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Challenges in achieving sustainability in Iberian rural areas and small towns: Exploring immigrant stakeholders' perceptions in Alentejo, Portugal, and Empordà, Spain

Abstract:
There is growing evidence of international immigration becoming increasingly influential in peripheral areas in some Southern European countries. Particularly in small localities, where the maintenance of a significant number of active populations is crucial for social, economic and environmental sustainability, immigration can be of vital importance for local and regional policy-making. This paper presents the perceptions, experiences and concerns of various international immigrant stakeholders in Southwest Europe regarding the main challenges in achieving sustainability. Its focus is on rural areas and small towns in Alentejo Litoral (Southwest Portugal) and Alt Empordà (Catalonia, Northeast Spain), places where foreign immigration is above the national average. Using qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews, literature review and participant observation), the main findings show how immigrant stakeholders' perceptions of local sustainability are rich, engaged and diverse, including interesting differences between some Northwest European immigrants and less advantaged immigrants, e.g. Northwest European immigrants (i.e. British, Germans, French, Dutch, Belgians) stress environmental challenges for sustainability much more than the rest. Overcoming some native prejudices, immigrants in Alentejo Litoral and Alt Empordà also contribute to local knowledge of the ways to achieve dynamic local societies and economies, as well as conserve natural protected areas and agricultural environments.

Keywords
International immigration, Stakeholders' perceptions, Sustainable development, Iberian peripheral areas, Portugal, Spain, Southwest Europe

1. Introduction

In a world where cities, metropolitan areas and megalopolises are of growing importance (UN, 2014), there has usually been bias towards them in sustainability narratives, as some recent relevant publications illustrate (e.g. Portney, 2015; Rosenzweig et al., 2016). However, rural areas and small towns are equally relevant for human and planetary sustainability. As early as the 1980s, the Brundtland Commission report *Our Common Future*, a key document in sustainability studies, proposed the development of explicit settlement strategies that would take the pressure off the largest urban centres and build up smaller towns and cities, while closely integrating them with the rural hinterlands (The Brundtland Commission, 1987)[1]. These small towns and rural areas can be a complementary type of human settlement: "one while globally linked and increasingly cosmopolitan, remains more small-scale, more balanced between natural and built environment, more personal, and more responsive to local values and governance" (Afshar, 1998: 376). Recently, the 2nd Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of the 2030 UN Development Agenda pays explicit attention to rural issues. In particular, for instance, target 2.a specifically asks to increase investment in rural infrastructure, including the enhancement of international cooperation (UN, 2015). Additionally, within the European Union (EU) context, the importance of people-centred rural development and promotion of sustainable food production systems have been underlined (EUROSTAT, 2016; 2017), while the UN Food and Agriculture Organization FAO (2018) has recently noted that 'one of the key challenges facing sustainable rural development is information sharing and dissemination'. Thus, in order to contribute filling that gap and informing more target policy-making, this paper offers qualitative information on challenges for rural sustainability in two different South European countries.

Today, the idea of small towns and rural areas as isolated and backward places is usually out-dated, especially in many regions of OECD countries such as those in the EU, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand or Chile. Globalisation and modernisation processes – including international immigration – are also occurring, with some particularities, in many rural areas and small towns (Woods, 2007). According to Cid-Aguayo (2008), many rural localities and small towns are 'global villages' in a literal, rather than in the metaphorical sense, as suggested by Marshall McLuhan & Bruce R. Powers (1989). Global villages are also 'all small settlements that participate in the globalization of processes related to the economy, ecology, culture, migration, technology and other aspects of life' (Cid-Aguayo, 2008: 543). In this paper, we argue along with other scholars (e.g. Scott, Park & Cocklin, 2000) that rural sustainability studies should take migration and ethnic diversity more into account, including elements of livelihood, social participation, justice and equity.

In international immigration studies, most research has been focused on the arrival of immigrants in big cities and large metropolitan areas, while much less attention has been paid to international immigration in small towns and rural areas (McAreavey, 2012; Jentsch & Simard, 2009; Hugo, Morén-Alegret, 2008)[2]. In nationalistic and

nation-state times (Simon, 2015), one may wonder why we should take the views of immigrants seriously, and what their insights could contribute to our understanding of sustainability. However, if immigrants' views were left unattended, an important part of reality would be lacking in the picture because today immigration is forging a 'new reality' in various places of rural Europe (Woods, 2016):

> Not only are traditional rural industries such as farming and meat-processing dependent in some regions on international migrant workers, but international migrants can also occupy traditional positions of authority in rural communities such as doctors and dentists (Woods, 2016: 583)

Engaging various immigrants' voices contributes to unveil threats and challenges for local sustainability that were under the radar of some regional or local institutions (Morén-Alegret, Wladyka & Owen, 2018). In other words, 'the transformative capacity of international migration in rural areas is not only economic, but is also social and cultural' (Woods, 2016: 588) as well as environmental, as it is explained below.

In recent decades, Southern European countries have attracted international immigration from various continents to rural areas and small towns, especially in regions where internationalised sectors like tourism and export-oriented agriculture are important drivers of the economy. Some studies (e.g. Donato et al., 2010) shown that despite economic crises, international immigration can constitute a key factor in the small town and rural 'rebound' (i.e. process of population growth following years of demographic stagnation or decline). We argue that immigrant stakeholders' voices should be heard in order to avoid reinforcing methodological nationalisms from academia (Wimmer & Glick Shiller, 2003) as well as to better inform the implementation of inclusive local and regional policies.

The main aim of this paper is to explore the immigrant stakeholders' perspectives and perceptions of key challenges for achieving sustainability in small towns and rural areas of Alentejo Litoral, Portugal, and Alt Empordà, Spain. According to Ragin (1994), the three main objectives of qualitative research are to give voice, to interpret significant historical or cultural phenomena, and to propose theory. In this paper, the analysis is mainly focused on international immigrants' narratives because their voices have been often neglected in academic literature on sustainability, especially regarding rural and semi-rural areas. Listening to a variety of immigrants' voices (including some from wealthier countries and others from impoverished countries) has the added value of obtaining various points of view, which helps to learn about different contexts of diversity (UNU-GCM, 2015). In this paper, an effort is therefore made to shed light on the contents of perceptions: Which dimensions of sustainability are underlined? What are, altogether, the main challenges for sustainability and the proposals for improvement? What is the content of local sustainability challenges?

In the next section we provide an overview of recent conceptual debates on sustainability, bearing in mind the importance of human migration in today's world. Then, the Southwest European study areas together with the applied qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews, literature review and participant observation) are presented. Next, we offer the main findings, which are organised by perceived perspective on

achieving economic, social and environmental sustainability in both case studies. Finally, the paper concludes with some remarks and reflections as well as suggestions for further research.

2. Conceptualising sustainability in the migration age

In their current meanings, 'sustainable' and 'sustainability' are neologisms. According to geographer William M. Adams (2006), the idea of sustainability dates back more than 45 years, when a new mandate was adopted in 1969 by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Shortly after, it was a key theme of the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm (1972) as a concept explicitly coined to suggest that it was possible to achieve economic development without environmental damage. In this regard, the importance of the term is linked to the stormy socio-political context of the 1960s and 1970s, when environmental movements took the public stage in several Western countries to protest against, among other problems, environmental damage caused by industrial and transport pollution (e.g. Wall, 1999). In the following decades, mainstream sustainable development discourse was progressively developed through the World Conservation Strategy (1980), The Brundtland Report (1987) and the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (1992), as well as in governmental planning and the engagement of business leaders and non-governmental organisations (Adams, 2006). Thus the 'sustainability' concept is a child of the nature conservation movement (e.g. International Union for the Conservation of Nature), illustrating the shift from a movement in favour of 'wildlife conservation' (as if nature was separated from human life) to a wider movement in favour of a healthy planet, including humans in the debate. For some, conservation is still a relevant concept, particularly in some countries like the UK, but today the meaning is changing from the protection of habitats for wildlife to the creation of optimum habitats for us humans as well (Juniper, 2015).

The idea of sustainability focuses on planning for the future and finding ways of dealing with serious threats, so it contains an explicit time dimension (Portney, 2015). In general terms, in sustainability discourse there is a fundamental emphasis on interconnectedness and unity (Adams, 2006; Becker, Jahn, Stiess & Wehling, 1997). In this regard, sustainability – the commitment to the long-term continuity of that which is valued, maintaining the best of what is there already but allowing and often promoting certain types of change – must be seen as always sitting in the midst of 'social', 'economic' and 'environmental' considerations, with any displacement into one sector, for example as 'economic sustainability', losing this holistic appreciation (Adams, 2006). In other words, for sustainability to be realized, people, places and production should be aligned with mutual benefit, and challenges need to be considered by including all three dimensions (see also: Kates, Parris & Leiserowitz 2005; Kates et al. 2001). However, over the past decades, some scholars pointed out the lack of theoretical rigor in 'sustainable development', which is not surprising because the aforementioned mainstream texts were the outcome of political negotiation and had become so rounded

as to be all things to all readers (Adams, 1995).

