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Spatial Locations and Dynamics of Immigrants in Rural Areas: Research Directions in France and Recent International Perspectives

Julie Fromentin*

Abstract

This article offers an overview of the literature on the settlement of immigrants in rural areas of France, as well as a comparison with similar research conducted in other Western countries. It notes the paucity and compartmentalization of research on this topic due to the following factors: the subject's disappearance from the research agenda in the 20th century, in parallel with demographic changes occurring in rural areas and a decline in rural studies; the influence of government demand, sensitive to the political and social context, which directs research on immigration towards urban studies; the segmentation between the fields of rural studies and migration studies; and the lack of theorization of the connections between individual trajectories and spatial patterns. It concludes by suggesting lines of research based on a biographical approach, to enable a more dynamic conceptualization of the geography of immigration.

Keywords

Immigrant, international migration, internal migration, rural areas, geography, life course, biographical approach, France

For more than 40 years, the settlement of immigrants, and particularly their concentrated settlement in major cities, has constituted a prominent topic of public debate and raised a number of questions among social science scholars. In post-war France, attention focused on the large numbers of immigrants living in slums (*bidonvilles*) and workers' hostels, but shifted in the 1980s to the '*problème des banlieues*', the issues associated with the economically deprived suburbs of large cities with high immigrant populations. Featuring high on the political agenda, the question of immigration became closely associated with this type of environment. Conversely, the position of rural areas within migration dynamics has only attracted public debate and media attention over recent decades in relation to specific, one-off issues: foreign seasonal agricultural

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workers in the South of France, the influx of British residents in Dordogne in the 2000s, and, most recently, the accommodation of asylum seekers and refugees in rural areas following the so-called migrant crisis of 2015. In each of these situations, the rural settlement of immigrants is an exception, confined to a particular time and space. They present a discontinuous history and fragmented geography of immigrants in rural areas, who, other than in a few exceptional, localized, and short-term cases, might appear to be largely absent from these environments.

Analysis of figures on the size of the immigrant population in rural areas of France—composed of sparsely or very sparsely populated municipalities (*communes*), according to INSEE's new definition (2021) and based on the use of a municipal population density chart⁽¹⁾—reveals a different situation: moderate but consistent growth in the number of immigrants, who now represent around 5% of the rural population, and increasing diversification of the origins and sociodemographic profiles of these populations (Fromentin and Pistre, 2021).

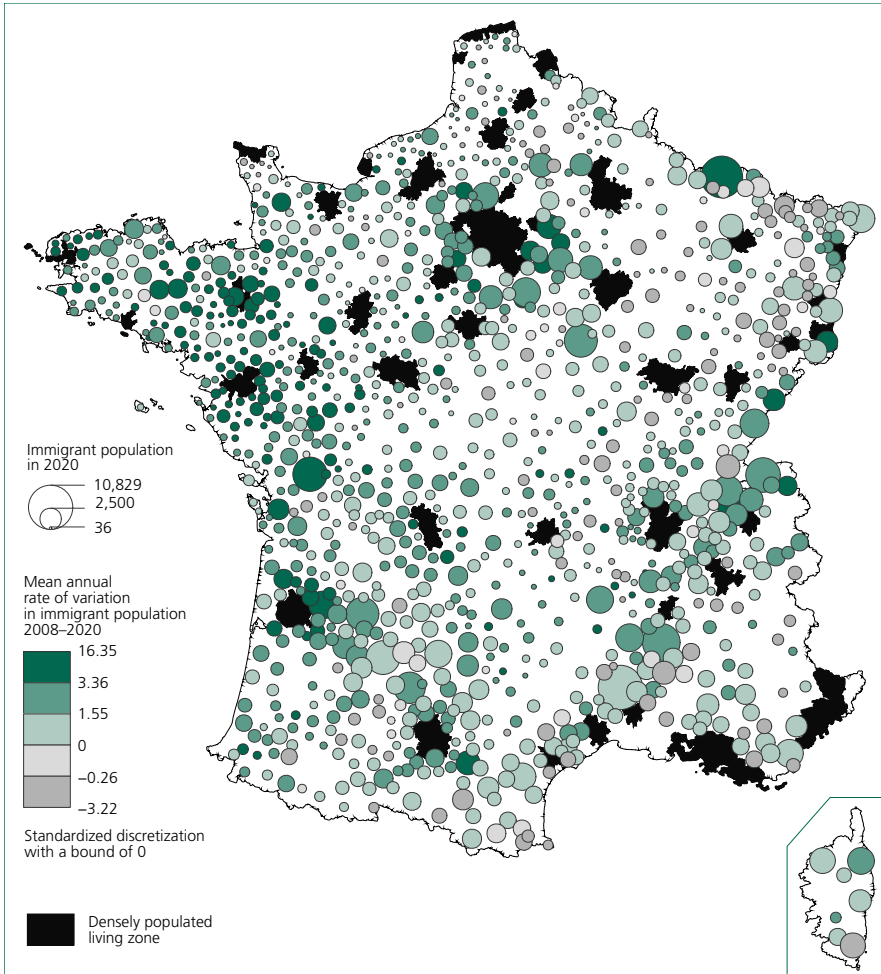
Since the 1960s, there has been a gradual increase in the immigrant population in all types of area, both urban and rural (see Table A.1), and this increase has progressively impacted all regions, with the result that the immigrant population is now more evenly distributed among rural areas of France than in the 1970s. This growth is particularly evident close to cities (e.g. in the Paris region) and in other specific regions, such as border areas and the West of France.

