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## Introduction: International immigration and demographic revitalization

1   A distinctive characteristic of the international immigration in Europe, from the era of industrialization through the end of the 20th century, was its urban orientation. Given that immigrants tended to establish themselves in metropolitan areas, researchers focused primarily on the characteristics of these immigrants (Jentsch, Simard, 2009; Morén, Solana, 2004; de Lima, 2012). More recently, there has been a growing and more diverse research emphasis on international immigration in rural areas. On the one hand, the countryside is experiencing a growth in foreign population; on the other hand, the diversification of rural activities beyond agriculture, such as tourism, has required more workers than were available in the local labour market (Jentsch, Simard, 2009; Kasimis, 2005). This phenomenon more or less coincided with the *renaissance* of rural areas (Kayser, 1989).

2   One of the aspects that have defined international migrations to rural areas, including mountain areas, is the diversity of motivating factors (Bender, Kanitscheider, 2012; Bijker, Haartsen, Strijker, 2012). Some studies have focussed on just one of the forms of rural international migration, which authors such as Buller and Hoggart (1994) or Halfacree (2008) refer to as "international counterurbanization". The 1994 work by Buller and Hoggart, *Être étranger à la campagne* (On Being a Foreigner in the Countryside)*,* inspired the title of this article; it was also the starting point for the study of international migrations for residential purposes. These newcomers were mainly attracted for environmental, cultural or spiritual reasons (Borsdorf, Hidalgo, Zunino, 2012; Perlik, 2006).

3   In Spain, other types of international rural immigration were described by Bayona and Gil-Alonso (2013), and attracted the attention of other researchers. One of these types, the migration of retirees (primarily from northern Europe) seeking a mild climate and comfortable lifestyle in southern European countries (in this case, Spain), has been studied most often within the framework of international counterurbanization, without devoting attention to work-related migrations (Mazón, Huete, Mantecón, 2011). In addition, in the 1940s there was a migration of people from southern Europe to the northern countries, who are now coming home to the villages they left behind (Ní Laoire, 2007; Farrell, Mahon, McDonagh, 2012). Another population that has been studied is the economic or employment migration motivated by the job opportunities in rural and mountain areas; most of this research has focused on the population of poorer countries (Papadopoulos; 2012).

4   The present article concentrates on international immigrants motivated by employment opportunities in tourism and construction who have settled more or less permanently in the Catalan Pyrenees mountain areas. The aim is to analyse the process of integration experienced by immigrants in communities that tend to be small, with limited population density, dispersed territory and a social structure that has been constructed from a social imaginary based on the idea of cultural homogeneity. Within this framework, the limited social and cultural diversity of the population presents a challenge to the integration of international immigrants. The study analyses the integration of newcomers, based on the relationships established between the international and the local population and their participation in the local community.

Study area and methodology

5   The administrative area of the High Pyrenees and Aran occupy 5,775 km[2] of northeast Spain, within the Autonomous Community of Catalonia. According to 2013 data, the area has a population of 74,822 and 77 municipalities[1]. The population density is relatively low

(13.3 inhabitants/km^2), compared to Spain in general (93.4 inhabitants/km^2). Many of the municipalities in the study area have fewer than 500 inhabitants and only eight have a population exceeding 2,000 (figure 1), most of them being county seats or major centres of the Pyrenees urban system (Solé, Guirado, Solana, 2010). The municipality with the largest population (12,468 inhabitants) is Seu d'Urgell.