The success of 'sustainability' as a concept is linked to the fact that it is a 'vague' term with multiple meanings (Adams, 2006). It is a vague term that is in vogue[3]. However, the apparent consensus on the term 'sustainability' conceals fierce battles behind the scenes over meanings (Adams, 1995). It has also been the target of some social scientists and humanities scholars from various disciplines and theoretical approaches. For instance, it has been suggested from anthropology that sustainable development discourse is a Northern/Western scientific worldview and that the practice of sustainability mainly happens via highly bureaucratic and technocratic institutional methods, which is advantageous for states, large NGOs or transnational companies and disadvantageous for local grassroots associations, i.e. it very rarely takes into account the local communities' insights and experiences (Smyth, 2011). Similarly, from biology and engineering, the mere ambiguity of the term is targeted as empowering existing consumption-oriented development, rather than supporting environmental protection (Ríos Osorio et al., 2005). Additionally, from history, there has been criticism that the triple conceptualisation of sustainability (economic, social and environmental) implies isolation of each dimension and, in recent hegemonic neoliberal decades, has meant a prevalence of the economic dimension over the others (Smythe, 2014). Or, from geography, the global strategy for commodification and marketization in order to intensify the penetration of nature by capital has been criticised (Smith, 2007).

This paper is inspired by social sciences approaches to sustainable development in Europe. In 2010, when our research project started (this paper is part of a wider project), the countries studied, Portugal and Spain, were already implementing National Strategies for Sustainable Development (NSDS)[4]. As in previous international studies of rural 'sustainable development' (e.g. Bruckmeier, Tovey, 2009), it was recognised from the outset that this is a 'contested concept', which often puts into question those researchers that dare to use it. However, at the same time, it has been argued that it is also a 'bridging concept' and a 'platform concept' (Bruckmeier, Tovey, 2009: 6-8): 'Differences in national, regional and local situations, in rural development policies and in scientific traditions of rural research make it implausible to treat rural sustainable development as a single coherent discourse'. Thus, in tune with European rural sociologists Karl Bruckmeier & Hilary Tovey, instead of simply starting with a predefined concept and looking for indicators to measure progress towards predefined goals[5], in the research upon which this paper is based it was decided to ask a wide variety of local, regional and national actors in different European rural areas and small towns about the main perceived environmental, social and economic challenges for sustainability. Little academic research has been focused on engaging ethnic minorities' or immigrants' perspectives in sustainability issues (Scott, Park & Cocklin, 2000). As today's world is immersed in the age of migration (Castles & Miller, 2009) and immigrants are relevant actors in the regional development of rural Europe (Woods, 2016), we consider that immigrants' voices make a valuable contribution to the sustainability debate and to policy-making. For instance, in countries like Portugal,

international immigrants faced the 2007-2008 economic crisis and its effects setting up new businesses and generating new jobs, e.g. the number of foreign immigrant employers grew while the number of Portuguese native employers did not (Oliveira, 2014; Esteves, 2017). In this sense, the Declaration of the 2030 Agenda (UN Population Division, 2015) stresses the multidimensional reality of migration and recognises the contribution of migration to both inclusive growth and global sustainable development. The Declaration also calls for enhancing migration research, such as the participatory-based research presented in this paper, and its effective communication. Thus this paper aims to fill the gap and offer original qualitative data on sustainable development, giving voice to various immigrant stakeholders who live in non-metropolitan areas (i.e. peripheral regions) of Portugal and Spain.

3. Material and methods

3.1 Case studies

The data presented in this paper are part of an international research project, which focused on areas and municipalities with a local cultural identity and capital that are distinctive from the regional ones, including not being part of metropolitan regions. Two case studies, Alt Empordà in Catalonia, Spain, and Alentejo Litoral in Portugal were selected as 'multifunctional' and multicultural territories (Woods, 2011; Argent, Tonts, 2015) with the following common characteristics: (1) variety of small towns and rural/semi-rural localities (villages); (2) presence of natural protected areas; (3) a growing immigrant population and foreign immigration above the national average [see Table 1]; (4) tourism and agriculture are the prime economic activities; and (5) peripheral in the sense of being distant from large metropolitan regions.

Table 1. Total population, foreign population percentage and main nationalities of foreign resident population at national and municipal levels of both case studies in 2011

	Total population	***% Foreign population***	***Main nationalities (% of foreigners)***
Alt Empordà			
Spain	47,190,493	12.19%	Romania (15.05%); Morocco (13.46%); UK (6.80%); Ecuador (6,27%); Colombia (4.75%)
Roses	19,731	34.82%	Morocco (35.18%); France (17.22%); Romania (6.51%); Germany (5.5%)
Castelló d'Empúries	11,885	49.99%	Morocco (21.74%); France (20.16%); Germany (15.26%); Romania (7.20%); Russia (5.28%); UK (3.2%)
Garriguella	863	19.47%	Morocco (29.76%); France (14.88%); Romania (13.69%); UK (9.52%)
Rabós	196	22.45%	France (29.54%); UK (27.27%); Netherlands (11.36%); Italy (9.09%)
Alentejo Litoral			
Portugal	10,562,178	3.41%	Brazil (28.33%); Cape Verde (10.30%); Angola (6.87%); Romania (6.34%); Guinea-Bissau (4.34%)
Odemira	26,066	9.2%	Bulgaria (29.55%); Germany (19.02%); Brazil (7.69%) Thailand (6.69%); UK (5.68%)

Source: GRM, based on 2011 Census, INE (Portugal) & *Padrón Municipal*, INE (Spain)

