



Newcomers and ‘Roots Migrants’: Chain Migrations and the Revitalization of Rural Shrinking Areas in Spain

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Abstract

This article analyses the processes of rural shrinking/revitalisation in Spain from the perspective of chain mobilities. It attempts to go beyond the vision that focuses on the depopulation approach. The chain migration perspective is a dynamic means, as it considers the articulation between internal/international, historical/recent migrations and shrinking/revitalisation processes. Spatial mobility is also analysed in relation to the articulation of the local and immigrant population’s intergenerational social mobility processes. The research is based on intensive fieldwork (109 semi-structured interviews) conducted in several shrinking regions in Spain (Galicia, Andalusia and Castilla-La Mancha). Our research reveals how the internal and international exodus of the second half of the twentieth century in Spain, driven by the ‘Developmentalist’ economic model and implemented by Franco’s regime, is the bases for the territorial imbalances and configuration of shrinking rural areas in this country. It also shows how de-agrarianisation and the lack of intergenerational replacement explains the arrival of immigrant populations in rural areas from the turn of the century onwards, in order to meet the needs of labour markets segmented by ethnic origin and gender. Together with newcomers, the shrinking areas are also benefiting from the arrival of returnees and root migrants (from both external and internal migration), who decide to return to their origins, drawn by emotional ties. These migration patterns (newcomers, returnees and root migrants) are different and complementary in terms of sustaining life in rural areas. The impact of migration on the revitalisation of rural areas is visible in demographic, economic and social terms.

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Introduction: Beyond the Focus on ‘Depopulation’, the Study of the Rural Shrinking/Revitalisation Processes from the Perspective of Chain Mobilities

Research in European countries and North America has shown a growing interest in the ‘shrinking’ of rural environments as a territorial multi-causal process involving the deterioration of previously attained standards of well-being, rooted in socio-political changes as well as in ecological and economic factors. Generally speaking, the literature focuses on simultaneous patterns related to demographic decline, diminishing public and private services and employment opportunities, falling public investment and an increase in the residential supply. It may also be accompanied by the weakening of social capital, the disruption of social cohesion or the population’s difficulty in meeting their basic needs (Martinez-Fernandez, Kubo, Noya & Weyman, 2012; ESPON, 2018; Zarecor, Peters & Hamideh, 2020). The term rural ‘revitalisation’ has been assessed in scientific production to refer to the possibility of creating better futures and is closely related to the notion of ‘community resilience’ (Sánchez-Zamora, Gallardo-Cobos & Ceña-Delgado, 2017; Álvarez-Montoya, 2020) or the capacity to respond to situations of crisis, as well as the deployment of resources for sustainable recovery and adaptation in rural areas (Cheshire, Esparcia & Shucksmith, 2015). However, the literature has focused to a lesser extent on the study of the relationship between shrinking processes and migration.

In Spain, in recent decades, there has been a growing interest in addressing the processes of depopulation and territorial imbalance in rural areas, the cause of which is closely related to historical migrations. Between the 1950s and 1960s, Franco’s policies boosted the economic development of some key industrial and tourist areas of the country, to the detriment of other regions, fuelling strong internal and international migration, which explains the emergence of shrinking areas. On the other hand, in the last two decades, Spain has become a country that receives immigrants, with some of the new settlers arriving in rural areas. This makes Spain an interesting case study, contributing to the analysis of shrinking/revitalisation processes, from their relationship with chain migrations.

However, territorial imbalance has been addressed by Spanish scientific production mainly through the issue of depopulation in rural areas, with few authors referring specifically to the concept of shrinking (Romero & Lozano, 2015). Fundamentally descriptive in nature, the literature provides a demographic and geographical perspective about the depopulation processes through the use of quantitative methodologies (exploitation of secondary data) (Ayuda Bosque, Sáez Pérez & Pinilla Navarro, 2001; Morén-Alegret, & Solana, 2004; Soler, & Boqué, 2008; Bayona & Gil, 2013; Collantes, Pinilla, Sáez & Silvestre, 2010; Pinilla, & Sáez, 2017; Roquer & Blay, 2017). Within the framework

of these debates, immigration has generally been approached in a utilitarian, albeit 'optimistic' way. Indeed, research has tended to focus on the idea of 'migration as an opportunity' (Abad, 2006; Abu-Warda, 2008; Soronellas et al., 2014; Hedlund et al., 2017; Camarero & Sampedro, 2020) in an attempt to stop or slow down the depopulation of rural areas, especially in regions experiencing severe demographic decline in Spain, such as Castilla y León or parts of Aragón (Sampedro & Camarero, 2016). Other shrinking territories, including Andalusia, Galicia, Extremadura, Murcia or Castilla-La Mancha, have received less attention in this respect.

Nevertheless, the link between depopulation and migration have been portrayed from an 'immobility approach'; in other words, research has focused on viewing the migrant population's intention of permanent settlement as the goal to revitalisation, and the consideration of re-emigration or return to the country of origin as a failure (Nijenhuis & Leung, 2017; Pérez-Caramés, Mujica & Rivera, 2021). This supposed 'defeat' is often attributed either to the migrants' strategies (Resino-García, Jiménez-Blasco, & Arranz-Lozano, 2018), or to local socioeconomic factors that do not encourage the migrant population to remain in the localities. Similarly, little research has been conducted with a gender an intergenerational approach, taking into consideration the particularities of the children of immigrants in rural areas (Camarero, Sampedro, & Oliva, 2013a; Cutillas & Moraes, 2018). The literature has also failed to consider the articulation between social mobility strategies of local and migrant population in shrinking areas.