This article aims to explore the gap between a continuous and 'ordinary' (Héran, 2017) reading of immigration in rural areas—as reflected in the statistical analysis—and the discontinuous and exception-focused representations of this phenomenon in public debate, by analysing how the scientific literature has addressed immigrants living in rural spaces. The objective is to offer an overview and a critical reading of works on the topic, exploring the shifting connections between demographic changes in the immigrant population, social and political contexts, and trends in the various fields of study that touch on this research topic. The article addresses two underlying questions: can we observe any continuity in research on the settlement of immigrants in rural areas since the 20th century? What thematic and epistemological shifts have shaped developments in this area of study?

We consider immigrant populations as all persons residing in France who were born outside France to non-French parents, and who have migrated to the country at some point and lived there for any period, whether short or long. Some of the France-focused literature we reviewed looked at the profiles

(1) This chart categorizes municipalities based on their number of inhabitants and how densely they are distributed across the area. Each municipality is divided into squares of 1 km² and aggregate numbers for squares with similar density are produced; the more people there are in a more concentrated area, the more densely populated the municipality is considered. For more information, see: <https://www.insee.fr/fr/information/2114627>

Figure 1. Geographical distribution of the immigrant population as of 2020, and its variation in rural areas of mainland France since 2008



Interpretation: In the Porto-Vecchio zone (South Corsica), the 2020 census recorded 3,437 immigrants, this population having decreased by 1% per year since 2008.

Note: In the context of population censuses, the statistical processing of questionnaires is done in two phases: the ‘main’ processing phase, which includes all the questionnaires collected; and a ‘secondary’ processing phase, designed to produce more complex variables (family structure of households, the occupations and socioprofessional categories of individuals, etc.), which is only performed on a sample of the questionnaires collected.

Coverage: Mainland France, all sparsely and very sparsely populated living zones (*bassins de vie* defined in 2012), according to INSEE’s four-level municipal population density chart. Living zones are the smallest geographical areas within which residents have access to facilities and everyday services. Here, rural areas are defined as living zones with a (very) low population density.

Source: INSEE, Population Censuses (RP) 2008–2020, main processing.

of seasonal workers, recently arrived and only in France for a short time (several months), whereas other research explored populations that arrived in France decades ago and whose residence in a rural area is due to subsequent internal

migration. By focusing on research centred on immigrants in rural areas of France, the prism of analysis adopted in this study is, by its very nature, a spatial one. This has two implications.

First, the corpus of literature analysed here does not include all works on immigration in France, or even all works on the settlement of immigrants in mainland France, but instead focuses on those that address the rural settlement of this population. The works collected and reviewed therefore have in common either that they are by nature empirical and relate to spaces that can be characterized as 'rural', like a monograph; or that they focus on the spatial and demographic dynamics of rural areas, sometimes from an epistemological perspective (e.g. addressing concepts such as peri-urbanization, counter-urbanization, etc.) Furthermore, as this article was developed from a geography thesis, the corpus is very much anchored in this discipline—one in which the question of spatial locations is key—supplemented by works from primarily sociological and demographic research. This positioning explains why certain works are excluded and implies how research that is less focused on rural areas and geography could reveal other long-term trends in the development of scientific research on immigration.