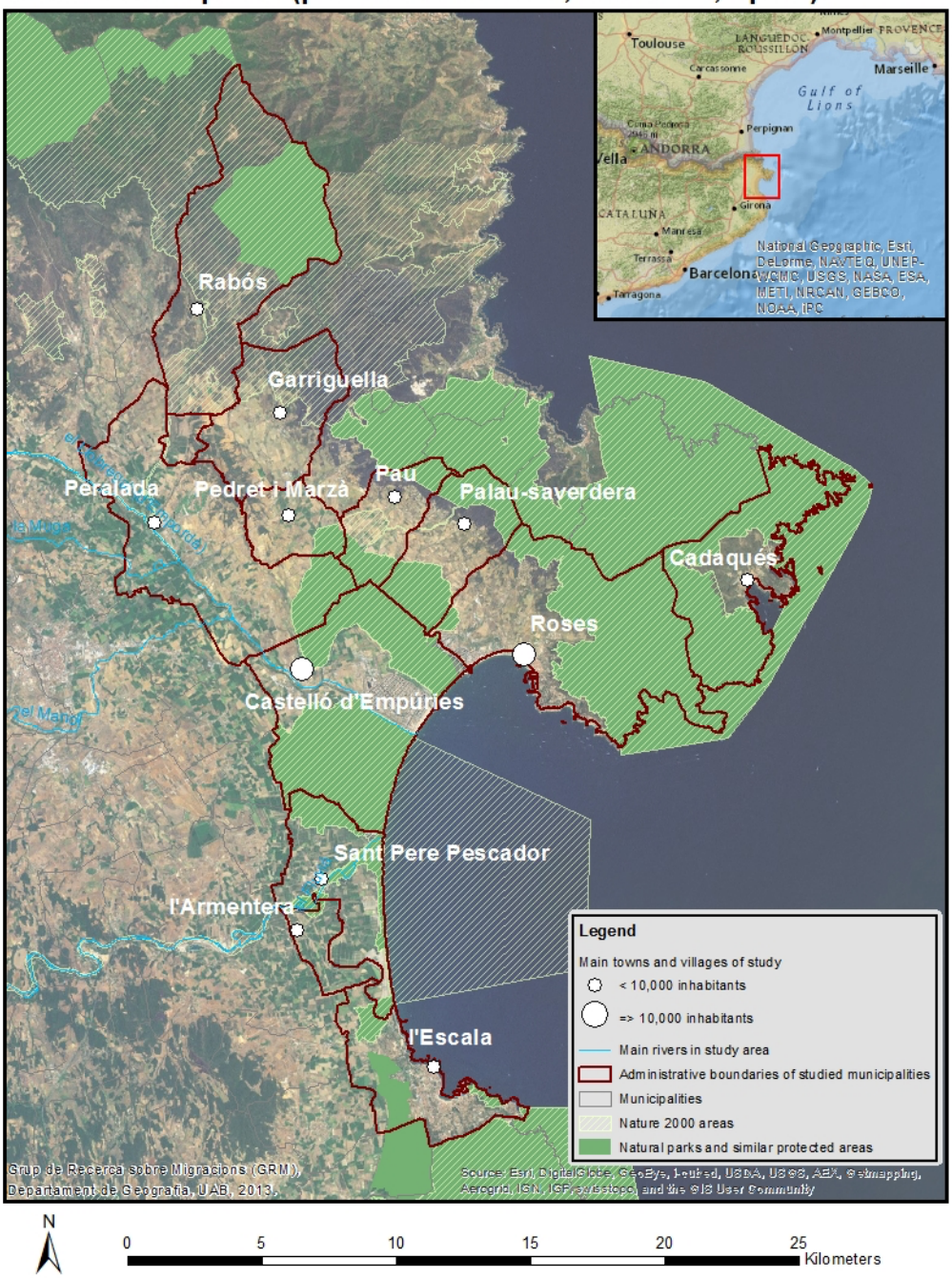
3.1.1 Eastern Alt Empordà

The fieldwork was conducted in four localities in the demographically and economically dynamic eastern part of Alt Empordà, a county in Northeast Catalonia, Spain, placed close to France. This area cannot be considered as a remote rural area (Paniagua, 2014). However, in Spain, municipalities with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants are considered rural and semi-rural localities (i.e. hamlets and villages; Hazak, 2004), while municipalities with between 10,001 and 25,000 inhabitants (according to the 2001 Population Censuses datasets) can be considered small towns (Morén-Alegret, 2008). For the purpose of the present paper, the Alt Empordà case study is divided into: (a) two small towns, Roses and Castelló d'Empúries, with territories being part of Aiguamolls de l'Empordà Natural Park (in the case of Roses, part of its territory also belongs to Cap de Creus Natural Park), and (b) two villages, Garriguella and Rabós[6], with part of their territories belonging to Albera Natural Zone of Declared National Interest (see Figure 1). These natural protected areas are included in the European *Natura 2000,* which is the largest network of protected areas globally. About 63% of Roses' territory is under protection, while Castelló d'Empúries has 64%, Garriguella, 41% and Rabós nearly 91%. The economy of Roses and Castelló d'Empúries is mainly based on tourism, from mass tourism along the coastline to eco-tourism in the natural protected areas and rural tourism in the inland areas of both municipalities. Additionally, agriculture such as olive oil and wine production add to the economy on the outskirts of both towns. In Garriguella and Rabós, wine and olive oil production are relevant economic activities[7], with a slight increase in rural and eco-tourism over the past few years in Garriguella (Mas, Morén-Alegret, Fonseca, 2014), including rural Bed & Breakfast lodgings and campsites.

Regarding demographic trends, over the last three decades, the small coastal towns of Roses and Castelló d'Empúries experienced a rise in population, mainly because of mass tourism and construction sectors, e.g. in Roses from 2,720 inhabitants in 1950 to 10,303 in 1991 and 19,731 in 2011. In Garriguella and Rabós, while the number of inhabitants declined until the 1990s, these two villages have recently been experiencing a slight recovery (in 2011, 863 and 196 inhabitants respectively). The percentage of foreign population in the Spanish case study has increased in recent decades and is considerably higher than those of Catalonia and Spain (see Table 1).

Figure 1: Map of the Spanish case study, Alt Empordà.

East of Alt Empordà (province of Girona, Catalonia, Spain)



3.1.2 Alentejo Litoral

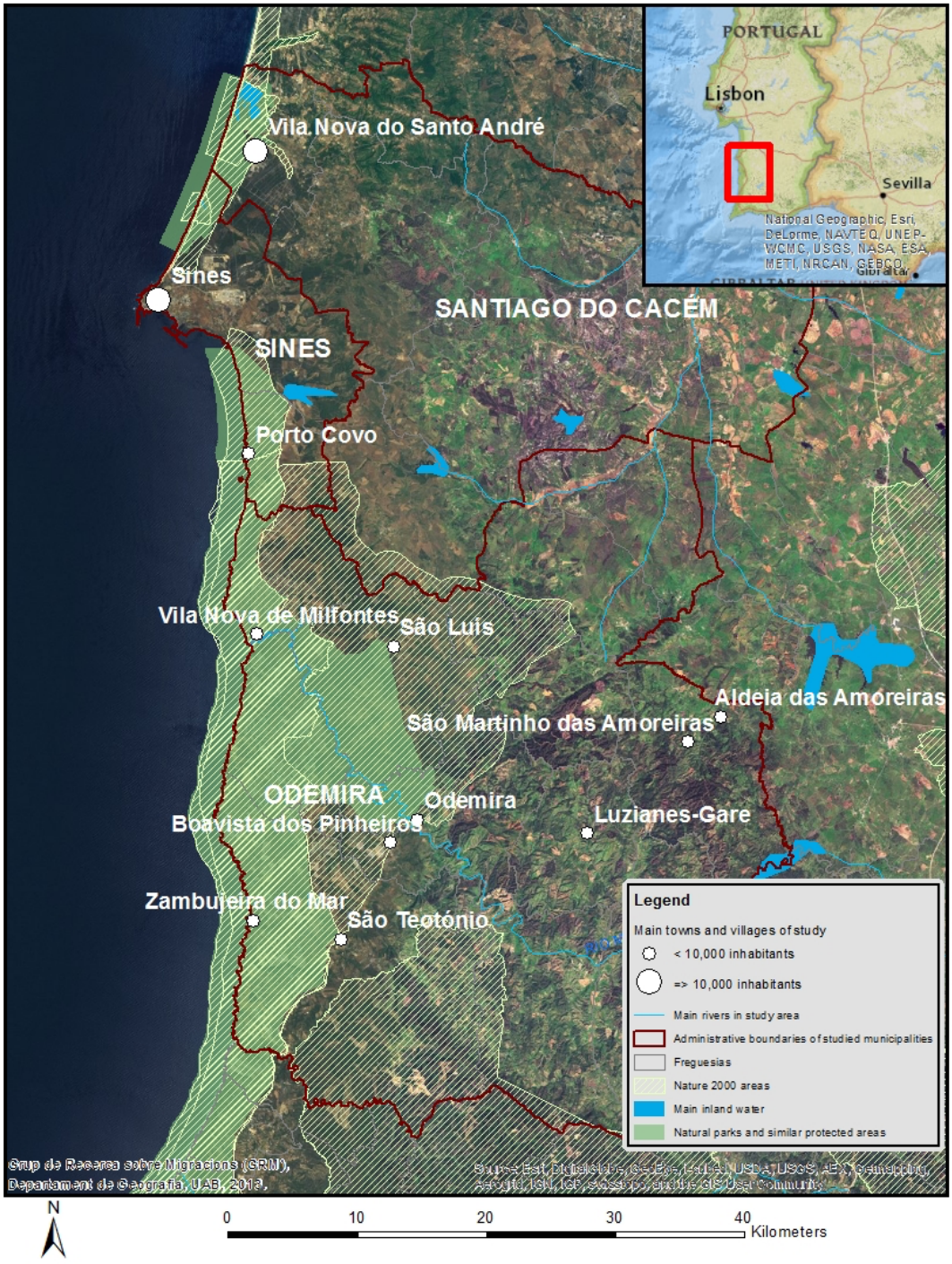
The Portuguese fieldwork was carried out in Odemira municipality and surrounding area, in the south part of Alentejo Litoral region. The growth in immigration to Portugal since the mid-1990s has had unequal effects on the different regions (Fonseca, 2008), but in some parts of Alentejo the growth was much higher than the national total. According to the current statistical delimitation in Portugal (INE, 2014), *freguesias* (i.e. sub-municipal units) of up to 5,000 inhabitants are considered rural and semi-rural

localities, while urban *freguesias* have 5,000 inhabitants or more. For the purpose of this paper, that delimitation is accepted for operative reasons[8]. Odemira is the municipality with the largest surface area in Portugal and is also one of the least densely populated municipalities in that country. Its territory is composed of several villages and small towns. About 44% of Odemira is in the Southwest Alentejo and Costa Vicentina Natural Park, included within the *Natura 2000* network (see Figure 2).