Figure 1. Map of the study area
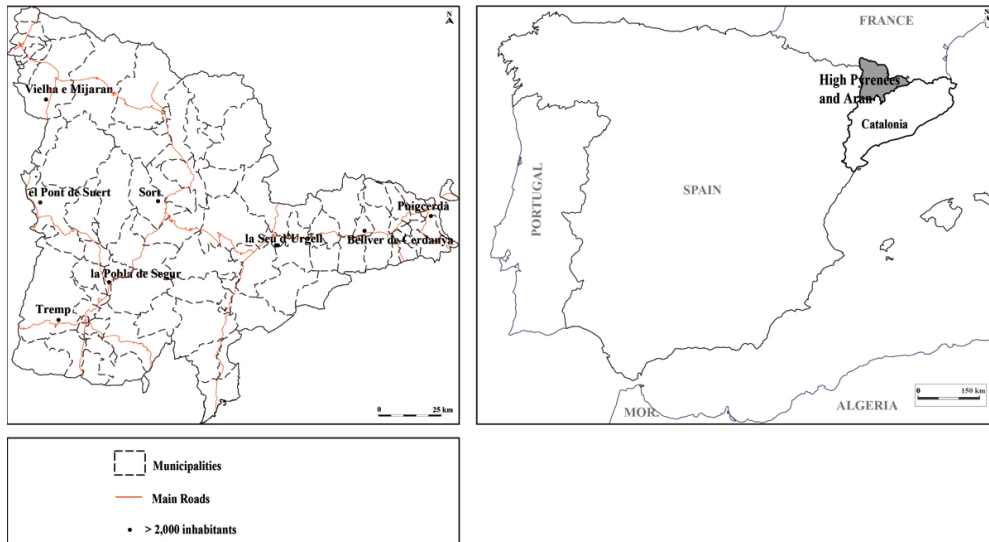
Own elaboration.

6   Since achieving its maximum recorded population in 1860, the study area has undergone a period of intense depopulation, as in most European rural and mountain areas. Three major periods can be identified with respect to population behaviours: 1860-1980, 1980-2000 and 2000-2013. The first period (1860-1980) was characterized by population loss. Nonetheless, during these 120 years there were periods with a certain population recovery, such as between 1910 and 1950, when workers arrived to build dams and hydroelectric power plants (Arqué, García, Mateu, 1987). Beginning in 1960, the population decline intensified considerably (Pujadas, Mendizàbal, 1987). In this phase, many villages were abandoned. This decline began to slow, initiating the second period (1980-2000). During these two decades, the population increased slightly as the migratory flows reversed. In the most recent period (2000-2013), intensive population growth occurred, caused primarily by new arrivals, many of them with a foreign nationality (figure 2). The greatest growth occurred during the first 9 years, when the international population grew from 1,644 to 12,962, a nearly eight-fold increase. In 2013 data, 15% of the population was foreign-born. The four most common foreign nationalities are: Romania (19,8%), Portugal (12,1%), Morocco (9,8%) and Bolivia (9,4%). They are mainly young adults (49,3%, from 20 to 40 years old) and just over half of foreigners are male (52,1% male and 47,9% female). We have to consider that there is a significant number of children aged 0 to 14 years old (15,62%) and a little group of people aged 65 or older (2,41% versus 21,3 for Spaniards).