The main contribution of this article is the analysis of the processes of rural shrinking/revitalisation from the perspective of chain mobilities. It attempts to go beyond the vision focused on the depopulation approach. The chain migration perspective is a dynamic means, as it considers the articulation between internal/international, historical/recent migrations and shrinking/revitalisation processes. Spatial mobility is also addressed in relation to the articulation of the local and immigrant population's social mobilities, including the complexity of this interplay of mobilities from an intergenerational and gender perspective. The originality of this work (unlike most previous studies that apply a quantitative methodology), also lies in its qualitative approach, based on intensive fieldwork (109 semi-structured interviews), carried out in several shrinking regions in Spain, including Galicia, Andalusia and Castilla-La Mancha, which have attracted less research interest.

The article begins by analysing why the internal and external exodus of the second half of the twentieth century lies at the core of Spain's rural shrinking processes and territorial imbalances. It also considers how deagrarianisation and the lack of intergenerational replacement in the rural labour market has influenced the arrival of immigrant population in shrinking areas, within the framework of the immigration boom that Spain experienced at the turn of the century. In this section, we identify two migratory patterns: the arrival of newcomers and return or root migration, defining these concepts. Secondly, we present the methodological approach of the study. Thirdly, based on the

two migratory patterns identified (newcomers and return/root migrants) and taking into account the fieldwork results, we analyse the extent to which the arrival of immigrants contributes to the revitalisation of rural shrinking areas, moving beyond their demographic contribution to consider their role in invigorating the economy (labour market insertion, entrepreneurial initiatives, social innovation, etc.). Finally, the article discusses how migration contributes to social revitalisation, the reconstruction of the social network and collective action.

Chain Mobilities and the Revitalisation of Shrinking Areas in Spain: Newcomers, Returnees and Root Migrants

Internal and international mobility underlies the processes of devitalisation and territorial imbalance that have emerged since the mid-twentieth century in Spain. From the end of the Spanish Civil War until Franco's death, economic policy was divided into two periods, namely autarchy and economic liberalisation, which began in the 1950s. Between 1960 and 1973, Spain experienced a period of unprecedented economic growth, which was coined '*Desarrollismo*' (Developmentalism) or the 'Spanish Miracle'. The economic policy during this period focused on the transition from an agricultural-based economy to industry and, albeit to a lesser extent, services, as well as the acquisition of state-of-the-art technology and increased purchasing power (Molinero and Ysàs, 1999).

From the 1960s onwards, international emigration from Spain, which had traditionally targeted America, shifted to Europe. In 1973, it is estimated that around one million Spaniards were living in European countries (data from the Spanish Institute of Emigration, INE), mainly in Germany, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the UK (Alaminos, Albert and Santacreu, 2010). Initially, this mass emigration was encouraged by Franco's government, due to its capacity to underpin the 'Developmentalism' economic model thanks to the influx of foreign currency (to balance the costs of capital goods imports) (Molinero and Ysàs, 1999). This external migration was preceded by the numerous waves of internal migration that took place throughout the 1950s.

The rural exodus proved a turning point in the territorial, socio-demographic and economic shaping of the country. Between 1961 and 1970, some 4.26 million people moved within or outside the same province (Artal, Navarro & Requena, 2015) in order to meet the high demand for labour in urban areas required by the changes in the Spanish economy (Developmentalism, modernisation, the formation of the urban-industrial network, the advance of a service economy, the creation of an internal market for urban mass consumption) (Camarero, 2020; Ródenas Calatayud & Martí Sempere, 2005). These migrations were led by young individuals, especially women, who moved far from their place of origin (long-distance migration) in the poorer regions of Spain—principally Andalusia, Castilla-La Mancha, Castilla y León, Aragon

and Galicia) to richer, industrial regions such as Catalonia, the Basque Country and Madrid.

Foreign emigration and domestic migratory flows were a determining factor in alleviating the demographic strain on the labour market in rural areas, curbing unemployment and reducing the number of people receiving public goods and services. However, in the long term, the development model implemented during Franco's regime brought to Spain major regional disparities and territorial and social imbalances. It was a form of Developmentalism that depended heavily on foreign investment and consolidated the considerable economic and demographic imbalances between certain regional development poles (industrial and tourist areas), to the detriment of central Spain, Castilla-La Mancha and Castilla y León, the inland areas of Andalusia, the mountainous regions and Extremadura (Angoustures, 1995). The transfer of population impacted negatively on the demographic and socioeconomic sustainability of rural areas, at risk of irreversible depopulation (Recaño, 2017). In demographic terms, mass emigration brought with it a lower presence of young people and women in rural areas, low fertility and birth rates, more divorces, ageing and a higher mortality rate. From a socio-economic point of view, people who move away from the countryside abandon agricultural life, which in turn leads to deagrarianisation. Generational replacement is no longer guaranteed, generating problems of unemployment and consequently social decapitalisation (Camarero, 2020). Consequently, the developmentalist model implemented in the second half of the twentieth century and the associated (external and internal) mass migration are the basis for the configuration of rural shrinking areas in Spain.