Over the last four decades, Odemira suffered severe population loss, going from 43,999 inhabitants in 1960 to 26,106 in 2001. However, between 1991 and 2001 the population decline was rather small, only -1.2%, and between 2001 and 2011, the resident population was quite stable, which may show a trend for stabilization or possibly a slight demographic recovery. Furthermore, Odemira has an ageing population with low levels of formal education. Regarding national diversity, the percentage of foreign population in Odemira is considerably higher than the Portuguese average (see Table 1). Agriculture, civil construction and tourism are important economic sectors both in Odemira and Alentejo Litoral (CLASO, 2005). There are notable geographical variations within the municipal territory and one of the greatest contrasts is between the mountainous inland areas, the lowland coastal areas and the urban core (Mas, Morén-Alegret, Fonseca, 2014). Specifically, according to 2011 census data collected in the then existing 17 *freguesias*, the percentage of rural residents ranges importantly in the municipality (Câmara Municipal de Odemira, 2015).

Figure 2: Map of the Portuguese case study South Alentejo Litoral.

South Alentejo Litoral (Alentejo, South-West Portugal)



3.2. Methods

3.2.1 Data generation

To explore key current environmental, economic and social sustainability processes and main future challenges for achieving or improving sustainability, we elicited the

perceptions, views and concerns of immigrant stakeholders from Alt Empordà, Spain and Alentejo Litoral, Portugal using semi-structured interviews. The researchers who conducted the fieldwork and interviews made an effort to incorporate sustainability in their research practices across Spanish and Portuguese study areas[9].

The data presented in this paper are part of a larger international research project and only represent a subset of questions included in the interview schedule (Fatorić et al., 2014, 2017; Wladyka, Morén-Alegret, 2017). We used the community risk assessment (CRA) approach (van Aalst et al., 2008), which emphasizes the importance of community engagement in scientific research, to structure the questions asked in semi-structured interviews and guide the analysis of the empirical data. Demographic information on immigrant stakeholders' gender, age and nationality were also collected. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a main method since these are likely to achieve higher overall response rates than other methods (Bryman 2012).

A non-probabilistic, purposive sampling method (Tongco, 2007) was used to recruit immigrant stakeholders. In this study, an immigrant stakeholder is defined as a key local and/or regional actor who was born in another country[10] and whose activity is linked to social, economic and/or environmental organisations in the study areas. There is a lack of studies in sustainability and rural development disciplines that focus on exploring immigrant stakeholders' perceptions and views (e.g., Lovelock et al., 2011) in comparison to more common native stakeholder groups. Between 2011 and 2014 twenty-six in-person, semi-structured interviews were conducted with immigrant stakeholders linked to small towns and villages in both case studies. After reaching saturation with twenty-six interviews, additional interviews were carried out to ensure that no relevant additional perceptions emerged. Guest et al.'s (2006) methodological research supports the choice of sample size for this study. The selected stakeholders were grouped into: (a) ten social stakeholders from immigrant associations and magazines, parent associations, cultural groups, political parties and religious communities; (b) ten economic stakeholders from the agricultural and touristic sectors, real estate agencies and engineering companies; and (c) six environmental stakeholders from non-governmental organisations and "green" businesses. All interviewees were adults (over 18 years old), resided in the study areas for at least one year, and were almost equally distributed in terms of gender and age (older and younger than 45 years). The interviewed stakeholders are not representative of the broader population in either case study, as the aim was to capture a diversity of immigrant stakeholders' experiences, views and attitudes.

3.2.2 Data characteristics and analysis

The interviews were conducted in English, Portuguese, Spanish and Catalan, and the average length was 35 min. All interviews were digitally audio-recorded, translated into English, and transcribed for content analysis (Weber, 1990). Transcribed data was first coded and then synthesized into major themes that appeared across the responses from the interviews to create final coding categories, which reflect the types of questions asked during the interviews. Similarities and differences between responses were also analysed. Direct interview quotes are used to further illustrate the identified immigrant

stakeholders' trends and contexts. These interview quotes are a way of giving voice to various stakeholders, which is one of the key objectives of qualitative research (Ragin, 1994). In each quote, details of the stakeholders' country of residence (PT stands for Portugal; SP for Spain), main dimension of activity (SC for social; EC for economic; ENV for Environmental), age (years old), geographical origin (NWE for Northwest Europe; SE for South Europe; CE for Central Europe; EE for Eastern Europe; NA for North Africa; WA for West Africa; SA for South America) and gender (female/male) are provided. In tune with previous research (e.g. Morén-Alegret, 2008), this way of displaying qualitative data invites the reader to grasp the existing diversity of experiences and points of view (Ely et al., 1997), while at the same time showing commonalities (Ragin, 1994).

The application of additional data collection methods ensured triangulation (Ritchie 2003). Data from scientific literature, reports, official documents, local newspapers and statistical data (obtained from the Portuguese *Instituto Nacional de Estatística*, INE; the Spanish *Instituto Nacional de Estadística*, INE, and Catalan *Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya*, IDESCAT) were gathered to gain background information about the case studies and to contextualize perceptions and knowledge brought up in interviews. Participant observations and photographic records were also made during fieldwork in both case studies.

4. Results and discussion

Immigrant stakeholders identified a number of key essential challenges related to each of the three dimensions of sustainability. These challenges are grouped as follows: a) *environmental sustainability*: territorial planning, nature conservation and management, waste and water treatment, pollution, transport, environmental education, recycling and climate change impacts; b) *economic sustainability*: employment and working conditions, seasonality, entrepreneurship, monetary exchange rates and bureaucracy; c) *social sustainability*: youth employment, participation, education, ageing, healthcare, criminality, social life, racism and prejudice. This triple approach to sustainability offered novel empirical findings in small towns and rural areas, while bearing in mind the theoretical concerns about sustainability (see section 2 above). We sought to avoid as much as possible the isolation of each dimension or the prevalence of one of them. The organization of the results does not draw strict lines between the components of sustainability, but it aims to highlight major emerging themes for each sustainability dimension. For example, transport is sometimes mentioned rather more in terms of social than environmental sustainability (e.g. access to schools, entertainment, workplace). Similarly, apart from the social dimension, some elderly stakeholders linked healthcare to environmental sustainability too, e.g. they decided to migrate and settle down in rural South Europe due to beneficial effects of the new place of residence on their illnesses. Thus, as Margot Ely and others noted in a collective book on qualitative research writing:

> "by final writing time, we have in front of us the data of various levels of abstraction out of which we work to create another abstraction; hopefully a cohesive, interesting, useful, and trustworthy essence that we call … an article" (Ely et al., 1997: 37).

4.1. Environmental dimension of sustainability

4.1.1 Territorial planning, nature conservation and environmental management

Both immigrant stakeholders from Portugal and Spain perceived that the short-term view of local politicians and policy-makers should be reconverted. Their focus should be to design and implement long-term territorial planning and policy-making. Concretely, in Alt Empordà, the perceived key challenges for environmental sustainability included: developing and implementing 'tourism plans' for the coming decades (SP-ENV-51-NWE-female), coping with an 'excess' of housing construction and urbanisation during the real estate 'bubble' years (SP-ENV-44-NWE-male), dealing with permit applications for new building developments out of the village/urban cores, managing waste and residual water with adequate treatment plants (SP-EC-58-CE-male), keeping a balance between the natural park protection and 'skydive' tourism development at the Empuriabrava airport after investments from an Arabic corporation (SP-SC-48-NWE-female; see also: ACN, 2013) and coping with the constraints of local governments in creating and preserving natural protected areas (SP-ENV-41-NWE-female). In terms of natural protected area conservation, it is opined that some powerful local actors (e.g. key landlords) constrain local public authorities from creating new natural protected areas because some environmental regulations are perceived as a restriction for local and/or regional economic development. So one challenge noted among interviewed stakeholders is to maintain or empower the necessary independence and authority of environmental officers (usually hired by local governments), when their job continuity depends on agreeing with contradictory local interests:

> The people who are trained in sustainability issues are environmental science graduates and their only way to earn a living here is to make favourable reports for local governments (SP-ENV-41-NWE-female)

Another complex challenge is how to overcome some of the former dictatorship practices, which in Alt Empordà resulted in aggressive urban development and degradation of natural resources, ecosystems and habitats. This is the case of Empuriabrava, a marina built in 1967 (this marina acts as an urban enclave within wider rural and natural protected areas) where wealthy immigrants from Northwest and Central Europe have settled or bought second homes[11], living together with African immigrant workers with jobs in domestic service, agriculture, construction and tourism. While there are various perspectives and perceptions on the situation in 'superdiverse' Empuriabrava (Wladyka, Morén-Alegret, 2017), a place where most residents are foreign immigrants, some immigrant stakeholders commented that housing and environmental regulations should be substantially improved:

> This place [Empuriabrava & Santa Margarida] is so artificial, and you need to put so much effort into maintaining it... the canals are already falling apart, the quality of buildings is horrible. Everything is done for quick money and they don't care what might happen (SP-SC-34-NWE-male).