Secondly, adopting this approach raises the question of what are being referred to as 'rural areas', or 'rural spaces', and of how this notion changes over time. Three criteria are commonly used to define these spaces: low population density, significant presence of agricultural or natural landscapes, and a spatial organization with multiple functions (residential, economic, social). The perimeter of a rural area may change over time, either due to demographic, morphological or functional changes (such as urbanization, for example) or because the representation of a rural area changes. Epistemological research in rural geography has shown how, in the past, the agrarian and agricultural component was highly significant in the definition and analysis of these areas; it was then influenced, from the 1970s, by the opening up of non-agricultural aspects of society and a shift in the relationships between towns and countryside; followed in recent decades by a movement towards the themes of the environment, nature, and local development (Plet, 2003). Here, we adopt a broad notion of rural area to cover the variety of definitions used by the authors of the works studied (Pistre and Richard, 2018).

Last, this article focuses on the French context but also looks at the European situation more broadly. Analysis of immigrant populations in rural areas of France is the main theme of the article, and the French context is used to study developments in the scientific handling of this topic over the long term. The works reviewed are also linked to developments in the European literature on the subject from the late 20th century onwards, a period marked by the growth and diversification of immigrant populations in rural areas across Europe, as well as by the growth and internationalization of research on these trends within Europe. Until this period, French (and France-focused)

research played little part in international dialogue, even though mainland France was a favourite field of study among international researchers analysing and conceptualizing new forms of immigration in rural areas (Buller and Hoggart, 1994a; Benson, 2011). Since France appears to be in a situation of ‘provincialism’⁽²⁾ in terms of the production of knowledge on the topic of immigrants in rural areas (Houssay-Holzschuch and Milhaud, 2013; Houssay-Holzschuch, 2020), another objective of this article is therefore to give it a place within European literature.

This dual approach has shaped the structure of this article. The first part tracks the historical decline and subsequent segmentation of research on immigrants in rural areas of France in the 20th century, as well as the concomitant rise of urban studies on the topic. The second part analyses the diversification of research on the subject since the late 20th century and the place given to spatial dynamics in the contemporary understanding of the rural settlement of immigrants in France and Europe. We conclude by discussing the contributions made by this literature review and suggesting new avenues of research connecting individual trajectories with geographical spaces to deepen our understanding of the distribution of immigrants and the spatial dynamics of immigration. These potential avenues are based on the hypothesis that perceiving the spatial patterns or ‘configurations’ of immigration as the aggregate result of multiple individual geographical trajectories could provide a more holistic, systemic view of the immigrant population in rural areas, i.e. one which goes beyond the segmented reading of different migrant types to understand their interrelations at local level.

I. Decline and segmentation of a historical research topic in France during the 20th century

1. The construction of a pioneering figure—the migrant agricultural worker—in the first half of the 20th century

In France, demography and geography were the first social science disciplines to work on immigration in the early 20th century, by addressing the question of ‘origins’. This approach contrasts with the ‘contractual’ view of the

(2) Houssay-Holzschuch (2020, p. 43) summarizes the definition of ‘provincialism’, here with respect to the discipline of geography, as comprising the following three elements:

‘– The provincial condition constitutes a subsystem within international geographies: a “core”, “peripheral” interfaces and neo-colonial dependents that “provided French geography with a welcome exposure to the other, although from a secure power position” [...]

– Provincialism is constructed around theoretical idiosyncrasies (specific sets of interrelated concepts) and a particular configuration of interdisciplinary relations.