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, Spain once again experienced an unprecedented change, albeit of a different nature, with the arrival of millions of new migrants of foreign origin that would shake the country both demographically and socio-economically. Arrival to Spain of a cumulative flow of more than 9 million immigrants of foreign origin between 1998 and 2017, attracted by the major economic expansion which took place from the turn of the century until the onset of the economic crisis in 2008 (Buriel, 2008 and 2014; Romero et al., 2012), reactivated the global dynamics of internal migration, especially long-distance migration (Gil-Alonso et al., 2015; Recaño, 2009 and 2016). The start of the twenty-first century brought with it new mobility routes that reveal a close relationship between the volume of inflows from abroad and the growth in the intensity of internal migration in Spain (Recaño, 2009) (Sampedro & Camarero, 2016). The Residential Variation Statistics (EVR-INE) showed that during the 1988–2017 period, one out of every five people that changed municipality was a foreign migrant (Recaño, 2010a).

Among the majority of people who decided to migrate to rural areas, two migratory patterns emerge with a differential impact, yet which act in a complementary manner in terms of their contribution to revitalising the shrinking areas: (1) immigration by newcomers; and (2) the migratory movements of returnees and root migrants (Wessendorf, 2007). In this paper, *newcomers* are

Fig. 1 Map of the localities selected for the study. Source: authors' own



considered people of national or foreign origin that have been settled in rural areas for a generation or less, whilst returnees are those persons who, after having migrated, settle back in their home locality or country. Following Wessendorf (2007), root migrants are people who decide to 'return to the roots' within a place where they were not born, but is their ancestors' place of origin. A major difference between the two groups is that the former are part of the flows of migrant arrivals that took place in Spain from the beginning of the century and are unrelated to previous Spanish emigration, whilst the latter is linked to the territory, either because they are returned emigrants or descendants of Spanish migrants, who have decided to 'go back to their ancestors' land'.

The arrival of these 'newcomers', returnees or root migrants represents a challenge and an opportunity for the revitalisation of shrinking areas, as discussed below and in accordance with the data obtained from our fieldwork. However, before analysing the results of the study, we will outline the methodological strategy employed.

Methodology

The research was carried out within the framework of the H2020 Welcoming Spaces project¹. It is mainly qualitative, based on semi-structured interviews and participant observation sessions. The case studies were chosen in rural or semi-urban Spanish municipalities that have attempted to compensate the tendency towards shrinkage by attracting immigrants of non-EU origin through various types of reception initiatives. For their selection, a prior

¹ H2020 funded research programme Welcoming Spaces-Investing in 'Welcoming Spaces' in Europe: revitalizing shrinking areas by hosting non-EU migrants (H2020-SC6-Migration-2019-870952) - <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/870952/es>

Locality	Inhabitants in 2021	Foreign-born population in 2021	Population over 65 years old in 2018 ^a	Main countries of origin
San Bartolomé de la Torre, province of Huelva, Autonomous Community of Andalusia	3,846	19.96%	15.1%	Morocco Romania Poland Bulgaria Ghana
Comarca de Celanova ^a , province of Ourense, Autonomous Community of Galicia	17,108	7%	34.9%	Venezuela Portugal Morocco
Burela, province of Lugo, Autonomous Community of Galicia	9,428	20%	18.1%	Cape Verde Peru Senegal Morocco Indonesia
Molina de Aragón, province of Guadalajara, Autonomous Community of Castilla-La Mancha	3,217	18.1%	22.6%	Romania Bulgaria Morocco

Fig. 2 Brief demographic overview of the localities studied. Source: authors' own based on INE data, 2021

analysis of statistical data (Quick Scan) on relevant economic, social, political and geographical variables was carried out to determine the demographic and socio-economic trajectories of a total of 7 municipalities over the last 15 years in Spain. For the purpose of this article, we have focused on the cases of the municipalities of Burela, Celanova, Molina de Aragón and San Bartolomé de la Torre, spread over three regions: Andalusia, Castilla-La Mancha and Galicia. This selection is justified by the fact that they are situated in various geographical zones and have different social, economic and political contexts (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). However, they all share a past of external and internal emigration that partly explains their condition of shrinking areas. The aim of this selection is not a statistical representation, but a typological one, insofar as this is a qualitative study.

A total of 109 semi-structured interviews lasting between 45 and 90 min were carried out in the selected localities. An extensive initial interview guideline was constructed, together with an ethics protocol and tested through exploratory fieldwork. The main questions focused on identifying the locality context in socio-demographic, geographical, historical, economic, migratory and political terms, going deeper into the processes of shrinkage and revitalisation, exploring the life and the spatial and social mobility trajectories of the people interviewed. The majority of the interviews were conducted in person (87.3%), and only 12.7% were held online/by phone. As for the people interviewed, 28.4% were residents of migrant origin and 4.5% were non-migrant residents. Representatives of companies (3.7%), third sector entities (34.3%), local administration