In Spain, the so-called Coastal Law has been an arduous issue for both environmental and economic sustainability over the past decades. It was controversially amended in 2013 (BOE, 2013), offering an exceptional status to, among other marinas, Empuriabrava (Aguirre, 2013)[12]. For instance, in 2017, the central government started to implement the 2013 Coastal Law, distinguishing private land from public land, and local authorities and some neighbours' concerns have calmed down somewhat[13]. Thus, especially among Northwest European immigrants (SP-ENV-50-NWE-male), there has also been a quite common concern about the enforcement and the respect of laws and current territorial planning in general.

Similarly, in Alentejo Litoral, the debate around the protection and conservation of natural areas is very intense among stakeholders. There is a fairly common feeling that having a natural protected area brings benefits to the place and that the protection regulations and laws should be further enforced. However, there is no consensus about priorities and there are two main confronting views. Some environmental immigrant stakeholders and economic stakeholders linked to small businesses suggest that natural park rules should be reconsidered and better implemented, and should avoid favouring large export companies while paying more attention to local people's needs, e.g. family farmers and artisans (PT-EC-45-SA-female). Some of these immigrant stakeholders opined that the natural park's effective protection suffers from double standards, which should be corrected because *de facto* there is one rule for small tenants and another rule for large export companies:

> Within the natural park there is an exclusion area that is irrigated from river Mira and that is an ecological crime [i.e. freely channelled water] and a social crime [i.e. labour exploitation] (PT-ENV-61-SA-male).

The view that there was contradictory territorial planning and scarce law enforcement was widely shared, which is due to, among other factors, the very small number of rangers available to control a very large natural park: there were just 7 rangers out of 15 natural park workers in total for over 200 km of protected coast and inland areas. An additional constraint that rangers faced is the lack of financial resources for daily operations, e.g. 'sometimes they do not have petrol for their vehicles' (PT-ENV-66-NWE-male).

In contrast, some interviewed foreign investors, businessmen/women and managers – who usually appreciate the natural park's existence – commented that one of the main challenges for sustainability in Alentejo Litoral is how to overcome the so-called administrative barriers posed by the environmental authorities (Mas, Morén-Alegret, Fonseca, 2014). These stakeholders perceived that, instead of interests clashing with and paralysing development, more synergies should be reached among large export companies, small farmers, touristic enterprises, artisans and other relevant actors. However, particular interests usually prevail. For instance, among horticulturalists the basis for development is agriculture in tune with 'adequate' (i.e. regionalised) natural park regulations, instead of top-down regulations from Lisbon capital city (PT-EC-50-NWE-male). This top-down approach is criticized as an 'authoritarian' policy by some North-West European immigrant stakeholders because local residents are often not taken into account, e.g. traditional small pigsties and shell fishing were forbidden,

without consultation with local residents (PT-ENV-66-NWE-male). Bastos et al. (2012) had also noted concerns and potential contradictions regarding how natural protected areas were managed in Alentejo Litoral while some so-called national strategic territorial planning were being implemented there, e.g. Projects of National Interest (PIN, Ministers Council Resolution, 95/2005 of 24 May) and Projects of Potential National Interest with Strategic Importance (PIN+, Decree Law 285/2007 of 17 August).

In this regard, the following quote is illustrative of the complex and confusing situation generated over the years and the need for better communication policies and compensation measures:

> What is not working is the administration of the park, and the regulations… First of all, I think they are too few administrators for such a big area. This is like the whole coast, and they are like 6 or 7 people … Secondly, the park ... you cannot say 'yes, it's a region where people live, and from today to tomorrow they have to move out'. Then you have to compensate them, and say, 'we'll close this', [but] this is like your sweetie ... you have to accommodate [them] and… explain to people what has to be done... (PT-EC-49-NWE-male).

As a solution to 'communication problems' and challenges, it was suggested that instead of just biologists, the natural park should also hire social scientists (e.g. anthropologists, geographers, sociologists) to work with local people (including immigrants) and more efficiently negotiate and implement policies:

> I went several times to talk with the natural park officers and they defended their ideas, but they defend them with biologists because they are all biologists. Their main aim is biology. Clearly, biologists have difficulties understanding human needs…·(PT-ENV-66-NWE-male).

Additionally, the need is also suggested for more legislative coherence and a 'symbiotic' territorial planning that should offer a balanced coexistence for different human activities in and around the Portuguese natural park:

> You have to have... what I call symbiosis, between economic life, cultural [life], population and environment … Now, people are coming here, the park is seen as: 'I can not build a house because of the park', 'I cannot set up a business because the park is not giving the authorisation'… OK, you always have limitations [but] … they are all fighting … so the laws are not being passed, the laws that are being passed are contradictory ... Consequence of that? People are breaking the law, which is bad; they don't pay taxes, which is also bad; and everything is going very slowly. And it's a pity. For some stuff, you have 3 laws here regulating the same thing and they are not the same (PT-EC-49-NWE-male)

Apart from agriculture, tourism is also growing in Alentejo Litoral. A shared point of view among several Northwest European immigrant stakeholders was the opposition to the Algarve's development model (Sampaio, 2013):

> The infrastructure is getting better in terms of tourism. There's more of such a kind of hotels, rural tourism... available now. They weren't here before. When we came 10 years ago, there were very few. A residence here and there and a little hotel, but nowadays there are more opportunities… [However] nobody wants it to become the Algarve. You know, people come here because there's still natural beauty and no high rise flats... (PT-SC-40-NWE-female).

This awareness about the potential 'danger' of becoming a highly urbanised area resonates in the 'counterurbanisation' debate (Halfacree, 2008). This is especially relevant if one takes into account how some Northwest European immigrants living in Alentejo Litoral expressed that had 'escaped' from the increasingly urbanised Algarve. Moreover, urbanisation is also connected, among other challenges, to transport and

pollution, as it is explained in the next sub-section.

4.1.2. Transport, pollution, environmental education and climate change

In some big cities and metropolitan areas, an important source of pollution and smog is the massive use of private cars and, consequently, some policy-makers have been encouraging citizens to use public transport, with variable results (Miralles-Guasch et al., 2014). It was found that this might not be a straightforward option in many Spanish rural areas and small towns since public transport is often scarce and, when it exists, it is often unreliable (Morén-Alegret, 2008). Similarly, some interviewed stakeholders from both case studies often stressed that 'having a car is indispensable' (PT-ENV-61-NWE-male) and pointed out the need for improved public transport frequency and timetables (SP-SC-39-NA-male).

Interestingly, apart from claiming for public transport improvements, some immigrant stakeholders in Alentejo Litoral are reviving walking as local mean of transport and, especially, as a sustainable way of attracting international (eco-tourist) visitors:

> People in Portugal were very poor and walking was something for the poor. Now this is changing… I did some research and many people still think like that. Portuguese people walk very little, but foreigners have another mentality. This is important because walking trails can be developed out of season, all year long (PT-ENV-66-NWE-male).

In fact, the successful walking trails called *Rota Vicentina*[14] that have been developed in Southwest Portugal were mainly fuelled by Northwest European entrepreneurs living in Alentejo Litoral.

Moreover, minimising pollution was perceived as a key aspect of sustainability and clean air was considered a reason for living in the study areas: "This is not like Barcelona with all the smog above, pollution…" (SP-SC-20-NA-female).

Some threats to clean air near natural protected areas were also noted. For instance, in Alentejo Litoral the risk of pollution from possible oil spills in the nearby Sines petro-chemical complex, port and refineries (PT-SC-19-WA-female) were perceived as serious risks for environmental sustainability[15] despite the fact that the port and petro-chemical complex have prevention and sustainability policies (Brito, 2014; Nobre, 2014). The oil industry also recently triggered other concerns and in 2016 inspired two environmental movements: ALA in Alentejo Litoral and ASMAA in Algarve, which represent communities and stakeholders in their fight against oil drilling plans on the Alentejo coast (ADN, 2017; O Leme, 2017).

In terms of pollution, in Alt Empordà wetlands, intensive agriculture and mass tourism resulted in heavy metals and pesticides contamination of ecosystems and natural resources (Salvadó et al., 2006). In this sense, some interviewed stakeholders perceived that repelling of mosquitoes with chemical products has sometimes side effects on the environment and people health: "There are also a lot of mosquitoes... Here they spread insecticide over the whole area, if not this place would be full of mosquitoes" (SP-SC-34-NWE-male).

