

## **Lifestyle migration in rural areas of Aragón, Spain**

**Raúl Lardiés-Bosque**

Departamento de Geografía y Ordenación del Territorio  
Grupo de Estudios de Desarrollo Territorial (GEDETUZ)  
Instituto de Investigación en Ciencias Ambientales de Aragón (IUCA)  
Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain  
[rlardies@unizar.es](mailto:rlardies@unizar.es)

**Theme and convener:** Poster

Nico van Nimwegen, Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI)

### **Abstract (up to 300 words):**

Migration due to lifestyle and amenity has emerged recently at international level, leading to a new type and conceptualization of the migration (lifestyle migration). This migration is basically composed by people who want to take the best environmental quality, the cultural differentiation of the new destinations, achieving greater connection to nature in a more relaxed and peaceful atmosphere. Usually, they are migrants from urban environments and seeking new rural settings in which to develop their lives, so that economic motivation is not the most important for the move, but other issues related to value the quality and lifestyle. Unlike other countries, few studies have highlighted and analyzed this migration profile among immigrants in rural areas of Spain.

In this paper, the phenomenon of amenity migration in rural areas of the region of Aragon has been studied, thanks to 331 questionnaires completed by new settlers arrived in rural municipalities of this region. Among all the new immigrants arrived to this areas, a group of them has been identified as 'amenity migrants'; several aspects of this migrants will be analyzed, starting by the definition and conceptualization of this phenomenon from the existing theorizing and the emergence of new forms of mobility in today's society.

Also, different aspects and dimensions of this new migration such as sociodemographic characteristics and profile of migrants, migrant diversity and migration motivation, professional and residential history, social life and activities developed before and after the residential relocation, apart from other aspects of housing (previous and current), will be considered. The socio-territorial impact of these migrants at the local scale, the level of attachment and integration, and the potential for this group to influence social and political processes in the target communities will also be discussed.

## **Extended abstract (2-4 pages):**

### **1. Introduction**

In Spain, most of the rural areas have traditionally been places for emigration, being the source of significant flows of people moving from the countryside to the city. However, this dynamic has changed in recent decades, as some of these areas have detected a certain reversal, or even population growth. It is an uneven process, sometimes accelerated by the economic crisis and the expulsion of people from the cities. Behind the numbers, a new migrant profile is sometimes emerging, for which the economic motivation is still important for migrating; nevertheless, other values and issues related to the quality and style of life are more predominant. This phenomenon has been conceptualized as 'lifestyle migration' (LM).

Migration due to lifestyle and amenity has recently emerged at the international level and it is basically composed by people who want to take the best environmental quality, the cultural differentiation of the new destinations, achieving greater connection to nature in a more relaxed and peaceful atmosphere. Usually, they are migrants from urban environments who seek new rural settings in which to develop their lives; economic motivation is not the most important reason for the move, but other issues related to value the quality and lifestyle are also relevant. Unlike other countries, few studies have highlighted and analyzed this migration profile among immigrants in rural areas of Spain.

The aim of this study is to know different aspects and dimensions of this new migration, as some sociodemographic characteristics and the profile of respondents, their motivations for the move and their conformity with the level of the services found. The socio-territorial impact of these migrants at the local scale, the level of attachment and integration, and the potential for this group to influence social and political processes in the target communities will also be discussed. Previously, the issue of theorizing and explanation of these new forms of mobility in relation to the paradigm of the new mobility will also be addressed.

### **2. Lifestyle migration: conceptualization and trends**

'Lifestyle migration' (LM) is an emerging form of spatial mobility whereby wealthier citizens of all ages and with different family circumstances and work, transfer their place of residence, either temporarily or permanently, to significant places with the intention of finding a better life (Benson 2011; Benson and O'Reilly, 2009). Unlike traditional migration flows, the main reason for this migration is not economical, but it is related to subjective motivations linked to the positive idealization of the destination. Beyond the common dream of seeking a better life in a nice place, testimonies related to the lifestyle of migrants encapsulate ideals of self-realization and personal projects. According to previous studies, the testimonies of the respondents reflect stories looking for a more relaxed and quiet life, a better environment and better health, cheaper housing, a lower cost of living; also, lifestyle migrants are searching the need of escaping and breaking with past experiences, personal fulfillment and self-realization and also fleeing the stress, danger and insecurity associated with their previous places of origin (Casado-Díaz et al., 2004; Gaspar 2015).

The poster will address the conceptualization and theorization of LM, its definition, origin and characterization. This phenomenon encompasses different realities, types of movements and forms of mobility. It is a large umbrella which gives shelter to the international migration of retirees (Casado-Díaz, 2012), different forms of

counterurbanisation (Buller and Hoggart, 1994) and also to various forms of residential tourism (Huete, 2009).