Fig. 3 Number of Interviews carried out during fieldwork. Source: author's own

No. of interviews			
Burela	36	San Bartolomé de la Torre	16
Celanova	26	Huelva	7
GALICIA	62	ANDALUSIA	23
Molina de Aragón	24		
CASTLLA-LA MANCHA	24	TOTAL	109

PROFILES OF INTEREST	
TYPE	SUBTYPE
Administration	Mayors, local authority social workers /health centre, school counsellors, teachers, local development agents, regional/provincial governments, migration offices, observatories of equality/integration/migrations, etc.
Enterprises	Cooperatives, enterprises that hire many people of migrant origin or people from the country of origin, social enterprises, enterprises that impact on local development, coworking spaces, entrepreneurs, etc.
Third sector	Political parties, foundations, NGOs, unions, associations, civil organisations, volunteers, activists, migrant organisations, religious organisations, local leaders.
Inhabitants from migrant backgrounds	Workers/carers, long-term residents of migrant origin, newcomers of migrant origin, retired, returnees, migrant women.
Inhabitants from non-migrant backgrounds	Workers/carers, young people that decided to stay, retired people, second generation, non-migrant women, etc.

Fig. 4 Profiles of interest for the research. Source: authors' own

(20.1%), educational centres (6.0%), provincial (2.2%) and regional administrations (0.7%) were also interviewed² (Fig. 3).

The fieldwork was carried out between 2020 and 2022. The snowball method (Goodman, 1961) was used until the saturation point was reached (Marshall et al., 2013). Observation provided the researchers with a deeper understanding of the territory, as well as information related to inhabitants' interactions, power relations, geographical and spatial aspects, etc. For the analysis, inductive and deductive methods were used concurrently (Andréu, 2000). The analysis was based on the thematic content of the interviews, seeking to extract meaning from the text (Araya, 2002; Piñuel, 2002) Fig. 4).

Results: the Impact of Migration on the Revitalization of Shrinking Regions in Spain

The impact of migration dynamics on the revitalization of shrinking regions in Spain has a different and complementary configuration depending on the migration pattern: arrival of newcomers or return/root migration as analysed in this section.

Newcomers: Labour Market Segmentation, 'Circular' Demographic Revitalisation, and 'Dissonant Social Mobility'

Newcomers include many of the international migratory flows that have arrived in Spain since the 2000s. A large proportion comes from Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Eastern European countries. Their arrival responds to labour migration (Camarero, Sampedro & Oliva, 2012). The demand for migrant

² The fieldwork was carried out by Paula Alonso and Leticia Santaballa. Part of the content of this article is included in the PhD research of Leticia Santaballa.

labour in rural shrinking areas is clearly explained by the presence of segmented labour markets shaped by the new social composition of the labour market, such as the internationalisation of the agri-food economy (Moraes et al., 2012). Modern agriculture changes the model of agriculture/rurality, which is no longer based on family labour, implying the salarisation of the activity and a dependence on under-employed workforce (Camarero, 2020). The fact that the communities studied are contexts of depopulation and ageing acts as a pull factor for workers in less skilled and more flexible jobs in activities that had traditionally been covered by the native population. The arrival of newcomers implies a new social composition of the labour market in rural environments, shaping an ethno-fragmented rurality (Torres & Gadea, 2021). In addition to origin, the intersection between ethnicity and gender also marks the segmentation of the labour market.

In Burela, a fishing port located in the Mariña Lucense area of Galicia, labour market demand for fishing activities is the main factor driving the arrival of newcomers. The Cape Verdean workers arrived in the town in the 1970s. Some of them settled with their families, forming a community that is now in its second and third generations. Later, fishermen arrived from Peru, Senegal, Indonesia, Morocco and Ghana. Construction, ceramics, shipbuilding and carpentry are other economic sectors of employment. Today, ethnic diversity is a characteristic of this village, where immigrants from more than 40 countries of origin live together. In addition to fishing work, Burela's position as the principal locality in the area, with services such as a hospital, presents a dynamic service sector (hotels and catering, retail trade), generating employment opportunities for immigrant women. In Burela, many Cape Verdean women work in the hotel and catering industry.

In Molina de Aragón, a municipality in Castile-La Mancha, a quarter of the population is of migrant background, with more than thirty different nationalities, although a large proportion are from Romania and Morocco. This locality, situated in an agricultural area (rain-fed agriculture, cereals) and livestock farming (rabbits, sheep), has become the most important economic and service centre in the area. Logging, sawmills, the resin business and construction all generate employment. The town also attracts tourists. The progressive ageing of the population in the surrounding villages has brought with it the emigration of older people to the centre, in search of the security and proximity of its services, which in turn has also increased the demand for labour in the care sector. However, the depopulation of the surrounding rural areas is counterproductive, as they generated a considerable proportion of the income and economic activity. In this locality, the care segment is mainly reserved for Latin American and Romanian women, with fewer Moroccan or sub-Saharan women working in these occupations.

In San Bartolomé de la Torre, agriculture is the main economic activity, in particular the cultivation of berries and citrus fruits. The workers are mainly migrants, due to a seasonal production model favoured by 'hiring at origin'. There are also two international flamenco costume companies, a polyester boat manufacturing company and an olive oil cooperative. In the streets, a wide range of shops and services can be found. Labour market segmentation is evident throughout the province, apparent in the intersection of ethnicity and gender. The clearest example is found in the berry-picking agreements, which traditionally targeted women from sub-Saharan

Africa, Ukraine, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Morocco, yet which more recently have included men from Ecuador and Honduras in the harvesting work. The constant need for intensive labour, in the face of demanding and poorly paid working conditions, has led to the use of different recruitment formulas, temporary contracts for people of national and international origin, the aforementioned ‘contracts at source’ and the seasonal employment of people in an irregular administrative situation.

