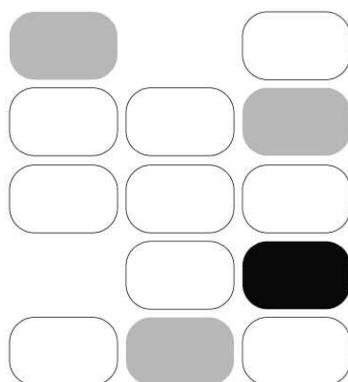


*Introducción editorial :  
Migraciones en los espacios rurales  
de la Península Ibérica:  
Tres estudios de caso*



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## *Editorial introduction: Migration in rural regions of the iberian peninsula: three case studies*

This monograph discusses three case studies concerning migration in rural regions of the Iberian peninsula. Our aim is that each one of these case studies should serve as a rich source of new insights offering many new productive lines of inductive reasoning. Despite the fact that rural spaces in Portugal and Spain are similar in many respects, they are generally not studied together. According to statistics provided by the World Bank, in 1969, 43.43 % of Spain's population lived in rural areas, compared to 65.04 % of the Portuguese population. At the time, substantially more than three quarters of the rural population in both countries were employed in agriculture. However, between 1960 and 1991, both countries experienced an extraordinary exodus from their rural hubs, such that by the end of this period, the rate of urbanisation in Spain had reached 79.6 %, while in Portugal at the same time, it was 59.6 %. These rates reflect the huge migrations that occurred in both countries coinciding with the slow demise of heavy industry in these states.

Since 1991, migration from the countryside to the city has continued, although it has now settled at a more moderate rate. However, the resulting net population decrease has become critical, particularly in the smaller municipalities, where populations are sparse, aging, and contain ever fewer women. In 2020, only 19.43 % of Spain's total population lived in rural areas and only 3.98 % worked in agriculture. In the same year in Portugal, 34.23 % of the total population lived in rural areas while 5 % worked in agriculture. Looking specifically at the population currently working in agriculture in these two Iberian countries, we see that only a third are women. Added to this, a further factor of huge significance in the Iberian peninsula as in other south European countries, is the ongoing importance of family farming. A particular consideration here, is that this type of farming is an invisible form of agriculture where production is solely for family consumption and not for profit. Surplus production from these small holdings, where it exists, generally circulates in a reciprocal economy in which maintaining social ties is more valuable than the merchandise exchanged. In this instance then, the attachment to community life itself is sufficient justification for family scale farming.

Clearly, not all rural areas across the Iberian peninsular face the same problems. Indeed, over the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many peri-urban municipalities have seen a significant increases in their populations. Nevertheless, these municipalities would be considered exceptions in the rural context. As is the case across Europe, both Portugal and Spain are increasingly urbanised and in the last decade the situation has reached such an extreme that there is a significant risk that some rural areas will become entirely depopulated. The huge efforts made to resolve this problem over the last thirty years, have not produced the desired results. Considering rural areas as defined according to Law 45/2007, that is, as a geographic space formed by a collection of municipalities with a population less than 30,000 inhabitants and population density of less than 100 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>, in the case of Spain, between 2018 and the present, the of rate population living in such areas has decreased by three points. The situation in Portugal is similar. In both countries a persistent population flow from the interior of the country to coastal regions has resulted in the depopulation of rural areas, particularly in the mountain regions. The articles in this monograph constitute three portraits of rurality in the Iberian peninsula, each with a different perspective but all aimed at highlighting a complex reality which, as we know, arouses deep concern in wider society.

In the first article, Eloy Gómez Pellón (University of Cantabria) studies the case of a rural area in the Cantabrian Mountains, a space that has all the markers of extreme rurality. Since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this area in southern Cantabria has lost 80 % of its population such that its low population density, pronounced population aging, and the extremely high male to female ratio now amount to a demographic disaster. Despite implementation of the LEADER rural development programme, the necessary population stabilisation has not been achieved to the extent that since the programme began in 1994 to the present day, this area has lost a third of its inhabitants. Improvements in public services, the rehabilitation of the area's natural ecosystems, and programmes for sustainable food production have caused some inwards migration, but this tends to be seasonal in nature and has not been sufficient. The loyalty to the region shown by older residents and their descendants is deep seated and therefore not likely to evaporate. However, the article notes the appearance of a particular kind of circular migration, so called *commuting*, which may offer an alternative source of hope since it avoids permanent emigration and indeed, promotes social stability. This said, when the phenomenon of commuting is examined in greater depth, we find a wide gender gap. Part of the explanation for this lies in the extremely high male to female ratio in the population generally but it is also due to the fact that female migration in the region is still significant - perhaps because local sources of female employment are more likely to

be on a casual basis and as a result very insecure. Furthermore, it is possible that the region's younger commuters of today run the risk of becoming the urban residents of a not-too-distant future.

In the second article, Óscar Fernández Álvarez (University of León) examines the case of women who decide to move to rural areas turning their backs on hectic urban lifestyles. The theme of the article has particular relevance considering the fact that populations in rural regions contain disproportionately high numbers of males. The investigation concerns several rural communities in the Castilian-Leonese region and provides a rigorous assessment of the personal life experiences of these women in which we see the interaction of personal circumstances, their desire to escape, and their longing for a closeness to nature and greater community ties. As a rule, these women are young, city educated and, in the majority of cases, have acquired some degree of professional expertise in their particular economic sector, thus they frequently become key players in the rural economies they enter and often assume active roles in local institutions. In this way they can come to gain sufficient influence to make real, modernising changes to the rural environments they find themselves in. Furthermore, the networks of family, friends, and neighbours that these women weave together often come to underpin and support the wider local community. Admittedly, the dynamism of these women can be absorbed, in part, by the general conservatism of local institutions, however, this cannot take away from the fact that these women bring with them what might be called a progressive ideology. As the article demonstrates, this progressive mindset based in beliefs about gender equality is opening new and very hopeful pathways in the development of the rural environment.

The third article is by Octavio Sacramento and Pedro Silva, (University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro: UTAD) who are both researchers at the Centre for Transdisciplinary Development Studies (CETRAD-UTAD); and Elizabeth Challinor (Nova Lisboa University). These authors investigated a particular immigration phenomenon that is little studied in the context of the rural environment. The European Union periodically receives large contingents of refugees. These refugees reach the EU through diverse routes and, thanks to the various resettlement programmes they find new homes in the participating EU countries. In addition to these refugees, there are many more who seek asylum for a number of reasons including political persecution in their country of origin. In this article, the authors study the impact of resettlement on the lives of one and a half thousand refugees who arrived in Portugal between 2015 and 2017. Resettlement programmes disperse refugees to many different rural and peri-urban locations in 98 Portuguese municipalities including several in the centre and north of Portugal where the field work for this study took place. The article

shows us how painful the experience of resettlement has been for many refugees and explores the factors that cause them to suffer dissatisfaction with their new lives, including memories of their previous lives, institutional errors, disappointed expectations, and the effects of culture shock. These factors explain why many of these refugees find it impossible to adapt to their new locations and justify their search for a new destination in countries further afield but more aligned to their personal sense of well-being. In this way, the authors highlight how these efforts to re-populate Portugal's rural areas with much needed new inhabitants are largely and ongoingly frustrated.

In summary, the monograph examines three case studies each of which considers a different migration phenomenon but all with reference to the Iberian peninsula's rural environment. The distinctive nature of the three cases studies means that each one takes a different theoretical approach and corresponding methodology. In this way, the authors of these studies offer us a nuanced picture of how migration has changed the rural spaces and geography of the Iberian Peninsula over the course of the years.