Research on LM in rural areas have been very scarce, although the trend is growing (Benson, 2011), so it is already well documented in a variety of rural areas in several countries. In almost all these cases, it has been studied how amenity migration and tourism are profoundly impacting on remote communities, many of which were in economic decline (Moss et al., 2006).

Some research on LM has been conducted in rural North-America analyzing the movement of urban residents to rural communities (Saint Onge et al., 2008), but also in countries such as Argentina and Chile with the study of new dynamics of tourism and amenity migration (Bedrich and Rainer, 2013). Other works have focused on mountain and rural communities in western Canada (Stefanick et al., 2012).

On the contrary, the study of these migrations in European rural areas has been less common, although it began with an analysis of the movement of British to rural areas in France some decades ago (Barou and Prado, 1995). Buller and Hoggart (1994) conceptualized this phenomenon as 'international counter-urbanization', and they analyzed aspects such as economic development of rural areas (Hoggart and Buller, 1995) and the generated impacts (Buller and Hoggart, 1994). More recently, we must highlight other contributions (Gaspar, 2015) focused on these migrations in Europe's rural areas.

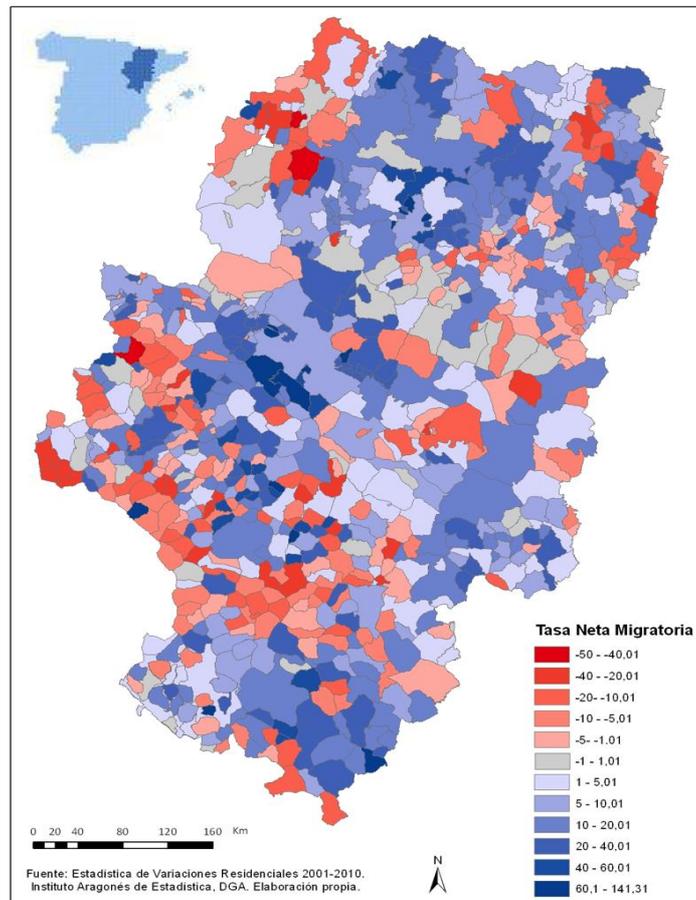
### **3. Immigration in Spanish rural areas: the case of Aragón**

The new paradigm of mobility includes movements from urban to rural areas, including various types of counter-urbanization (Ferrás, 2000). In Spain, new forms of mobility have been revealed, and one is the arrival of immigrants to some rural areas during the past two decades (Collantes et al., 2010; García and Sánchez, 2005). Several authors have analyzed how and where these flows have occurred in some Spanish regions, including both the arrival of new migrants and also of returnees (Egea et al., 2005.).

In Aragón, Lardiés et al. (2012) have noted migration positive dynamics occurred between 2001 and 2010 in some municipalities with reduced population size (Figure 1); in part, this is a phenomenon linked to the arrival of national and foreign immigrants, which is pushing to some municipalities to positive migration rates.

However, not all the immigrants hidden under these figures correspond to LM profile, and only those who left the city in search for a new (rural) life. Generally, the bulk of immigrants in Aragón was recorded in urban areas between 2000 and 2010 (EVR, INE), so the city is still the center of attraction, reaching 57.9% of the total immigration in the region; in particular, Zaragoza -the regional capital-, it is the main area of attraction for immigrants, receiving 37.8% of the total in Aragón during this period. The total of immigration was distributed between rural (21.2%) and semi-urban areas (20.9%).

Figure 1. Net Migration Rates in the municipalities of Aragón. 2000-2010



#### 4. Method and Source

The phenomenon of LM in rural areas in Aragón has been studied thanks to 331 (valid) questionnaires, completed by new settlers arrived in rural municipalities of the region during 2011 and 2012. The questionnaire included some initial 'filter' questions, and was divided into several parts devoted to: personal information, motivations for migration, places of residence (previous and now), social life and activities before and after the move, and type and characteristics of the (current and previous) houses/homes.

