flows intensified segregation among Catalan rural areas. The answer seems obvious. Independently from its national origin, increased immigration accentuates segregation between, on the one side, what can be called «backward rural areas» (categories 1, 2 and 3), which includes most (around 80%) of the rural municipalities, and, on the other side, «dynamic rural areas» (categories 4, 5 and 6), which are far less numerous and are concentrated in four axes: the three touristy and residential areas of Empordà, Baix Ebre and the Pyrenees, and the rural-urban fringe around the two metropolitan regions of Barcelona and Tarragona-Reus, which is affected by suburbanisation and counter-urbanisation processes.