Another challenge for sustainability that was mainly mentioned by some Northwest European immigrant stakeholders relates to the lack of environmental culture among a significant number of fellow residents and local authorities:

> Things must be designed for recycling from the start. Here… there are some efforts to be

> sustainable, but not like in Britain. They are pretending to be green, but actually they are not (SP-SC-34-NWE-male).
>
> Some are working on it [on sustainability], but there is a lack of proper mentality. I think they do it because the European Union tells them to do so, otherwise they would do nothing. It does not really affect them (SP-EC-42-NWE-male).

Some interviewed stakeholders in both case studies suggested to improve the management of waste disposal and treatments (SP-EC-44-NWE-female) as well as to enhance environmental education among local residents (PT-EC-45-SA-female). Additionally, in Alt Empordà, one of the aspects of sustainability that emerged is climate change, which was explored in more detail by Fatorić et al. (2014, 2017). Some stakeholders opined that Alt Empordà experienced increasingly more frequent heat waves (SP-SC-20-NA-female) and floods (SP-SC-48-NWE-female), together with a rise in sea level (SP-SC-39-NA-male), which present an important risk to coastal urban areas and marinas (SP-EC-42-NWE-male):

> [The weather] became more unpredictable, more unusual, three years ago we got snow, everything collapsed, and the electricity system broke down. Then [having] hot weather this winter is not normal either (SP-SC-34-NWE-male).

Apart from climate or weather seasons, immigrant stakeholders also commented the challenge posed by tourist and agriculture seasons, as it is explained in the next section.

4.2. Economic dimension of sustainability

4.2.1. Seasonality, labour conditions and sustainable business development

In both study areas, agriculture and tourism[16] are key parts of the economy, making seasonality one of the most commonly perceived economic challenges for local sustainability among interviewed stakeholders. For some, there should be much longer active tourist seasons (SP-SC-32-EE-female). This is a serious sustainability challenge that was raised by interviewed immigrant workers and small entrepreneurs who, especially since the economic crisis, felt that the work during the main tourist season is not enough to earn a living due to the lower wages and drop in activity. Recently, in spite of the tourism boom in the Iberian Peninsula, the seasonality of tourism in peripheral areas has gained renewed mass media attention, particularly in Spain (Cañas, 2017).

Immigrant stakeholders suggested that one of the solutions to minimize the problematic seasonality impacts could be implementing more efficient public policies to encourage the extension of the tourist season in small towns and rural areas. For instance, in Spain, just 21 officially recognised 'touristic municipalities' receive extra public funding (e.g. to cover extra-costs derived of having a numerous floating population) because the requirements include having a legal population of over 120,000 inhabitants and having more second homes than main homes, but recent political petitions have demanded a change of requirements (EP, 2017).

Interestingly, for some interviewed stakeholders, a reduction in seasonality is viewed as an opportunity for a more sustainable tourism and visitor practices. This idea of having tourism all year round is also closely linked to people's environmental values:

> Investing in trekking is a strong commitment for us. We want our area to develop in the sense of

> nature-based tourism, outdoor tourism, everything except motors… we don't want motorised tourism (PT-ENV-50-CE-male).

In the agricultural sector, similar views and perceptions could be found among interviewed stakeholders in both case studies. It was suggested that seasonality could be minimised by enhancing innovative private investment:

> The environment is safeguarded by the (natural) park, but you can't do that for economic and social sustainability … for people to work for the (local) council is not the solution. So we have to create more economic activity (PT-EC-55-NWE-male).

In this regard, in Alentejo Litoral, it was noted that more financial resources should be invested in eco-greenhouse horticultural park 'Hortas do Mira'[17], which could foster sustainable practices providing employment all year instead of seasonal work, protecting the environment and preserving local society. However, there is no consensus on the local benefits of this project (e.g. Nazaré, 2011), which is sometimes perceived as exogenous, artificial, massive, dubious and biased towards a privileged minority. Recently, the concerns of sustainability practices related to greenhouses and intensive agriculture expansion within the natural park have reached the Portuguese mass media (Ramos et al., 2016), raising public awareness about the importance of implementing effective regulations, management and surveillance.

Furthermore, attracting the so-called 'manpower' and guaranteeing that companies have enough workers is underlined as a challenge, especially in tough labour-intensive jobs, a fact that contrasts with what used to occur when international investors first arrived, after Portugal and Spain joined the EU in 1986:

> Labour was cheap and plentiful, but that's not the case anymore. One of the main problems today in Odemira, in all this area, in general in farming, is that young Portuguese people don't want to work on farms. So we have to import labour. And that is getting very difficult because of regulation. On the one hand you have unemployment… but people don't want to come and work in the fields or in the greenhouses. And at the moment we have labour coming from Eastern Europe, from Thailand… and some companies also have people from North Africa... At the moment, we have this mix of local and imported labour. However, having external labour from other countries brings other problems: housing, language, training... So we are trying to cope very well with this here (PT-EC-49-NWE-male).

Here, some immigrant stakeholders also noted working conditions as an important aspect of economic and social sustainability. These stakeholders in Alentejo Litoral opined that they provide formal and decent employment including wages, immigration documents and working hours:

> We have people from Thailand who have been in the company for more than 3 years. They are permanent workers, and we try to make sure that they get good conditions. But it is... I know some other companies, maybe in construction, are not treating them fairly. We know that. Here we do not do that. They get exactly the same conditions as a Portuguese employee (PT-EC-49-NWE-male).

However, documents can also be related to bureaucratic administrative procedures, as it is explained in the next sub-section.

4.2.2. Bureaucracy, taxes and exchange rate fluctuation

Among interviewed immigrant businessmen, managers and entrepreneurs, especially in the Portuguese case study, a recurrent challenge for local sustainability was bureaucracy:

> The problem, of course, for any foreigner coming here: they buy a plot of land, and then, they want to build a greenhouse and a house and this, and then and then... Then the Portuguese bureaucracy appears. They can't do this and they can't do that… (PT-EC-55-NWE-male).

Some stakeholders underlined as a challenge the need to speed up administrative procedures (PT-EC-50-NWE-male), for example, mentioning that there was a three-year-wait to obtain a business license (PT-EC-41-NWE-female) or noting specific bureaucratic difficulties that artisans have to face (PT-EC-45-EC-female). In particular, among immigrant stakeholders linked to the craft sector, there were also demands for lower taxes for artisans because of their cultural added value (PT-SC-43-CE-female). These demands are in tune with some recent European Commission programmes, initiatives and publications. Craft is a recognised sector of the cultural and creative industries, important for the EU economy and composed chiefly by micro and small enterprises (see De Voldere et al., 2017).

Dramatic financial ups and downs can be a challenge for economic sustainability. Thus, for some immigrant stakeholders and local economic sectors linked to them, the fluctuation of the pound exchange rate against the euro was perceived as affecting sustainability in a few villages where they are a relevant part of the population. Sometimes, the arrival, settlement and continuity in the Iberian Peninsula of many members of that wealthy immigrant group depend on that:

> They gained 30% with the exchange rate. English are very, very reactive. When you see their homes, almost empty… they just have small things there… Then they can move super quick. Most of the English I know, they sold, they gained 30% with the new exchange rate and they have bought in Florida. Because there are low cost flights every day and houses are cheaper, with swimming pools, and they speak English [in Florida], because English only speak English. And there are a lot of golf courses… there is everything they're looking for… (SP-ENV-50-NWE-male).

Such monetary fluctuation poses a challenge for the sustainability of estate agents that, at certain moments, were concerned about ways to attract wealthy immigrants from other countries wanting to buy a house and reside in the area for some years (SP-SC-48-NWE-female).

4.3. Social dimension of sustainability

4.3.1. Youth, labour prospects and ageing population

Among the social aspects for sustainability, improving the social situation of young people in villages and small towns (e.g. access to housing, job opportunities, social inclusion and socio-cultural activities) is the most commented issue in both countries. This comes from a variety of perspectives. Sometimes the youth issue is combined with the concern for an ageing population and the arrival of elderly immigrants, both in Alentejo Litoral (PT-EC-50-NWE-male) and in Alt Empordà:

> Young people emigrate to the cities, and people from the cities come here to buy second homes for weekends or elderly people from Northern Europe, where the climate is less attractive than here, buy houses to retire here… The character of some villages is changing… very tidy, with ten or twenty houses, but dead… No one is living there. They are like… skeletons (SP-EC-58-CE-male).

At other times, youth retention and attraction are considered a challenge in their own

right. During fieldwork we gathered various immigrant stakeholders' voices demanding to avoid or to minimise the emigration of some young people to cities for good (PT-SC-19-WA-female). For instance, retaining local young people and attracting young immigrants by offering more employment opportunities and (re)new(ed) socio-economic activities, fostering wider socio-economic local-focused projects with added value (PT-ENV-61-SA-male), as well as implementing new policies in order to improve the social prestige of agriculture (PT-EC-50-NWE-male), creating more attractive agricultural jobs (PT-SC-40-SE-female) and enhancing tourism industry all year long.