– Internal instances of legitimation (journals and a publishing system distinct from the international, Anglo-dominated one, its universities, and its research subjects) and the local nobility of a specific discipline sustain the provincial system.’

presence of foreigners living in France,⁽³⁾ which was predominant in sociology and law at the time (Noiriel, 2006). The burgeoning popularity of this topic occurred at a time of severe shortages in agricultural labour between the First and Second World Wars. Research was closely linked with the political concerns of the time based on the need to ensure the recruitment of a foreign workforce and its assimilation (Noiriel, 2006; Escafré-Dublet and Kesztenbaum, 2011). One of the first studies explicitly dedicated to immigration was Georges Mauco's thesis on foreigners in France and their role in economic activity (Mauco, 1932). It described immigration trends in France and their geographical distribution by the job or nationality of the individuals. Taking a nationalist approach to demography, it also situated these migration flows within the overall evolution of the French population (Weil, 1999). Marked by ethnic stereotypes, this study also addressed the 'immigration problem' and the 'degree of assimilability' of foreigners from an angle that foreshadows the anti-Semitic and racist attitudes evident in Mauco's later works.

Early research on immigration was also designed to influence public policy, particularly on the naturalization and mobility of immigrant populations within the country (Piatier, 1939). Two studies from this era are particularly remarkable for their scale, originality, and significance in steering research at that time. The first, entitled *Documents pouvant servir à l'étude des étrangers dans l'agriculture française* [Documents to support the study of foreigners in French agriculture] (Demangeon and Mauco, 1939), was based on a large survey conducted in 1937 and 1938. The number of foreigners, their profiles, and their geographical distribution were studied in four large zones of agricultural immigration, with different nationalities depending on the region. The questionnaire covered various aspects of social life, generating detailed descriptions of the foreigners' living conditions in the 1930s. The value of this work lies in the wealth and detail of the material collected,⁽⁴⁾ but the interpretations presented by the authors were marked by stereotypes and an ideological conception of assimilation (Rygiel, 2004; Weil, 1999). Nearly 15 years later, and again in the context of agricultural labour shortages following the Second World War, Girard and Stœtzel published *Français et immigrants. L'attitude française. L'adaptation des Italiens et des Polonais* [French and immigrants. The French attitude. Adaptation of Italians and Poles] (1953). This book, based on five monographic surveys, some conducted in rural areas, was followed by a second volume on the 'Muslim Algerian population living in France' (Girard and Stœtzel, 1954). The two books addressed the issue of 'assimilation' by looking at the behaviours of French nationals towards immigrants and by evaluating the 'adaptation' of immigrants to French soci-

(3) From Rousseau to Renan, this 'contractual' viewpoint considers the nation as a body of citizens linked by the desire to live together. It contradicts the German concept in particular, which places more emphasis on 'origin' and ethnic heredity.

(4) This is a position shared by Hubscher (2005), who believes that Demangeon and Mauco's surveys are of interest due to their factual information.

ety. Here again, the work remains valuable for the huge wealth of material collected,⁽⁵⁾ which provides detailed information on various aspects of immigrant trajectories and of immigrants' lives in France.

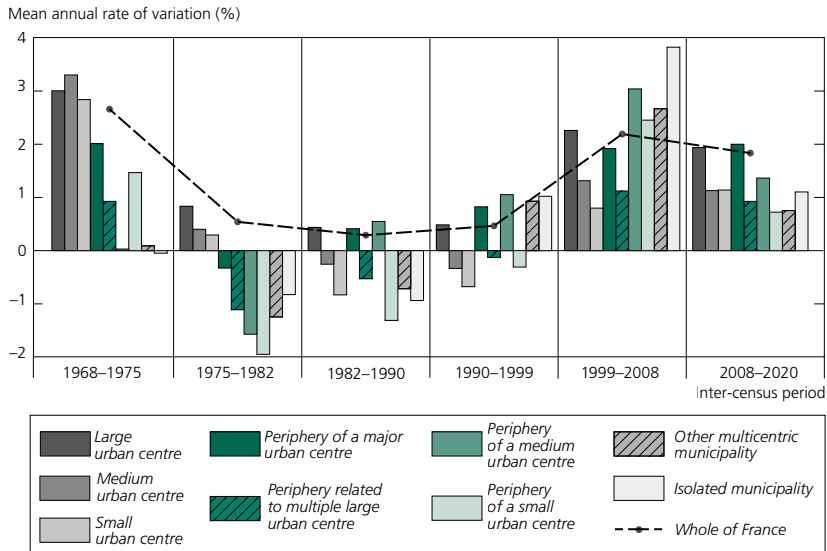
The attention paid, until the 1950s, to rural areas in research on foreigners was aligned with an essentializing and agrarian view of society—in that it considered the countryside and proximity with the land as favourable to the assimilation of populations—and was analysed in the light of the economic (recruitment of labour, rural exodus) and demographic (low birth rate) contexts of the time (Hubscher, 2005). These works also inaugurated a new topic of study, that of the migrant agricultural worker, a figure that remains the subject of much study today. However, their essentialism and ethnocentrism would lead to the gradual abandonment of these foundational reference works. From the late 1950s, the topic itself would fall out of fashion due to the late development of migration studies as a field, with the 'relegation' of post-war rural geography in favour of other fields of the discipline and increasing importance being placed on urban studies.

