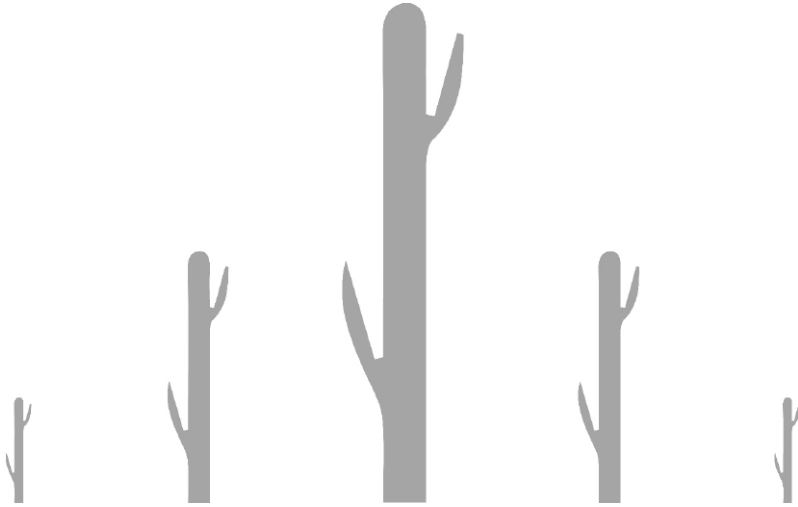


Extended abstract

*Challenges and Opportunities
for Coexistence in Multicultural Rural
in Navarre (Spain)*



Rubén Lasheras Ruiz, Izaskun Andueza-Imirizaldu

Universidad Pública de Navarra / Nafarroako Unibertsitate

Publikoa, Pamplona, Spain

ager

Revista de Estudios sobre Despoblación y Desarrollo Rural
Journal of Depopulation and Rural Development Studies

Highlights:

- 1) International migrations have an amplified impact on rural social space.
- 2) The increase in diversity linked to international migrations challenges the previously existing relational model.
- 3) Rural environments provide specific opportunities for intervening and enhancing intercultural coexistence.
- 4) The peculiarities of the rural relational space require tailored interventions to improve intercultural coexistence.

Abstract: The proliferation of international migrations, especially intense in the last two decades, has had a noticeable impact on the daily coexistence of rural spaces. Faced with the historical predominance of urban perspectives, this text reflects on how the increase in compositional heterogeneity in these villages presents specific challenges and opportunities in the relational space. To this end, 14 discussion groups held in five small Navarrese towns (Falces, Larraga, Cintruénigo, Iruztzun and Lakuntza) that have developed participatory processes for diagnosis and promoting intercultural coexistence are analysed. The results indicate, on the one hand, that displacements have an amplified impact in rural spaces frequently characterized by strong relational models (strong ties, sense of community, predominance of coexistence, etc.). On the other hand, the increase in cultural diversity in places with social frameworks, practices and social imaginaries that differ from urban ones makes it necessary to identify distinctive challenges and articulate specific interventions to improve intercultural coexistence.

Keywords: International migrations, relationships, coexistence, interculturality, Navarra.

Rubén Lasheras Ruiz. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2237-9835>

E-mail: ruben.lasheras@unavarra.es

Izaskun Andueza-Imirizaldu. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5336-4348>

E-mail: izaskun.andueza@unavarra.es

Extended abstract

1. Introduction and justification

As a result of a series of diagnostic and intervention experiences over the last decade in several rural areas in Navarra, this text describes the main challenges and opportunities for promoting intercultural living-together in rural spaces, which have been historically neglected in the literature in comparison with the extensively addressed urban context. Without disregarding common urban issues (segregation, discrimination, etc.), this work focuses on specific challenges related to intercultural living-together in rural environments. This term refers to the relations established between ethnoculturally differentiated individuals and groups who live according to the principles of cultural pluralism (equal treatment and non-discrimination, positive valuation, respect, and the right to difference). Additionally, there is an emphasis on positive interaction between parties and a mutual appreciation of what they have in common (Giménez Romero, 2005).

2. Objectives, methodology and sources

The main objectives of this work are:

1. To understand the specific impact that migratory flows have on the relational spaces of small rural towns.
2. To identify the challenges and opportunities posed by the everyday relational dynamics resulting from the increase in cultural diversity in those spaces.

The methodology used is qualitative. The article analyses 14 discussion groups carried out in five different rural towns in Navarra (Falces, Larraga, Cintruénigo, Irurtzun and Lakuntza-Sakana) within an action-research framework. They were single-session groups conducted after an exhaustive profile selection process. Ethical consent forms were signed by and collected from the participants in keeping with the ethical principles of social research. Recruitment was supported by local agents

involved in the participatory process in each town. The recordings were transcribed, coded and categorized according to the research objectives (Callejo, 2001).

3. Results

The results are organized into two categories linked to the two objectives of this work: specificities of the rural relational model, and challenges for living together.