In Southwest Europe, young immigrant workers with small children face considerable social challenges such as weak support in balancing work and family life, which is an obstacle especially to the upward mobility of international immigrant women (Lozano, 2015). It was perceived that for young working parents employed in the tourism sector, the main challenge is how to efficiently and healthily cope with long working hours and raising their children at once (SP-SC-32-EE-female).

Moreover, it also emerged from the interviews that the higher education and schooling opportunities of both native and immigrant youths residing in rural areas should be considerably improved. For instance, some stakeholders in Alentejo Litoral suggested that, instead of permanent emigration elsewhere, rural young people's short-term emigration to cities or abroad (for studies or work) should be facilitated, while guaranteeing their return to the rural areas (PT-SC-43-CE-female). This short-term migration program could include incentives for university access among rural youth (PT-SC-40-NWE-female). Interestingly, a few years ago in Catalonia, *Fundació del Món Rural* (i.e. Rural World Foundation) launched the on-going *Odisseu* program aiming to foster the return of university graduates born in Catalan rural areas (FMR, 2012). So far, this program has mainly focused on university graduates from some Catalan mountainous areas only. Some other interviewed stakeholders advocated for establishing universities and faculty jobs in small towns and not just in big cities, metropolitan areas and province capitals (SP-SC-20-NA-female).

It was also noted that young people's continuity in villages and small towns is also challenged by the fact that local policies are often designed with mainly elderly people in mind, such as leisure activities considering low noise (SP-EC-44-NWE-male). More leisure activities for young people living in rural areas should be implemented in local public policy agendas. Similarly, in both study areas, participation in socio-cultural activities should be improved in small towns and rural territories. One challenging issue commented among immigrant stakeholders in Alt Empordà was how to minimise effects of having unemployed youth through socio-cultural activities (SP-SC-39-NA-male), avoiding to have youth 'hanging around in the streets'. In this regard, in Alt Empordà, the award-winning *Xarxa de Convivència* is a successful enterprise that helps fostering intercultural dialogue and positive social action among youth (ACN, 2014).

An ageing population was perceived as a serious challenge for sustainability both in Alt Empordà and Alentejo Litoral. In the Portuguese study area this was especially problematic since increasing number of elderly people live in dispersed population settlements with very limited healthcare services (PT-ENV-61-NWE-male). Faced by

this challenge, stakeholders suggested providing healthcare services in villages, and not just in towns or provincial capitals (PT-ENV-61-SA-male). Over the last decade, the main Portuguese trade union council has been advocating and seeking to improve the healthcare services in Alentejo Litoral[18], but often their voice was not heard by the national government. Moreover, some stakeholders perceived that the healthcare deficit in Alentejo Litoral adversely affect birth rates, populating the area and the attraction of foreign private investments:

> [Something] that is really important is to develop and improve schools, kindergartens and the social care system… It is impossible for some people and companies to come to the area if the nearest hospital is in Beja [over 100 km away]. There is an ambulance driver in Odemira, and he's very famous because he has assisted with some 50 deliveries on the way to Beja… You know, it's not that much better today than it used to be (PT-EC-49-NWE-male).

Additionally, youth and elderly protection deficits can also be connected to other challenges like crime, as it is explained in the next sub-section.

4.3.2. Criminality, individualism and isolation

Criminality was perceived as especially dangerous in some parts of Alt Empordà, where some 'mafia gangs' were established in recent years in connection with the booming prostitution businesses located relatively near the French border (Ribas, 2015). This would need a multi-level and cross-border policy response (SP-ENV-51-NWE-female) in order to prevent unemployed young people being tempted by quick illegal money (Tremlett, 2006; EFE, 2015).

Some immigrant stakeholders perceived the growing individualism, the loss of community values and monetarisation of life as other aspects challenging social sustainability in Alt Empordà:

> Especially since the adoption of the euro as the currency, I have seen a change in the [local] mentality, in the way of life… There is much less [social] life than before, people do not go walking so often… Before [the euro], the whole family used to walk around together, from grandparents to grandchildren, but now you see much less of that… That way of life attracted a lot of people [from Northern Europe] but it is being lost bit by bit, that soul. And that makes me sad (SP-ENV-50-NWE-male).

In this line, years ago, some Northern European immigrants arrived in Southern Europe in order to try to avoid neoliberal individualist processes in their countries of origin (e.g. fleeing anti-social policies promoted since Margaret Thatcher's times), and attracted by the so-called 'intimate handshake' of collectivism (Cohen, 1997). However, it can be observed that over the past three decades our two study countries have been changing fast, infused in the neoliberal age (Morén-Alegret, 2002). In contrast to that socially idyllic and collective rural view, other immigrant stakeholders acted as neoliberalism promoters and considered that the recipe for local sustainability is to increase privatisation and market-oriented policies: "to try to increase the part that is private as opposed to the part which is governmental" (PT-EC-49-NWE-male).

Moreover, another challenge related to decreasing social relations and increasing individualism in the Southwest European study areas was the isolation of some elderly Northwest European immigrants who are not interested in either learning the local language, knowing local customs or meeting native people (PT-EC-45-SA-female). Isolation can imply various dangers. In Alt Empordà, the perception of crime as a threat

for sustainability is also related to increasing robberies (SP-SC-53-NWE-male), especially in isolated houses, shops or cars out of the villages or town centres. In Alentejo Litoral, the perception of very high social inequality (PT-EC-41-NWE-female), which can increase criminality, was also found. In this regard, international drug trafficking has been an issue in Odemira mainly due to geographical factors like relative closeness to Morocco and its low population density (Laranjo, Pinto, 2012).

According to some interviewed stakeholders, major participation of both native and immigrant people in the public realm is needed, especially in more bottom-up and grassroots movements that should pay attention to social, economic and environmental issues (PT-ENV-61-SA-male). Some others go beyond that and put into question the whole national political system, accusing it of having a lot of corruption, which hinders sustainable development (PT-EC-41-NWE-female). This kind of comments can also be connected to the challenge posed by prejudices, which are tackled in the next sub-section.

4.3.3. Prejudice and racism

In the two study areas, prejudice and racism were mentioned as important social challenges for sustainability. Racism sometimes has a particular rural or small town 'accent':

> Here locals may make generalisations about 'moors' [with stereotypes] but when they have one face to face they behave humanely, you cannot smell racism there. However, they do not realise that they can sometimes be racist in their general discourse (SP-ENV-50-NWE-male).

In other words, racism is supposedly tamed by the fact that in a small place 'everybody knows each other' but racism is still there (PT-SC-19-WA-female).

For other interviewees, this 'latent' racism that is especially addressed at people coming from impoverished countries who work in agriculture should be openly tackled and discussed in public gatherings before it could develop into any kind of conflict (PT-EC-45-SA-female). Furthermore, stereotypes and prejudices are sometimes multi-directional, and can be found not just among some native people regarding some foreign people but also among foreign people regarding native people and among some foreign groups regarding other foreigners (PT-EC-60-NWE-male). For instance, in Roses, Alt Empordà, racism took a more organised and threatening path. In 2011, during the economic crisis, extreme-right parties stood in local elections (Tubert, 2010) shocking the town and obtaining hundreds of votes (SP-SC-20-NA-female). However, they did not end up gaining seats on the municipal council because they stood divided. Some years later, the situation in Roses has calmed down but that experience was a warning of what the so-called 'latent' racism, when excited, can deliver.

Some of these prejudices and racist tendencies can be linked to linguistic changes and challenges (Junyent, 2005), economic threats like perceived competition for scarce resources (Stephan & Renfro, 2002) and a sort of small town or 'rural nostalgia' (Fennelly, 2010): the belief that demographic changes are a primary cause of the demise of supposedly pristine rural areas or solidarity in small towns. The complexity of this issue is also linked to the fact that some newcomers are also interested in limiting diversity:

> I know there are more and more people like me, coming from other countries, and I think in a way this is good, but I hope not many will come (PT-ENV-61-NWE-male).

As a solution to that problem, more education on the benefits of diversity is suggested (SP-EC-44-NWE-male). Concretely, education programs specifically addressed both at young and elderly people are proposed. Over recent years, the Alt Empordà county council and the Odemira municipal council have been implementing general plans to include diversity on the local policy agenda[19] and to integrate immigrants[20] respectively.