2. From the relative disinterest of social sciences to the development of urban-focused research on immigrants in France in the second half of the 20th century

In the 1950–1960s, social science research lost interest in migration issues in France (Abou Sada et al., 1990), even though migration flows intensified from the post-war period until the mid-1970s (Figure 2), against the background of France's reconstruction and modernization (Blanc-Chaléard, 2001). In fact, the immigrant population of France grew from 2 million in 1946 (5% of the total population) to 3.9 million in 1975 (7.4%). After the Second World War, however, demographic analysis was more interested in the effects of the baby-boom than on 'settlement immigration' (Tribalat, 1991). Furthermore, a feat of selective memory, viewing France a country of emigration rather than of immigration, impeded the development of immigration history (Noiriel, 2006). In geography, regional monographs, which had persisted from the interwar period until the late 1950s, addressed foreign populations only marginally. While pioneering work in sociology was done during this period (Michel, 1956), immigration still failed to constitute a fully legitimate sociological topic. According to Noiriel, this was mainly because sociology had still been based on its Durkheimian heritage, which theorized social and cultural integration through schools and considered the matter of origin to be of lesser significance (Beaud and Noiriel, 1989, p. 70). When Halbwachs explored the topic of 'ethnic experience' after travelling to the United States

(5) Like Demangeon and Mauco's survey (1939), Girard and Stœtzel survey's (1953; 1954) are often used as a reference by historians documenting the post-war period, whether for critical analysis of the method and data collected (Hubscher, 2003; Martini, 2003) or for extracting statistical information (Rygiel, 2001; Escafré-Dublet and Keszenbaum, 2011).

Figure 2. Variation in the immigrant population between 1968 and 2020, by urban area zoning category



Interpretation: Between 2008 and 2020, municipalities belonging to the ‘periphery of a large urban centre’ category saw an overall increase in their populations of 2% per year.

Note: Rates of variation were measured for each intercensal period. These are the mean rates of variation for all municipalities within each 2010 urban area zoning category, which have been applied across all the periods studied. This provides a consistent geographical breakdown for analysis purposes.

Coverage: All municipalities in mainland France grouped by 2010 urban area zoning category.

Source: INSEE, RP 1968–2020, main and secondary processing.

in the 1930s, he chose to focus his research on the city of Chicago, believing that no similar object of study existed in France (Noiriél, 2006, p. 30). The significance accorded by certain French works to the foundational reference works of the Chicago school was aligned with the development of an urban sociology that places little emphasis on immigrants. The ‘social ethnology’ surveys of Chombart de Lauwe (1952) until the late 1960s, like the structuralist and historical materialism theories of Lefebvre (1970), approached the social question from the perspective of the reproduction of social positions (Rea and Tripiér, 2008), and the situation of immigrants was largely encompassed within the ‘manual workers’ (*ouvriers*) group.

From the 1970s, research on immigration took place within a new economic, political, and intellectual context and takes on an urban character. This orientation corresponded to the reality of spatial immigration dynamics during the period in question (Figure 2). The 1970s and 1980s were characterized by primarily urban immigration. The suspension of immigration for permanent workers was accompanied by a slowing or even a decline in the numbers of immigrants in rural areas between 1975 and 1982, with the growth in this population on a national scale solely due to increased numbers in urban areas (small, medium, and large urban centres).