Figure 2. Annual cumulative rate growth in the municipalities of High Pyrenees and Aran (1857-2012)
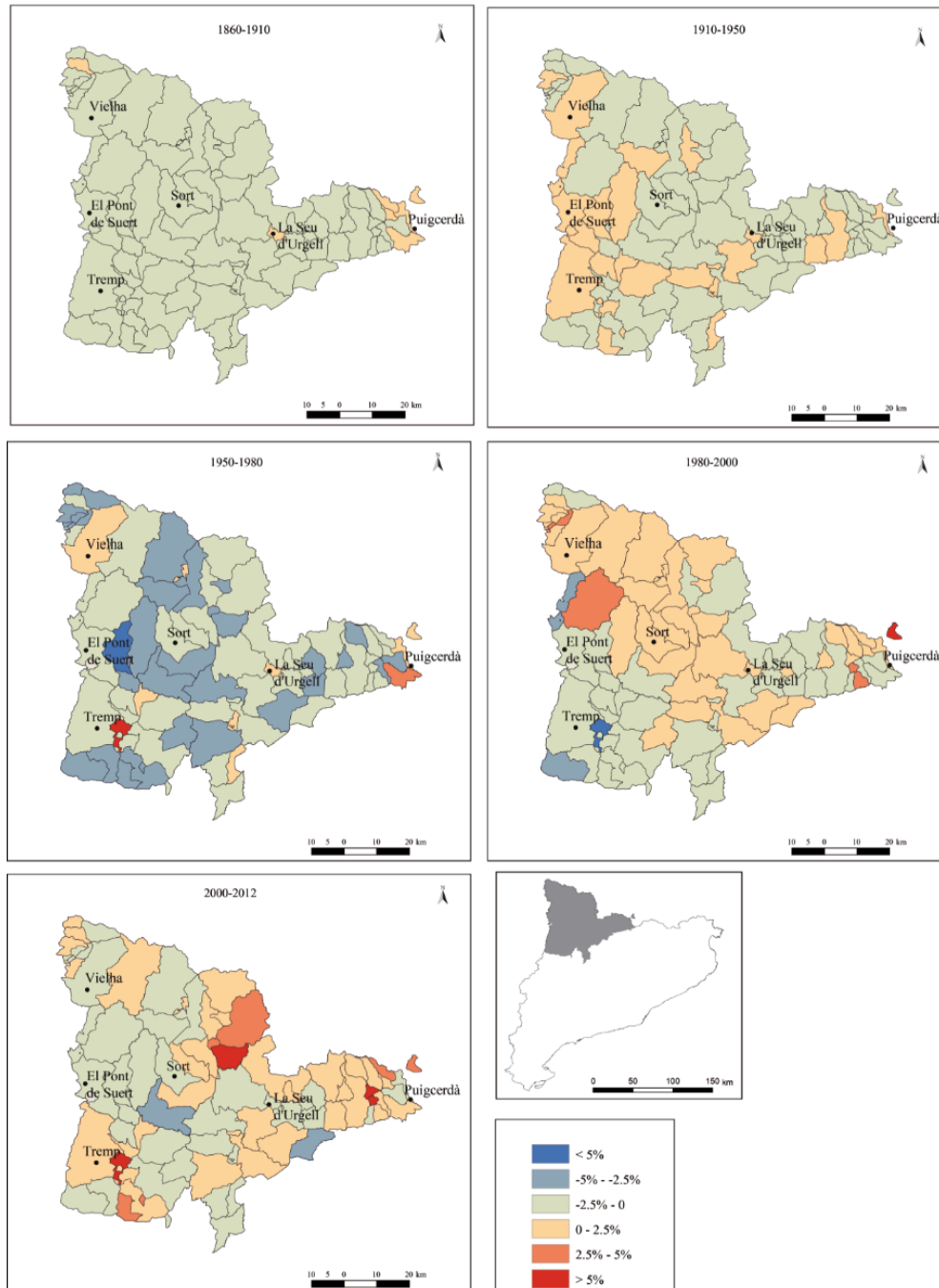
Source. Own elaboration based on municipal population data from Catalan Institute of Statistics.

7   Without a doubt, the job opportunities available in tourism and construction, the major economic growth sectors in the Pyrenees, motivated much of the recent population influx. This was reinforced by the relatively limited local population of active working age. The demand for labour favoured the arrival of workers from other places. The lack of active local workers can be explained by the rapidly ageing population and the decline in the level of job acceptability. In other words, the Spanish population would not accept certain working conditions, aspiring to better pay and working conditions. Therefore, we observed that the international population primarily occupied jobs in the secondary segment of the employment market (Veira, Stanek, Cachón, 2011). There are several explanations for this finding: a normative framework that produces undocumented immigration (Cachón, 2009), stereotypes and a limited labour market in the Pyrenees, with three main characteristics: a) activities that are not very diverse and

highly concentrated in the tourism and construction sectors, b) limited opportunities for job promotions, and c) small businesses that are looking for a workforce willing to be flexible about working conditions, schedules, etc., relegating the international population to the least desirable jobs. Although this article focused on cultural integration, it is obvious that work is a crucial part of the process of integration, as one of our informants said.