The emergence of segmented labour markets is explained by the articulation between the spatial and social mobility strategies of the native and immigrant population, as will be seen below.

Dissonant Social Mobility: Social Ascent for Some, Blockage for Others

Segmentation according to origin (autochthonous/migrant) is articulated with the processes of the intra- and intergenerational social mobility of the autochthonous population. Burela is a good example of how the processes of the substitution of foreign immigrant labour are carried out within the framework of intra-generational social mobility strategies. During the 1970s, an aluminium factory was opened in the vicinity of this municipality. Many men left their work at sea due to the better conditions offered by the new company. The need for labour for the fishing industry led to immigration to fill the jobs vacated by local workers. Some Cape Verdean immigrants, who had been hired for the construction of the aluminium company, decided to stay in Galicia. However, unable to obtain jobs in the new company, which employed mainly locals, they opted to work in the fishing industry.

Secondly, the lack of intergenerational replacement in less skilled jobs and, in general, in professions linked to agricultural, livestock and fishing activities also results in the recourse to immigrants. In Molina de Aragón, for example, the local young are not interested in following in their parents’ footsteps: many move to the cities to study and find work in sectors other than agriculture and farming. Thus, the difficulty of generational replacement, the internal emigration of young autochthonous people (spatial mobility) or their refusal to work in traditional activities (as a strategy of social mobility), form the basis of the emergence of migratory flows that feed the segmentation of the labour market and the arrival of newcomers in rural areas. The emigration of some explains the immigration of others.

[...] if you have a boarding card, you will never be short of work at sea. Do you know how to work with a chainsaw? You’ll never be short of work. Because there are a lot of people who cut. Now... there are people from Romania... and from Portugal. To cut wood. Why, aren’t there people here? Yes, there are, but what happens is that they don’t like the work. They say it’s a dirty job, and... well... A lot of things... And grandma... grandma, maybe, she gets a pension... Grandpa... ‘Here, my grandson... Did you get your license? I’ll buy your license. Do you want a car? My boy is fine, my boy is great...’ But I don’t have a grandfather, I’m here alone. I must work, I must make a living. And on top of that I’ve got a family to support, I’ve got... That’s the difference! It’s not that there are too many of them and we’re taking people’s jobs. No, no, no, no, no. It’s the other way around. (Key informant, newcomer 11022021_SGB1_M_1_a)

However, whilst young natives climb the social ladder thanks to emigration, for immigrants the path to social ascent is blocked: the options for intra and intergenerational social mobility are extremely limited for the population of immigrant origin in rural areas. This blockage starts at school, where there are high dropout and failure rates among the children of immigrants. In the case of Molina de Aragón, the blockage is found particularly among the descendants of newcomers, especially the children of Moroccan immigrants and, above all, for women. In Burela, numerous testimonies refer to the mechanisms of blockage or social immobility for the younger generations, which are also found in the school context, especially for those of Cape Verdean origin. Many of these young people end up leaving the village, a further impediment to demographic revitalisation.

We can therefore speak of a 'dissonant social mobility' (Oso & Suárez Grimalt, [n.d.](#)), insofar as it is upward for the autochthonous population, through emigration, yet it also acts as a form of blockage for those of immigration origin. Together with job insecurity, it prevents settlement of the immigrant population in rural areas.

Precariousness Does not Generate 'Roots': Demographic Revitalisation, Based on Circulation

The fieldwork shows that labour precariousness, typical of segmented labour markets, does not generate roots, giving rise to what we have termed a 'circular' demographic revitalisation. The results of the fieldwork indicate that the working conditions of people of migrant origin in the primary sector, especially in livestock farming, agriculture and fishing, are very harsh. The logic of job rotation is one of the characteristics of the precariousness of the segmented labour market and is accentuated by the temporary nature of some types of employment. Poor working conditions impose limits, which is why migrants eventually leave. In fact, one of the weaknesses of initiatives to attract immigrant populations is that workers are merely 'passing through' or 'in the interim' (Camarero, Sampedro and Oliva, [2012](#)) (Pumares, García & Asensio, [2006](#); Camarero, Sampedro & Oliva, [2013b](#); Pedone, [2005](#); Pedreño & Riquelme, [2006](#)).

Precariousness favours temporary and circular migrations, generating a model of demographic revitalisation, which can be termed 'circular', whereby as some arrive, others leave. This may be functional and articulated with the migratory projects of some newcomers, who are oriented towards savings and return, but it is not functional for those who wish to stay. Population settlement is, therefore, 'trickle-down', with migrants who have lived in Spain for a long time managing to settle and gradually achieve greater stability through the development of resilience strategies.

However, in the localities studied, the existence of reception initiatives by the third sector or institutional support from local or regional governments have proved essential for greater settlement, as we will see below. This differentiates the localities studied from other reception contexts where, without these palliatives, rotation is the norm. Yet before addressing this issue, let us consider how the migration pattern of returnees or root migrants is reproduced in comparison to newcomers.