In summary, in the view of the interviewed immigrant stakeholders, it is worth mentioning the need to involve different types of stakeholders and local communities in the identification of concerted solutions that seek to minimise conflicts of interest and to find an equilibrium between conservationist/sustainability logics and economic development initiatives. This issue is particularly relevant because both case studies are located in protected natural areas. In addition to the emphasis placed on the relevance of participatory land planning and management processes, it should also be noted that several stakeholders referred to the importance of environmental education and raised awareness of the benefits and development opportunities for small towns and rural areas brought about by international immigration, as well as the risk of social exclusion that some immigrants face.

5. Conclusions and further considerations

In September 2015, the Heads of State and Government and High Representatives, met at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, and decided on new global Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs, for 2030. Concretely, seventeen goals linked to three dimensions of sustainable development – social, economic and environmental – were agreed. After analysing the content of the challenges to sustainability that immigrant stakeholders expressed in Alentejo Litoral and Alt Empordà during the interviews, most of their concerns can be related to the SDGs. Concretely, the challenges to sustainability gathered in the previous sections of this paper resonate, in one way or another, in sixteen of the seventeen SDGs (UN, 2015). Interestingly, the SDG that is missing from the interviews is Goal 17 'Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development'. This may be indicative of a lack of awareness among interviewed stakeholders on the relevance or perceived feasibility of international multi-stakeholders partnerships in order to achieve sustainability. Some international immigrants and their organisations are privileged agents for promoting collaboration between different stakeholders in the territories of migrants' origin and destination. Therefore, international comparative studies on immigrants' visions and experiences are very relevant to share knowledge and best practices to promote global partnerships for sustainable development.

For various participants in this research, immigrant stakeholder engagement is considered a key principle for sustainable development in small towns and rural areas,

particularly in the context of natural resource management and growing population diversity. In general, among the interviewed immigrant stakeholders' responses there were no significant differences in terms of gender or age. However, interestingly, in both case studies, especially in Alt Empordà, Northwest European immigrants (i.e. British, Germans, French, Dutch, Belgians) stressed environmental challenges for sustainability much more than the rest of interviewed stakeholders. This is consistent with the longer tradition of environmental movements in those countries of origin (Wall, 1999) and their awareness is indicative of the potential contribution of some immigrants to sustainable development in their place of settlement. Moreover, this is also consistent with the fact that most Northwest European immigrants living in Portugal and Spain are socio-economically wealthier than most North African and South American immigrants, which might allow the former more time to reflect and be active on environmental issues than the latter.

Specifically, for the more disadvantaged immigrants, needs related to the social and economic dimensions of sustainability often take precedence over the environmental sustainability dimension. One could argue that only when the basic needs are met, i.e. guaranteed access to basic services and income perceived as stable and equitable, can those immigrants develop more environmental awareness. In the sustainability debate, the environmental dimension is frequently confronted with the difficulties in meeting basic human needs. The less affluent immigrants can undervalue environmental sustainability because they may have more urgent needs than that, such as stable income, housing, education and healthcare access. Still, the on-going discussion regarding the meaning of 'needs' in the sustainability framework should not be overlooked (Collins et al. 2009; Jabareen 2008; Ríos Osorio et al., 2005), and neither should the issue of defining the difference between needs and wants.

This paper contributes to small town and rural sustainability studies by appraising the incorporation of various international immigrants' perspectives and experiences in the multi-level EU policy-making agenda, which is helpful in order to avoid methodological nationalism or euro-centrism bias. As Scott, Park & Cocklin (2000) suggested, rural sustainability studies should take ethnic diversity, including elements of livelihood, social participation, justice and equity, more into account. In fact, among immigrants there is also diversity and inequality. Wealthy immigrants (sometimes called 'expats' or lifestyle migrants) - which *a priori* are often associated with migratory motivations linked to quality of life and the so-called 'residential tourism' - live side by side with labour migrants. The latter are attracted by job opportunities, which are partly induced by the consumption patterns or entrepreneurial activities of the former groups (Sampaio, 2011; Salvà-Tomàs, 2002). Those immigrants not only live as neighbours or workers. Sometimes they age together and their children play in the same playgrounds. Sustainability is a framework that attempts to bridge present and future generations, while taking the past into account. Thus, considering the results of this study, it is desirable that further research on sustainability in rural areas and small towns recognizes the aforementioned population diversity (including immigrants) and gives voice to all relevant local-regional actors.

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[1] This report is one of the publications that paved the way to the seventeen *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) that should be achieved by year 2030. See: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org

[2] However, internal immigration in rural areas was studied earlier (e.g. Halfacree, Boyle, 1998).

[3] In recent years, sustainability has become both a trendy and a criticised term. In an *International New York Times* supplement focusing on 'Luxury', fashion and culture journalist Dana Thomas (2015) stated that the 'hottest buzzword in luxury fashion right now is sustainability'. According to her, the luxury industry is evolving from 'greenwashing' (i.e. public relations spinning) to sustainable measures (e.g. transparency throughout the industrial process, cleaner fabrics, animal rights in leather or fur production, safer manufacturing conditions and occupational rights, as well as consideration of impacts on climate change).

[4] On NSDS, see: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/nationalsustainabledevelopmentstrategies

[5] However, several sustainability indicators lists were taken into account at the beginning of the project upon which this paper is based, e.g. Jiménez Herrero (2009). They were useful for preparing the scripts of the semi-structured interviews with stakeholders.

[6] Rabós is a particularly small village, a hamlet. However, in tune with the general situation in many parts of Catalonia, it is a municipality with local council, i.e. Ajuntament / Ayuntamiento (for further details, see also: www.uab.cat/hamlets & https://twitter.com/RicardMoren/status/885746615595786241).

[7] In relation to an olive oil and wine cooperative business in Alt Empordà that includes producers from Rabós, Roses and Garriguella, see http://empordalia.com/en/, and particularly on wine production in Roses, see: http://www.vinscollderoses.com/en/

[8] However, in tune with the usual classification in Spain, Orlando Ribeiro (1969), a classical Portuguese geographer, considered 10,000 inhabitants to be a good threshold for small towns, together with other qualitative characteristics. In any case, whatever the minimum threshold, according to several previous studies, in Portugal, small towns can be considered to be urban localities of up to 20,000 inhabitants (e.g. Carvalho Seabra, 2011).

[9] For instance, regarding environmental sustainability, besides mostly walking, trekking and/or riding bicycles through villages, the countryside and small towns, public transport (inter-local buses and trains) was used occasionally. Buses were also an additional incentive since immigrant stakeholders are among their top users in both study areas. However, relatively small/low-consumption cars were also used in cases of unreliable public transport, dangerous roads, adverse weather conditions and/or limited time availability.

[10] Just one interviewee was born in the Iberian Peninsula (with dual nationality), but militates in an immigrant association, keeping strong ties with the ancestral country of origin.

[11] For some interviewees, the distinction between main home and second home is out-dated because they live half of the year in one place and the other half in another one. Moreover, there are others who are even more mobile over the year.

[12] As Aguirre (2013) notes, the passage of Act 2/2013, May 29, 2013, for the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Coastline, and the Modification of Coast Act 22/1988, July 28, 1988, represented the single greatest reform to the text of the Coast Act since it was enacted in 1988. The controversy surrounding the drafting of the Act raised numerous legal doubts about just what the real consequences of the reform are for the Catalan coastline.

[13] See and listen to the news on boundary making in Empuriabrava (Castelló d'Empúries) and Santa Margarida (Roses): http://cadenaser.com/emisora/2017/05/17/radio_girona/1495000940_969646.html

[14] See the following website for details in English about walking routes there: http://en.rotavicentina.com

[15] A recent oil spill was reported in October 2016 (Petrov, 2016).

[16] In Alentejo, the pole for touristic development of Alentejo was officially approved in 2008 (*Diário da República*, 1.ª série, nº 200, 15 October 2008). Regarding Empordà, the Costa Brava-Girona Tourist Board was founded in 1976 to serve as the meeting point for the various government bodies and the tourism sector in Girona province, see: http://trade.costabrava.org/en/about-us/.

[17] Approval of Intervention Plan in the Rural Space of Herdade do Zorreiro - Malavado by Odemira Municipal Council, see: https://dre.pt/application/file/58605779

[18] See the following press release published by the main Portuguese trade union council: http://www.cgtp.pt/informacao/comunicacao-social/comunicados/620-algo-vai-mal-no-sns-exige-se-explicacoes-do-governo

[19] See: Plan for Inclusion and Social Cohesion in Alt Empordà / *Pla per a la Inclusió i la Cohesió Social de l'Alt Empordà* (http://inclusioaltemporda.cat/portal/pla-inclusio-2013-2016/).

[20] See: Municipal Plan for Immigrants Integration / *Plano Municipal para a Integração dos Imigrantes* (http://www.cm-odemira.pt/pages/490).