> If you really want to be part of the society you need to talk some words in Catalan. If you really want to work here you don't have any other option. (Isabel, 50-year-old woman from Argentina, speaking in Spanish)

8　The study methodology was qualitative, based on the conduct and analysis of 52 in-depth interviews in three population groups: a) key informants, specialists and those knowledgeable about the territory (n=13); b) foreign nationals who arrived during the first several years of the 21st century (n=30); and c) local Spanish nationals (n=9). This information-gathering was complemented by participant observation. Fieldwork was completed between 2009 and 2011. It is important to note that, over the last years, the economic context of the study area has changed notably. Since 2008, when we started our fieldwork, Spain has been hit by a severe economic recession. The first effects of the financial and economic crisis could be already observed when the fieldwork was being conducted. We perceived that some migrants were leaving the area. However, data show that only a minority has finally made the decision to leave. Those who have stayed have had to face new social and economic challenges (unemployment, worse working conditions, etc). This has been a general trend for almost the entire population, but even worse amongst the foreigners.

Key elements in the process of social and cultural integration

9　The social impacts of immigration have captured the attention of researchers as well as public opinion. The process of newcomer integration is one of the essential concerns of the nations that receive them (Jentsch, 2007). The major issue is the maintenance of the social fabric when new population flows arrive. Two fundamental concepts appear in the discussion of the social consequences of immigration: joining a group with shared characteristics and integrating with a different group, the local population. This results from the fact that immigration generates contact between different groups, conditioned by historical, political and economic elements and by the definitions and self-definitions of different groups. The cultural baggage that results constitutes the basis of the model of coexistence and integration.

"In these mountains, there can't be a village!": When they arrive, they will find ...

10　For many newcomers, their arrival in the Pyrenees is a nearly traumatic experience. The following comments describe one woman's emotions when asked about her arrival:

> Ooh … I don't want to remember. For me, it was very hard. Well, for them *[indicating her children]* it was also very difficult. I didn't have to speak, like they did at school. I don't want to remember. Many times when I remember I start to cry. (Sabina, 40-year-old woman from Romania, speaking in Spanish)

11　The aspects highlighted in the interviews as making the immigrant's arrival difficult can be categorized as emotional elements related to leaving their place of origin, having an insecure legal status, needing to return money loaned to them for their journey, or encountering some unexpected situation. In addition, arriving in a territory with such special features as the Catalan Pyrenees (with three languages[2] in daily use, Spanish, Catalan and Aranese), social and geographic isolation; high mountains; cold winters, etc.) can exacerbate the feeling of being in a place that is different than one imagined. The Catalan and Aranese languages are one of the aspects emphasized by immigrants in interviews as complicating their adaptation:

> Then when I arrived, I came here, where it is colder, and besides they speak Catalan and the language of the Aran Valley, which is Aranese, and the people are not exactly outgoing. (Miguel, 33-year-old man from Colombia, speaking in Spanish)

12   Aside from confronting language issues, other aspects that were highlighted include the climate, the geographic relief, and the closed social climate. The hard winter climate, in general, was a recurrent theme and is a characteristic of the study area. If this weather condition is combined with poor housing conditions, the situation worsens. The difficulties of finding affordable housing are further complicated for the international immigrant population. In some cases, those interviewed had lived in inadequate or over-crowded housing:

> We lived for eight months in [*a village*]. But we had a really horrible winter, very cold […]. We had like one heart for all of the rooms, we put up with the cold. The first winter we spent here was really horrible. (Angela, 41-year-old woman from Colombia, speaking in Spanish)

13   Another characteristic of the Pyrenees is the geographic relief of this territory, with high mountains and deep valleys. Arriving in a mountainous landscape with difficult access to small villages can make the surprise and worry more acute, as illustrated by this interview fragment:

> And on the way here, I said, ¡*madre mía*! Where are we going? Because here, in these mountains, there can't be a village! (Romanitza, 21-year-old woman from Romania, speaking in Spanish)

14   In addition, the inhabitants of these mountain villages tend to be reserved by nature, which can be perceived being unfriendly. Despite the changes in the Pyrenees production structure, for centuries the mode of production shaped a particular lifestyle, the "Pyrenees culture", that persists today to some extent. For example, among villagers there remains a distrust of anyone who comes from the outside, meaning outside of the village or of the known context.