Returnees and Root Migrants: the Revitalisation of the Territory Through the Emotional Bond with the Roots

The second pattern is made up of returnees or people returning to their origins, namely root migration. The region of Celanova, in Galicia, is a clearly devitalised territory due to the abrupt loss of population of productive age during the twentieth century (large migratory outflows to Equatorial Guinea, Argentina, Venezuela, Mexico, the USA or later to Switzerland, Germany, the UK or France, as well as to national destinations). The labour market is not very dynamic and therefore is unable to guarantee the incorporation of migrants on the labour market. Arrivals are therefore fundamentally attributable to the emotional ties stemming from historically woven migratory networks. The social and affective relationship built by the 'transnational bridges of the Atlantic' (Oso et al., (2008), through the Galician tradition of emigration to America, especially to Venezuela, channels the arrivals. However, the lack of employment options makes it difficult for new inhabitants to settle. The economy is currently based on the primary sector and family farms (vineyards, cattle and sheep farming). Elderly care, as well as the retail trade, tourism and catering in the county town, are also a source of employment. This locality is often configured as a 'springboard', or as a territory of 'vital survival' (Torres & Gadea, 2021) used by new residents to 'land' before 'taking off' again in search of greater opportunities. Thus, this migration model, based on the roots pull factor, yet which occurs in undynamic labour contexts, also acts as a springboard for demographic revitalisation. It receives newcomers but then sees them leave in search of more dynamic labour markets.

The motivation for mobility in the case of returnees or root migrants is related to questions of identity: the decision to return is often driven by a sense of belonging, identity, responsibility for the land, affective and social ties. The decision is more easily activated when there is patrimony involved (home ownership), a relevant key asset, given the housing difficulties that occur in rural areas and which we observed throughout our fieldwork.

In addition to the returnees or root migrants from abroad, there is a further group linked to the territory who participated in the rural exodus from the 1960s onwards and who decided to go back to enjoy retirement in their village of origin. This also includes their descendants, who leave the cities in search of a better quality of life and opportunities to raise their children (the so-called neo-rurals or pro-rurals) (Camarero, 2020). For this latter group, migration is the result of the weariness generated by the city, perceived as a source of stress and discomfort. They migrate in search of nature, community, mutual trust and a slower pace of life (Halfacree, 1997 in Escribano, 2022).

In the case of Molina de Aragón, we have seen how retirees contribute to revitalisation, as they are consumers of goods and services for which labour is needed. The return of the elderly is accompanied by economic capital that generates employment and wealth in the territory. In turn, pro-rural young people go back or return to their ancestors' roots with greater educational and cultural capital, which is in decline in rural areas. Emigration for studies and return mean a (re)attraction of talent and human resources for economic activity. For example, in Molina de Aragón, we find

many young people who left to study in large cities such as Madrid or Zaragoza who, on their return, are inserted in skilled jobs that economically revitalise the environment (social services, health, education or tourism), and also consume goods and services. They are key to the implementation of social innovation projects. In labour markets that are not very dynamic, the principal opportunities for migrants lie in entrepreneurship strategies, as discussed below.

Entrepreneurship: a Strategy for Moving out of Declining Occupational Segments

Entrepreneurship is one of the few employment opportunities for the migrant population, sometimes at the beginning of the migration project, as in the Comarca of Celanova, given the few employment options. Alternatively, these opportunities emerge after a longer period of residence, as in San Bartolomé de la Torre, as a strategy for social mobility and a means of moving out of declining occupational niches.

In Celanova, the intensity of entrepreneurial strategies among Galician descendants can be explained by the migratory strategies of these migrants, which are clearly oriented towards settlement rather than savings and return, which is more present among new arrivals who have no previous links with the territory. Root migrants in Galicia have a series of characteristics that favour the setting up of businesses. Firstly, they hold citizenship, as they are the children of Spaniards, which greatly facilitates the settlement process. Secondly, they have the necessary social capital to be able to turn to their relatives for help and financial support. Thirdly, the Galician emigrants who left for America were, to a large extent, entrepreneurs, so their descendants have been socialised in entrepreneurial skills. Moreover, as they are considered 'returned emigrants' by the autonomous regional government (Xunta de Galicia), they have access to the financial aid granted by this same body (a return programme for Latin American descendants of Galician emigrants³), for which they receive a small amount of money during the first few months after arrival, which facilitates settlement and business start-ups. As previous research has shown (Oso & Dalle, 2020; Oso et al., 2008), root migrants have greater capital for entrepreneurship than migrants who have no previous relationship with the territory (newcomers).

Moreover, the strategic position of Celanova, as the county town, makes entrepreneurship in the service sector (hospitality, retail) an option. Care, in the framework of an ageing region, is one of the sectors in which some of the entrepreneurial initiatives are currently being oriented. An example of this is the cooperative project *Emprendiendo en Común* ('Entrepreneurship in Common'), managed by the NGO Boa Vida no Rural. Financial aid from the LEADER programme, managed through the local development group, or the 'Coworking' initiative, promoted by the School

³ In Spanish, 'Programa de retorno para descendientes latinoamericanos de emigrantes gallegos': <https://emigracion.xunta.gal/es/actividad/retorna>

of Industrial Organisation and the town council itself, with several editions carried out, supports the creation of companies. All this has generated a small entrepreneurial ecosystem in the region. In this sense, whilst emigration to America contributed to the territorial shrinking process, the arrival of return and root migrants is revitalising it.