All the respondents should meet a number of requirements to be interviewed, as:

- (1) be adult (+ 18 years);
- (2) to reside permanently (main house) in a rural municipality of Aragón and specifically in towns with less than 2,000 inhabitants;
- (3) previously, they had to live permanently in an urban area (city) with more than 40,000 or 50,000 inhabitants, either inside or outside of Aragón;
- (4) have made the residential transfer from a city in the last ten years;
- (5) to have (paid) economic activity in a rural area, and the fact of living in a rural area does not have to be a consequence of a professional transfer (therefore, this excludes to teachers, public and bank workers, members of state security, etc.). Some basic data on the distribution of respondents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sociodemographic and economic characteristics of respondents living in rural areas of Aragón

Variables	n=331	%
Sex (n = 331)		
Men	163	49.4
Women	168	50.6
Age (n = 330)		
18-29 years	47	14.2
30-39 years	122	37.0
40-49 years	90	27.3
≥ 50 years	71	21.5
Education level (completed) (n = 329)		
Primary education	59	17.9
Secondary education	140	42.6
First stage of Tertiary education	53	16.1
Second stage of Tertiary education	77	23.4
Civil status (n = 328)		
Married (or cohabiting)	224	68.3
Single	85	25.9
Divorced or Widow	19	5.8
Professional status (n = 331)		
Having a job (full time)	210	63.4
Having a job (part time)	42	12.7
Unemployed	23	6.9
Housewife	17	5.1
Retired/Pensioner	28	8.5
Other	11	3.3

Source: Author interviews.

The 331 surveys were conducted in villages belonging to 161 different municipalities of Aragón and were distributed geographically in the three provinces. These 161 municipalities concentrate 15.5% of the population of Aragón (of a total of 1,3 million) and represent 22% of the 731 municipalities in the region.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Profile and sociodemographic characteristics of the lifestyle migrants

The fieldwork has revealed the variety of migration profiles, styles and ways of life that the new settlers 'import' from the city, in opposition to the traditional homogeneity that has characterized the rural population. Among the respondents, there is a notable gender balance and also a homogeneous distribution in the presence and representation of all age groups; about the question if this rural countryside attracts more young immigrants or more middle-aged/older, figures reflect higher proportion of young immigrants than retired.

Most of immigrants have secondary education, although many of them have university degree (23.4%), especially younger immigrants between 35-40 years. It is also noted that the new rural life attracts couples (almost 70% of respondents are married or living with a partner), although the most common among young people is to live alone; in both cases, it is usual to move to places previously known and which already had relationships / connections (family, friends, second residence, etc.).

The establishment of immigrants has occurred quite recently, since 50% of respondents were installed in this rural area during the past four years, and the number

decreases with age. In 95% of cases, the newcomers are originally from Spain and only 27 of them (8.1%) come from another country. Three out of four respondents immigrants (76.1%) have paid work in rural areas where they reside, mostly full time, and only 7% are unemployed, 5.1% are registered as 'housewife', and 8.5% as retired / pensioners (Table 1). Results show few retirees compared to other rural areas studied in Spain (Egea et al., 2005).

The analysis of the occupations of immigrants who are engaged in economic activity (working people) is complex to be analyzed, especially by the diversity of professions; anyway, this analysis shows a new scenario in which the traditional professions based on the exploitation of primary resources are replaced by other related to services; this is a clear sign of the ongoing restructuring of rural areas and gentrification associated with it (Solana, 2005).

Compared to 93% of the sample (238 people) who declare physically visit their usual workplace, only 4.7% (12 people) is teleworking, which involves going back and forth to its parent company. This phenomenon has been seen among people residing in some villages of the region, where these workers often move to Barcelona or Valencia, once or twice a month.

The services sector is the predominant among these immigrants, in particular activities related to trade and catering (32.7%), utilities (22.1%), followed by financial services (8.9%), tourism (3.2%) and transport (2.1%) (Table 2). Large transfers between economic sectors from the previous job (in the city) and the current (in rural areas) are detected, and generally, much less people is now working in construction, and more in agriculture, trade / hotels, and in public and tourism services.

Table 2. Economic sectors of employment before and after the migration

Economic sectors	Before (n=295)		Now (n=281)	
	n	%	n	%
Agriculture	7	2.4	18	6.4
Industry, Mining	44	14.9	40	14.2
Bulding	35	11.9	12	4.3
Comerce and Hospilality	65	22.0	92	32.7
Transports	5	1.7	6	2.1
Financial services	29	9.8	25	8.9
Public services	55	18.6	62	22.1
I've never worked	7	2.4	7	2.5
Turism	6	2.0	9	3.2
Other	42	14.2	10	3.6

Source: Author interviews.