"We know everybody and everybody knows us": The neighbour relations

15   Closeness based on place of origin and other aspects such as language or certain customs helps to connect people. In fact, many of the international population interviewed had a network of family or friends when they arrived in the Pyrenees. Very few arrived without any kind of connection. However, we would highlight two aspects that specifically affect the Catalan Pyrenees. First, the international population of the Pyrenees is small in absolute numbers and diverse in their origins. Second, the study area consists of small villages with spaces for interaction that are few and far between, and not very diverse. This means that social relationships exclusively with others from one's home country are difficult for immigrants, and therefore they develop more diverse relationships, especially with other immigrants of different nationalities. The fact of being foreigners and immigrants confers certain shared characteristics:

> Right there, in that little group [*pointing to others nearby*] there are four Colombians, three Ecuadoreans, two Bolivians and one Peruvian. They're different but they have something in common. I mean, we do have relationships with Spanish people, but less. We get along very well with everybody. We've been in this village for eight years. And we know everybody and everybody knows you. In general, we get together more with immigrants, whether they are Romanians or wherever they're from. Just being an immigrant, you already have something in common. (Marcelo, 42-year-old man from Ecuador, speaking in Spanish)

16   With respect to relationships between the international immigrant population and the local population, the type of interaction is often one of needing assistance, especially in the first months after arrival. This relationship is supported by communities where there is a lack of anonymity and knowing the specific situation of one's neighbours can awaken a feeling of solidarity. This type of setting often has a shared history, known to everybody, and/or a sense of trust and neighbourly monitoring among its inhabitants (Jentsch, Simard, 2009). The immigrants interviewed considered this a positive or negative aspect, depending on the narrator's experiences or the topic in question. Some people saw a potential for good coexistence between the locals and immigrants because of the small population, as reflected in this comment:

> Here in the valley, we are pretty well integrated. Much better than in the big cities. […] It's not "the Romanian", it's Andrei or Constanta. Here they know the person better, because it is a small village and we all know each other. It's better. I tell you, go to Barcelona and say you're Romanian and they look sideways at you. (Andrei, 38-year-old man from Romania, speaking in Spanish)

17   The negative aspects, on the other hand, include an excessive lack of anonymity that can be a problem. The population is increasingly given to following individual standards and values its privacy more. Therefore, the social controls generated by the lack of anonymity can be annoying:

> I came from a village and I know what that's like, but it's just that here they know everything. What time you leave the house, what time you go out, what time you eat, where you go, who goes with you, who you hang out with. Sometimes, bad people who talk like that have really screwed me, really hurt me. (Romanitza, 21-year-old woman from Romania, speaking in Spanish)

18   In the interviews, the immigrants reported good relationships with the local population. However, in some of the interviews there was evidence of a certain difficulty in making friends, not acquaintances but close friends, especially with the local people (not just with other immigrants). Various factors could combine to make it difficult to establish deeper friendships. From the point of view of the immigrants, these could include language problems, a lack of time or an inconvenient work schedule. On the other hand, in the interviews with local people, we perceived a certain underlying sense of distancing themselves from the international population. This is the "outsider" identity given to the newcomer population. "Outsiders" are not neighbours. "Neighbours" form part of a community to which it is not easy to gain access; it requires a special relationship with the territory. Much of the international population is far from having this special relationship. In addition, these newcomers are foreigners. *Étrangers*. Strangers. This generates a barrier to interpersonal relationships:

> I know that I am never going to have a real friend from here. Because I don't see it … they don't accept somebody just like that. And look, all in all, I am well connected. But I tell you, I can be more her friend [*referring to a coworker*], who is Romanian, than somebody from here. I've tried to get close to people from here and from around here, but you're always the immigrant, no? (Angela, 41-year-old woman from Colombia, speaking in Spanish)

19   Therefore, being an *immigrant* and a *foreigner*, the international population experiences a double discrimination, to which it is continuously exposed. The fact that "everybody knows everybody" in this type of setting, and the social control that this brings with it, may increase the stigmatization of the international population. Throughout the fieldwork there was evidence of how, in some cases, the international population experienced rejection that can be attributed to being both a "newcomer" and a "foreigner".

