

JOSÉ ANTONIO NIETO CALMAESTRA, ALBERTO CAPOTE LAMA

Grupo de Investigación HUM-662. Department of Human Geography. University of Granada

## *Geography of ageing in Spain and Portugal*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this article is to make a diachronic comparison of ageing over the last two decades in Spain and Portugal, two countries which, like the rest of Europe, are currently caught up in a seemingly unstoppable process that is transforming their age structures. In fact, according to the United Nations, in 2050 Spain and Portugal will be two of the three most aged European countries, among other reasons due to the baby boomer generation born between 1960 and 1975 reaching old age. Although these two countries have lived through different experiences and processes and have implemented quite divergent sociodemographic policies, they are currently faced with the same problem of the progressive ageing of the population structure.

This comparative analysis is structured into three parts. We begin with an analysis of the main indicators of age structure in the two countries, which includes a comparison of their population pyramids in 2001 and 2018. We then go on to study the sociodemographic profile of the ageing population in the two countries. Finally, we create a population structure typology allowing us to classify each municipality into one of six types. This enables us both to identify the evolutionary trends over the last 20 years and to make comparisons between the different territories.

The study, therefore, falls within the field of Population Geography. The data we have used was produced by the official statistics bodies of each country (El Instituto Nacional de Estadística de España and O Instituto Nacional de Estatística de Portugal). The main indicators were cal-

culated to analyse the age structure of the population and the population profiles, and a map was then drawn up to illustrate the contrasting impacts of the ageing process in the different parts of the Iberian Peninsula, taking municipalities as the territorial unit. In order to trace the evolution of the population structure over the last two decades, the years 2001 and 2018 were taken as points of reference.

### 2. AGE STRUCTURE: TWO INCREASINGLY AGEING COUNTRIES

In an initial overview of the age structure of the two countries in 2018, the different indicators show that Portugal has a slightly more ageing population. Whereas in Spain, those over 65 currently account for 19.2% of the population, the figure for Portugal is two percentage points higher (21.5%). A similar trend can be observed in the average age of the population, which in Spain is 43.6 years old, while in Portugal it is higher at 44.8 (a difference of more than one year).

Differences are also visible when the population pyramids of the two countries in 2001 and 2018 are compared. The common feature in both cases is the trend towards ageing, as witnessed by the increasingly important role played by senior citizens in the profiles for both Spain and Portugal. However, there are several notable differences, the most striking of which are in the cohorts of between 30 and 55 years old, especially among men. There are two reasons for this difference; on the one hand, the greater impact of the baby boom in Spain, and on the other, the

fact that Spain has received larger numbers of immigrants from abroad. This has had a particularly strong impact in these age groups, especially in Spain, where the foreign population accounts for 10.13% of the total compared to 4.10% in Portugal. While during this period, Spain became the main European destination in terms of international migratory flows, in Portugal, although there was also an influx of foreign population, this was counteracted to some extent by emigration, which remained high.

The second important difference was that the base of the pyramid was wider in Spain. Indeed, in the first years of the 21st century, there was a brief respite in the ageing trend during which the birth-rate figures were inflated by the arrival of a young immigrant population of an age to begin forming families and particularly, due to the baby boom generation of the 1960s becoming young adults. However, in both Portugal and Spain, this illusory bubble in the birth-rate came to an end in 2010, among other reasons due to the economic crisis that affected both countries. This led to women delaying motherhood and marriage, and to a reduction in the synthetic fertility rate, all of which have become key factors in the ageing of the population in the two countries.

### 3. PROFILES OF THE ELDERLY POPULATION: OVER-AGEING AND LONELINESS

The profiles of the ageing population in the two countries are very similar. The elderly population (over 65s) in both Spain and Portugal is highly feminized: 134 women for every hundred men in the Spanish case and 139 in the Portuguese. They have also experienced a similar increase in the over-ageing rate (over 85s as a percentage of the total population over 65) of around 12% over the period 2001-2018. Widowhood levels in the two countries are similar (about 30% of all over 65s), a figure that is substantially higher amongst women (over 40%). Given this figure, it is not surprising that such a high proportion of elderly people live alone: above all women. One of every four women over 65 years old lives alone, while the figure for men is 9%.

### 4. A PROPOSAL FOR CLASSIFYING THE AGE STRUCTURE OF THE POPULATION INTO DIFFERENT TYPES

Six types of demographic structure were identified, taking the municipalities in the two countries as the unit of analysis.

TYPE 1: the municipalities that show the least signs of ageing, either due to the fact that they retain some degree of natural vitality or because they are attractive places for young people (coastal strips, outlying metropolitan areas in which housing is cheaper). This trend is characteristic of large areas of the south of the Iberian Peninsula (Guadalquivir Valley, Murcia), the east coast of Spain, large parts of the archipelagos and the big urban conglomerations in both Spain (Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia) and Portugal (Lisbon, Oporto).

TYPE 2: this type is characterized by a relatively large proportion of both young and elderly people, due to the lesser role of the adult population (20 - 65 years old). This is the type that has suffered most in terms of territorial presence over the last two decades and is now most often found in scattered points in inland areas.

TYPE 3: this structure type is characterized by large numbers of adults. 20 years ago, this type was common in large parts of the north of Spain and was especially frequent on the coast of Galicia, urban areas of Castilla-León (Burgos, Valladolid, Salamanca), the Basque Country and inland areas of Catalonia. Today, it occupies large swathes of the South (mountain regions of Andalusia, Extremadura, inland areas of the Valencia Region, etc.).

TYPE 4: this is the type that most closely matches the average values for Spain and Portugal as a whole. As such it is the one that has gained most ground over the last two decades especially in inland Portugal, but also throughout Spain wherein 2001 it was typically found in the northern half of the country but now dominates in large areas of the centre and south.

TYPE 5: this type is characterized by demographic structures that are already quite ageing in which the dominant position of adults and elderly is so evident that the population pyramid is inverted. This population type is frequent in large areas of the centre and north of the Iberian Peninsula, in Spain in particular and in areas of Portugal bordering on Galicia.

TYPE 6: this type has the oldest population structures and is most often found in the northern half of Spain. However, it would seem to have lost ground in recent years especially in the Sistema Ibérico and the Sistema Central, where it was previously more common. The cause of this apparent rejuvenation in many of these rural areas may be due to the contribution made by immigrants, above all foreign, who in relatively lowly populated areas have helped boost the groups in the middle of the population pyramid with the resulting benefits for the population.