It is noted that with the transfer of these people to rural areas and the increment of their employment in certain branches, this people break with his previous life in the city and they start to own their own business (rural tourism, bars / restaurants, crafts, sports adventure, etc.); this explains the figure of 32.3% of them working as independent / self-employed. They can be their own boss, without relying on anyone and organizing their life easier.

## 5.2. Motivation for migrating and relationship with the previous place of residence

Most respondents (54.4%) say that they moved to the countryside because they knew this place because of being on it during weekends, holidays or longer seasons;

however, 45.6% affirm that they had never been/resided before here. This prior knowledge of the area helps reducing some problems related to residential mobility, thanks to the network of family and friends installed in the area. Thus, the most common previous relationships maintained with the destination are 'being originally from there' (21.8%), being a tourist (19.3%) or being the spouse / partner from there (18.5%); almost two out of three immigrants had lived in the area for one reason or another.

According to the motivations for migrating among all the respondents, economic reasons are quite relevant, due that 46% of interviewed declared a job change as the first motivation (20.4%) or searching for a new job (25.6%), together with lower housing prices (7.9%), which is also an economic factor. This means that not all new immigrants in rural areas fit into the paradigm of LM, but an important part it does.

The second group of reasons for migrating is related to the environment (14.9%) and the search for greater quality of life (2.4%); also, when asked about the importance of several factors, 51.8% of respondents stated the 'tranquility lifestyle' as very important, 11.4% the 'character and idiosyncrasy of the people' and 10.7% the 'security '. There are not very high percentages, but it reflects the meaning and importance that LM have reached in these rural areas. Thirdly, among the first reason of displacement, 20% (65 people) highlighted family reasons.

Many respondents have regular contact with the city where they emigrated from, and they visit the previous place of residence mainly because of leisure, family (most they mostly left family as parents or siblings) or because of other reasons. Going to the doctor is the most common reason (63.4%), but also to make administrative (47.7%) arrangements, for leisure (44%) and shopping (32.3%).

Generally, two out of three respondents still travel quite often to the previous place of residence. Regarding frequency, about half of respondents travel monthly, although one in three does not usually go to the city of previous residence. Accordingly, they can be immigrants and living in a rural area, although they still mostly maintain strong ties with the city.

### **5.3. Use of services and local integration**

There are some examples about the differences in the socioeconomic and professional level between the newcomers and the local population, especially when the immigrants are dedicated to service activities and the local population works in the primary sector activities. We can also identified examples of spatial 'gentrification', since some immigrants reside in new areas with more amenities than the local population: however, local population use to live in the traditional houses, sometimes old and without many amenities.

34% of respondents highlighted the access to services as the biggest problem of living in the countryside, followed by the lack of communication, which is usually solved with the use of private cars, that becomes imperative to live in a rural area.

Another usual comment is the lack of a good internet network in these small villages, for example for shopping, being able of communicating and avoid physical displacement; the lack of this good internet network is one of the main problems highlighted by respondents.

A third aspect related to the present life of these new migrants is their integration into the local community. The existence of numerous previous relationships with the place of destination helps to minimize problems of coexistence at the local level, although there are sometimes friction and mistrust, with dualization processes produced between both groups. But overall, we mention the good (44.8%) or very good (50.6%)

relationship that immigrants say to maintain with local residents; this explains that 83% of newcomers made new friends in the village where they now reside, and that 63% participates, or has recently participated, in a group or association in the village (usually cultural, social or sports association or club).

## 6. Conclusions

One conclusion of this research is the heterogeneity of the immigrant population in rural areas. Among the many shapes and types of migrants, we can say that a part of the newcomers integrates the LM. It is true that the economic component (changing jobs or seek for it) is an important motivation to move to a rural area, so the economic reasons are important for it; however, the decision to move to a rural area has much to do with the need of 'disconnecting' from urban areas among a substantial proportion of respondents; it is also important for them to find 'real' and 'authentic' experiences in the everyday life (Huete, 2009).

The arrival of these new flows of population responds to the deep restructuring lived in rural areas, but also to the effect that globalization is having on the different forms of mobility. People who lived in urban areas and later they move to rural spaces introduce a demographic change, but also other socio-economic and cultural impacts in the destination areas. The arrival of these people is an important issue because the composition and characteristics of the new LM are different from traditional rural population; in addition, the way they relate to others and to the environment (tourism trips, trips to the city, etc.), is also different and this introduces significant challenges for the analysis. Therefore, this short and descriptive analysis of the survey has brought to light many aspects that have to deepen, concerning the wishes and aspirations of these lifestyle migrants, and their way of being in contact with other people and their environment.

Finally, it may also indicate that most research on LM have not taken a comparative approach to migration in lifestyle different host societies. This comparative approach should generate new knowledge about the peculiarities and similarities analyzing different types of destinations.

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