"This is the foreigner's festival…": Community participation

20   Both municipal and county public administrators have carried out activities promoting community participation by people from other nationalities. In broad strokes, these are directed at welcoming and integrating newcomers, understood as a mechanism for communicating sociocultural information, such as Catalan language or the exchange of culture and folklore to strengthen the interrelationship between the established community and newcomers, including traditional and multicultural dances or foods from different countries. The message about integration and cultural diversity appears not only in institutions related to public administration but also to some extent in other activities promoted by civic groups.

21   In this context, there is an awareness of the existence of new associations created by newcomers. The goals of the international immigrant associations, based on what was observed, focus on mutual assistance, diverse recreational or religious activities, reminiscing or reproducing experiences typical of their countries of origin, or acting as an intermediary with the administration. The primary objective of one of these associations was described in this interview:

> It's to get together, spend time together, help each other when somebody has some problem. This was the primary objective of the association. And from there, they told us that the association had to be legal. And so we legalized the association. (Anabelle, 37-year-old woman from Cameroun, speaking in Spanish)

22   Despite the relatively high number of immigrant associations and activities to strengthen participation, a certain lack of awareness was observed among the immigrants interviewed. In addition, the fabric of these associations was often described, in different ways, as being weak.

Some of the reasons given were the lack of free time, the small size and the fragmentation of the disperse population, and the fact that some of the functions of an association are handled informally. Altogether, little social and political participation is generated; another influencing factor is that they have limited interaction with the public administration and are sometimes not considered valid spokespersons.

23   On the other hand, the intensity of involvement in social activities of the village varied. This is explained by several factors, some of which are similar to the problems with participation in ethnic or immigrant associations (such as a lack of free time), as well as the background, skills and interests of the international individuals in a particular village or how long it has been since they arrived. In addition, in studying this process of integration it is interesting to note the reticence of some immigrants to participate in local activities. Two interview excerpts show this hesitation. The first describes how those in charge of organizing the village festival are the "lifelong" local residents; there is a sense of restriction. Generally, festivals and activities are organized through informal networks of friends and a strong sense of group ownership develops. At the very outset, this makes it a less than welcoming scenario for immigrants:

> This is the foreigners' festival… There are others, the ones that have always been here, for the whole life of this village. (…) Well, we participate like that, going out in the street and everything, but we doing something specific, no, because it's the village festival and there are people who have been responsible for those things all their lives. (Sabina, 41-year-old woman from Romania, speaking in Spanish)

24   On the other hand, it is important to note that many festivities in Spain have a religious component or tradition. The cultural distance that this aspect and others can introduce can make the immigrant population feel that they are not represented and therefore they have no interest in participating:

> Do you understand? [Here they have] a different way to celebrate and have a good time. On Christmas and the festivals with bonfires I have never participated, because it's different. (Anabelle, 37-year-old woman from Cameroun, speaking in Spanish)

In conclusion, what does social and cultural integration mean in a mountain area?

25   Reviewing the factors that help to explain the arrival in the Pyrenees of the international immigrants, the interviews highlight two elements. First, there is an economic transformation. While agrarian activity is in serious decline, tourism and residential uses are on the increase. Second, and as a result of the first point, social, economic and cultural relationships are changing. To this, we must add the development of infrastructure and communications, and expanded administration, services and rural development policies. Change is definitely occurring in various spheres, and these are also evident through the change that has occurred in the direction of migratory flows.

26   Improved well-being and job possibilities, along with the presence of family or friends, are the primary elements emphasized by the international immigrants interviewed when asked why they had moved to the Pyrenees. The motivations for migration never had anything to do with being attracted to *rurality,* understood as a set of specific attributes such as peace and tranquillity or environmental values or quality of life. Although those interviewed had on occasion seen themselves affected by these elements, this – or the search for this *rurality* – was not the reason they decided to migrate.