Regarding the first category, it is possible to confirm the existence of a specific rural relational model characterized by three different features. Firstly, the prevalence of idealized representations of the rural world in the five towns studied. The local population tends to use the terms "hospitality", "family-like character", "cohesion", "rootedness", "trust", "solidarity" and "mutual support" to describe living in these areas. These qualities are often mentioned in opposition to the impersonal nature of life in large cities. Likewise, "quietness" and "good relations" are common expressions among people arriving in these localities from other countries. All this reinforces people's desire to settle and/or stay in these places.

Secondly, there are two circumstances that question this idealized rural relational scenario: individualization and international migrations. Although these phenomena are not exclusive to the rural environment, they gain relevance through the amplified impact of the transformations they bring to these localities. Individualization interrupts relational dynamics by giving greater prominence to private spaces for socialization, reducing the volume of encounters and selecting relationships. The increase in incoming migratory flows (mainly of foreign origin) also generates transformations that affect the integrative capacity of these towns. Although the transformations affect multiple spheres (relational, labour, etc.), those taking place in institutions with a strong foothold in the territory, such as educational institutions, stand out.

Thirdly, the amplified impact of these flows has a threatening component that is manifested in three different ways: rejection, overestimation, and insecurity. Although historically associated with the reception of internal migrations, rejection is now acquiring a greater conflictual and stigmatizing nature. This is fuelled by various phenomena, including overestimation, that is, the tendency to exaggerate the volume of immigrant people. As a result, the arrival of foreign population is linked to insecurity. Immigrants are defined as "enemies", especially where resources (employment, aid, etc.) are scarce and highly contended for.

As for the second category, relations in rural spaces pose challenges at three different levels: coexistence, proximity and control. Between the "native" population and those of foreign origin, coexistence prevails (characterized by a lack of relation) rather than the living-together expected in spaces of proximity such as small rural towns. This coexistence creates a divide between "us" and "them", generates otherness and imposes a logic of assimilation that hinders the integration of people of foreign origin in these localities.

The second challenge is related to proximity, greetings and glances. For example, avoiding greetings is experienced as a lack of recognition and a trigger for division. Similarly, glances acquire a potential conflictual dimension (amplified according to gender). These daily discomforts, often silenced, are experienced as discriminatory.

The third challenge has to do with how certain expressions of social control, especially present in rural environments, hinder the establishment or maintenance of relationships. Thus, relational self-censorship with individuals of foreign origin is identified and explained by the risk of social rejection. This greater control also contributes to spreading stereotypes such as, for instance, the lesser aptitude for work of the population of foreign origin.

4. Discussion

The analysis carried out shows that international migrations have an amplified impact on the relational framework of rural areas (Morén-Alegret, 2005; Paniagua-Mazorra, 2013; Soronellas Masdeu et al., 2014; Sampedro Gallego and Camarero Rioja, 2017, 2018; Natale et al., 2019; Camarero Rioja, 2020; Camarero Rioja and Sampedro Gallego, 2020). As a result, and considering the existing multicultural context, the living-together that should prevail in rural relational spaces turns into coexistence with an underlying tone of hostility (Giménez Romero, 2005).

Although the expressions of conflict have been mitigated by a pragmatic discourse (Rinken, 2015) that positions immigration as a countermeasure to depopulation and a lever for development (Esparcia Pérez, 2002; García Coll and Sánchez Aguilera, 2005; Pinilla et al., 2008; Roquer and Blay Boqué, 2008; McDonald-Wilmsen et al., 2009; Mancilla et al., 2010; Prieto Díaz and Papadodima, 2010; Bayona-i-Carrasco and Gil-Alonso, 2013; Collantes et al., 2014; Sánchez-Flores et al., 2014), this amplified impact brings about specific challenges.

Despite the demonstrated strength of rural mutual support, situations of scarcity have a differential impact in these areas due to the narrower margin for manoeuvre in economies that have been weakened by the exodus to the cities (Arango Vila-Belda, 1985; Portes and Böröcz, 1998; Sacramento et al., 2022). Consequently, and given the lower capacity of the response services in rural environments, the immigrant community has a higher risk of inhabiting spaces of vulnerability and social exclusion (Castles and Kosack, 1973; Castel, 1997).

5. Conclusions

Although the relational specificity of rural areas presents its challenges, it also represents an opportunity. The experience of promoting intercultural living-together in Navarra shows how these areas can be particularly integrative.

While coexistence is not really an issue in urban areas, it often becomes uncomfortable and annoying in rural environments. The stronger bonds and community networks of small rural towns promote collaboration between social actors (politicians, technicians, and citizens) and the implementation of proximity interventions and community actions. And given that living together is the shared aspirational model, the increase in diversity is, in itself, one of the main drivers for achieving intercultural frameworks.

6. Next steps

Diagnoses continue to be necessary in order to adjust intercultural interventions to rural idiosyncrasies. In this line, mediation, the creation of spaces for the actual participation of the immigrant population, and the provision of resources for learning local languages are aspects to be developed. However, attention must also be paid to inequalities in structuring areas (employment, housing, etc.), which particularly affect the immigrant group and are amplified in areas with fewer services. Thus, beyond the relational sphere, access to full citizenship should be the focus of policies promoting intercultural living-together in multicultural rural areas.