This relationship between emigration/shrinking and return/revitalisation can also be seen in San Bartolomé de la Torre. In the mid-twentieth century, the town experienced a major exodus, driven by the crisis brought about by phylloxera (a vine parasite) which affected the wine sector, a financial mainstay for a large proportion of the population.⁴ The growth of the European economies after the post-war reconstruction also acted as a major push factor. However, the economic crisis that hit Europe due to the onset of the oil crisis in the early 1970s drove many emigrants back to Huelva. Thanks to the capital saved from migration, these returnees set up their own strawberry and flower farms. In addition to providing a livelihood for their own and successive generations, these farms were key to the arrival of immigration in the area at the beginning of the century. The entrepreneurial strategy is also used in San Bartolomé by newcomers to escape from employment in the agricultural sector and is also a means to social mobility and permanence in the territory. In this locality, there is a proliferation of shops within the so-called ethnic economy, and therefore inevitably linked to the flow of seasonal workers; however, there are also food businesses, restaurants, bazaars or barbershops. Recently, a number of entrepreneurs have acquired land in the municipality, joining the local production circle as members of the local strawberry cooperative 'Fresaflor', or have become carers for the elderly.

As we can see, as in Celanova, in San Bartolomé there are chain migrations that are closely linked to survival strategies and the processes of territorial shrinking and revitalisation. Migratory corridors (built by the links established between emigration and immigration) strengthen the emotional ties with the place of origin. Migrants and their descendants are like turtles and elephants: turtles return to the place of their origins to reproduce life; elephants return to their land to die. Young people returning to their roots fuel return migrations, as do older people returning to retire (Oso, 2011). The emotional attraction that localities exert is reproduced, not only among immigrants from abroad, but also with the return or roots migration of young and old people who move back to the village from other cities in Spain. Their return is characterised by drive and a strong sense of commitment and the notion that they have a debt that must be 'repaid' to the village. Through associations, they are often the principal contributors to the revitalisation of the rural areas:

[Referring to the neighbourhood/cultural associations:] It's like a kind of return of those who have left. Most of them are created, and promoted, with the person linked to the village who has emigrated, who continues to maintain links with the village and who, when they return, wants to do things in the village... And it's as

⁴ For more information about phylloxera:

https://www.juntadeandalucia.es/institutodeestadisticaycartografia/atlashistoriaecon/atlas_cap_17.html

if they have a debt with the village, right? And that's why they get more involved in the village. (Key informant, long-term inhabitant from national background, 26032021_SART_O_2_a)

These turtles and elephants are key to the implementation of 'welcoming initiatives', as well as to the development of social innovation projects. Returnees and root migrants are inputs that revitalise the area economically, because they bring with them social, human and economic capital, as well as the desire to contribute to and revitalise the community. Both social capital and institutional support are key in the process of revitalising localities. And this is true in the case of the migratory patterns of newcomers, returnees and root migrants, as we will see in the next section.

Social Capital of Immigrants and Institutional Support, Key to Territorial Revitalisation

The results of our fieldwork have shown that without social capital, depopulated areas are the chronicle of a death foretold. In all the municipalities studied, the social fabric, in its various forms, is fundamental to their survival. Immigrants—newcomers, returnees or root migrants—bring with them a desire to contribute to the community, to develop and reinforce social cohesion, which in the face of depopulation processes can be diminished. It has been shown that social movements such as 'Teruel existe'⁵ or 'Soria ¡Ya!' are driving forces of struggle and resistance for people at risk. In the municipalities considered here, we have identified fundamental actions, such as participation in associations, cultural and recreational activities, sports networks, festivals, etc., that form a network that has a positive impact on present life.

Some initiatives promoted by the third sector are particularly relevant in attracting the population and boosting certain areas. One such initiative is the *Proyecto Nuevos Senderos*⁶ ('New Paths Project'), launched in Molina de Aragón, as well as in other depopulated rural areas in Spain. A market prospection is carried out, mediating between the employment supply and demand. The need to improve the employability of immigrants is diagnosed by broadening their training, with language learning as one of the first barriers to overcome. Highlights of this project include the potential for individualised attention and the design of personalised itineraries.

In Molina de Aragón, municipal initiatives to generate networks, an associative fabric and social activity have proved so productive that a figure has had to be created within the town council to coordinate the 30 existing associations in the municipality. *The Social Garden* (a collective garden where each person grows vegetables

⁵ Originally citizen movements that became political agents, demanding improvements in infrastructures, and raising awareness about relevant issues of sparsely populated areas such as Teruel or Soria, in Spain.

⁶ <https://www.cepaim.org/areas-actuacion/desarrollo-rural/nuevos-senderos-insercion-sociolaboral-nuevos-pobladores-medio-rural-madrid/>

for their own consumption) or the *Pippioteca* (an alternative library, in which residents participate by painting, cleaning, making handicrafts, etc.) are key initiatives. Institutional support or third sector initiatives have a positive influence on the settlement and rooting of the immigrant population. They also alleviate, to a certain extent, the tendency towards rotation and the tensions generated by segmented labour markets.