27   With respect to the relationships established between newcomers and the local population, there was a certain tendency to interpret them based on two more or less differentiated identities, the classic *them* and *us*. In the first case, belonging to a specific place has an evident impact on the definition of identity. From the fieldwork, some cultural elements were observed that serve to define the local population (*them*), such as "being from the mountain" or the particular character of the Pyrenees people, seen as difficult and unfriendly. In the second case, the identity bestowed by the exogroup on the international population is important. This is usually connected to the *immigrant* identity, the worker with few qualifications who has come from some place that is miserable. The conditions of any relationship, from this position, tend

to be unequal. Therefore, there are two categories that fit one identity and one particular kind of belonging, when in reality one individual, as a member of diverse groups, can confirm his identity in various contexts (Maalouf, 2003).

28   Within this framework, what does integration mean? In the research interviews, integration was related to a lack of conflicts because of the degree of social controls that exist in this type of community, where "everybody knows each other". For some people, this was a positive aspect for integration and the relationship with people who are different, but for others it was negative. Both the international and local population identified other integrative elements, such as participating in local activities. Nonetheless, as we observed, local participation is complex and quite restricted in the study area. The social and cultural integration of *étrangers à la montagne* occurs within a very specific context in which it is not always easy to create new relationships. One of the points emphasized in the interviews was the reserved – or closed – attitudes typical of the local population in the Pyrenees. Despite the absence of serious difficulties in getting along, some participants commented that there is scant interaction between the immigrant and local population in this type of environment.

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Notes

1 www.idescat.cat [Accessed: 8-09-2014]

2 All three are Romance languages and co-official in the Vall d'Aran. Catalan is spoken by 7 million people (www.ethnologue.com), primarily in Catalunya, Valencia, the Balearic Islands, and Andorra. Aranese is a variant of the Gascon dialect of Occitan, spoken by an estimated 500,000 to 3 million people in south France, some valleys of the Piedmont region of Italy, and the Vall d'Aran in Spain.

Pour citer cet article

Référence électronique

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Droits d'auteur

Résumés

This article explores the social and cultural integration of international labour migrants to a mountain area, the High Pyrenees and Aran (Catalan Pyrenees, Spain). Since the last two decades of the 20th century, the Pyrenees has experienced significant social and economic changes. Until then, demographic, social and economic indicators showed mountain rural areas as marginal spaces characterized by deep economic crisis, a significant demographic recession and an important decrease in traditional activities. Nevertheless, from the nineties onwards we observe a demographic recovery in the Pyrenees. This new trend is caused by positive net migration, especially international labour migration. In order to understand some of the

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impacts of the new arrivals of international immigrants, this article focuses on the process of integration. In so doing we attempt to investigate three key issues in social and cultural integration: social interaction with local people, community participation and membership in associations. The small size of villages and towns and the lack of privacy are characteristic of this mountain area. Some migrants consider this a positive aspect, in the sense that they are less likely to be categorized as *the foreigner*. Others say that the small size requires more fences, more barriers, and this hampers relationships.

Cet article analyse l'intégration sociale et culturelle des travailleurs migrants internationaux dans une zone de montagne, les Hautes-Pyrénées et l'Aran (Pyrénées Catalanes, Espagne). Depuis les deux dernières décennies du XXème siècle, les Pyrénées connaissent des changements sociaux et économiques importants. Jusque-là, les indicateurs démographiques, sociaux et économiques montraient les zones rurales de montagne comme des espaces marginaux caractérisés par une profonde crise économique, une récession démographique considérable et une diminution notable des activités traditionnelles. Néanmoins, les années quatre-vingt-dix marquent une reprise démographique. Cette nouvelle tendance s'explique par un solde migratoire positif, principalement attribuable à la migration internationale de main-d'œuvre. Cet article se concentre sur le processus d'intégration de ces nouveaux immigrants internationaux à travers trois éléments clés de l'intégration sociale et culturelle : les relations sociales avec les populations locales, la participation à la vie locale et l'implication dans les mouvements associatifs. La petite taille des villes et des villages et l'absence d'intimité qui caractérisent cette région montagneuse sont vécues différemment selon les migrants : facilitant pour les uns, freinant pour les autres, leur insertion dans le tissu local.