In Burela, the associative movement plays an important role in the settlement of the immigrant population, together with support from the town council, which has implemented a Plan for the Social Integration of Immigrants, as well as an intercultural mediator and a legal advice service. Another way of creating social synergy is through marketing strategies. In Burela, the aim is to sell the town as a symbol of ethnic diversity and 'social integration', and its media projection in this sense is a factor of attraction, as well as for settling newcomers.

Recognition by institutions of the migratory phenomena and their positive consequences for the territory have a positive influence on the reception and settlement of immigrants. In both Celanova and San Bartolomé de la Torre, local public administrations publicly value emigration. These municipalities have monuments symbolising the departure of their residents to other territories, inaugurated in both cases at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. In addition, at municipal level, photograph collections have been compiled and books have been published on the subject in collaboration with associations (Huelva Association of Returned Emigrants, Association of Returned Emigrants of Ourense). This reinforces the emotional bonds between emigrants and the territory. This symbolic recognition of emigration transcends the personal dimension to a legal dimension, through the commitments made by public administrations in the form of twinning arrangements between towns. San Bartolomé de la Torre has made four twinning arrangements with towns in different parts of the world: Tavira (Portugal), Perpignan (France), Kenitra (Morocco) and Porto Novo (Benin). Resulting initiatives include experiences of exchange visits and a number of projects. Celanova is twinned with Guadalix (Spain), Rubí (Spain), San Tirso (Portugal) and Clichy (France). Rather than merely fulfilling a symbolic function, twinning favours exchanges and economic or cultural cooperation dynamics. In Burela, cooperation projects are financed between Galicia and some of the Cape Verdean localities the emigrants originated from.

Public administrations, positioned in favour of the reception of migrants, successfully mobilise a number of economic, material and human resources to support the associative movement and promote events and support programmes for the immigrant population. An example of this is the institutional support received in the Celanova region by the Cantaclaro Association (a cultural and social association made up of people linked to Venezuela), or the multicultural fairs held in San Bartolomé de la Torre at the reception centre for immigrant women with dependent children in the same locality. Consequently, institutional support for migration ultimately favours the development of both individual and collective expressions of connection, which contribute to the sustainable revitalisation of the territories.

Conclusions

The main contribution of this article, which does not aim to be comparative or exhaustive, but rather to illustrate the divested nature of migratory chains, has been to analyse rural shrinking/revitalisation by focusing on interlinked mobilities, which implies going beyond the traditional approach, centred on depopulation. Our research reveals how the internal and international exodus of the second half of the twentieth century in Spain, driven by the 'Developmentalist' economic model, is at the basis of the territorial imbalances and the configuration of rural shrinking areas in Spain. It also shows how deagrarianisation and the lack of intergenerational replacement explains the arrival of immigrant populations in rural areas, in order to meet the needs of labour markets segmented by ethnic origin and gender. Along with the arrival of newcomers, the shrinking areas are also benefiting from the arrival of returnees and root migrants (from both external and internal migration), who decide to return to their roots, drawn by emotional ties. These migration patterns are different, yet complementary, in terms of sustaining life in rural areas. Thus, the decapitalisation to which some territories have been subjected through emigration is cushioned by the recapitalisation brought about by the arrival of newcomers, returnees and root migrants. The impact of migration on the revitalisation of rural areas is visible in demographic, economic and social terms in all three cases studied.

Newcomer migration contributes to the revitalisation of shrinking areas on three levels. From a demographic point of view, it adds inhabitants of a functional age to the villages: they are young and sometimes have children. However, this demographic revitalisation is often 'circular', insofar as the segmentation of the labour market and the blockage to the social mobility of immigrants makes it difficult for them to settle: some arrive and others leave, leading to a circulation of people who, although they do not settle, make the rural areas more dynamic, like the water of a river. This model can be articulated in the temporary migratory projects of the immigrants themselves, who do not necessarily seek to settle, but rather to save and return. Nevertheless, it blocks the settlement and the social mobility processes of those that would like to stay. In economic terms, newcomers fill the gaps in the labour market in disadvantaged areas. Without these workers, the survival of economic activities in rural areas could not be guaranteed. Their mobility is linked to the dynamics of the labour market and their rootedness is associated with the segmented, precarious and temporary way of entering the labour market.

In turn, social ties related to previous migratory movements (either external or internal) trigger return or roots migration. Identity, belonging or responsibility to the land generates consumption with return migration. It also produces struggle, resistance and future aspirations, through innovation and the social capitalisation of young people who wish to put down roots. In their day, these migrants or their ancestors left the villages, taking their social capital with them, but with the journey back to their origins, they return this form of capital and also bring back other resources that were accumulated, intergenerationally, during the migration process (economic and educational capital,

entrepreneurial skills). Thus, chain migration maintains a dialectical tension with the processes of shrinking/revitalisation in rural areas.

In all the cases studied, the arrival of newcomers, returnees or root migrants makes a significant social contribution, revitalising the daily life of the village through collective activities and actions, generating, in turn, more migratory networks that feed back into this dialectical relationship between migration and (de)vitalisation.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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