Government demand also played an important role, inviting researchers to address the social issues of the time—the living conditions of immigrants being one of these. New research topics then emerged, particularly in relation to the health and housing of these populations, who lived predominantly in urban centres in run-down or unsanitary housing, in hostels for immigrant workers, or in slums (Barou, 1999; Pétonnet, 1979; Sayad, 1980). These topics evolved in tandem with the situation of immigrants in France, who were gradually relocated into the low-income housing (HLM) left vacant due to French middle class home ownership (Dufaux and Fourcaut, 2004). The implementation of the *politique de la ville* (urban policy) in the 1980s, following riots in the suburb of Minguettes in Vénissieux, was accompanied by a government commission that stimulates research on the ‘urban’. It led to ‘the association, and then identification, of “the integration of immigrants” with a right to the city’ (Simon, 1999, p. 90). This research often identified the suburbs (*banlieues*) as places where immigrant populations settle, although some works tried to develop a critical reflection of this superposition of population and space (Rudder, 1983). In this sense, some of the research conducted between 1970 and 2000 was permeated with an ‘urban ideology’ (Castells, 1972), which considered the spatial context produced by specific social relationships and reduced social issues to their ecological dimension. While new perspectives have evolved based on more constructivist approaches to space and the interactions between spaces and social groups,⁽⁶⁾ the favoured terrain for analysis remains the major cities, which continue to be viewed as the most relevant ‘social laboratory’. Within this triptych of social representations, factual realities, and academic research, immigration in rural areas is ‘invisible’ and ‘transparent’ (Hubscher, 2005).

3. Little overlap between migration and rural studies until the late 20th century

From the 1980s onwards, first rural areas close to towns (peripheries of urban centres) and then more isolated areas (isolated municipalities and those related to multiple urban centres) began, once again, to experience the growth in immigrant population that had been continuous across France as a whole (Figure 2). Nevertheless, studies looking at the rural settlement of immigrants remained rare and were segmented between the fields of migration studies and rural studies. In the former, the major models for interpreting migration placed little significance on rural areas in high-income countries. In his hypothesis

(6) For example, the development of systemic approaches to the links between immigration and urbanization (Guillon, 1992), and studies conducted from an ethnographic perspective that placed the migrant at the forefront of the analysis. The latter picked up the issues raised by research on the concept of interethnic relations developed in the 1990s (Rudder, 1991; Simon, 1994) to analyse how the urban environment produced forms of ethno-racial exclusion and discrimination (Kirszbaum and Simon, 2001; Fassin and Fassin, 2006). Studies on interethnic relations were also connected with those on the links between urban mobility and dynamics (Dureau, 1987) and on circulatory territories and migration flows (Tarrus, 1993; Potot, 2003; Schmoll, 2004).

of the mobility transition, Zelinsky (1971) described the existence of major international migration flows and of internal flows, which occurred primarily within a network of small and large conurbations. Skeldon (1997), who built on Zelinsky's works, also conceived migration as an integral part of societies' urbanization process. Likewise, works on the concepts of migration scope and space (Simon, 1981) and on migration flows (Ma Mung et al., 1998) considered rural areas within an asymmetrical relationship that linked the countryside and large cities of low-income countries with the major conurbations of high-income countries, or prioritized inter-urban relations.⁽⁷⁾

From the 1980s to the 2000s, migration studies looking at rural areas of France primarily adopted a sociological and legal approach, looking at vulnerable migrants, particularly in agriculture (Berlan, 1986; Michalon and Potot, 2008; Mésini, 2017). In doing so, they revisited an old topic while departing from the functionalist and essentialist perspective that had prevailed previously. The starting points for this research were the changes in French and European migration and agricultural policies that resulted in the transformation of production systems, the establishment of intensive farming practices in the 1960–1970s, competition across production zones worldwide, and the creation of new legal statuses for foreign workers. Last, these studies highlighted individuals who, until this point, were socially invisible due to the urbanized version of the immigrant figure, the representation of their presence as 'birds of passage' (Piore, 1979) and, more broadly, lack of interest in the socio-economic changes of rural environments.

In the field of rural studies, the economic and agricultural dimension has also long permeated work on immigrants and foreigners in rural areas. Such research mainly consisted of monographs or regional studies in the field of geography (Carrière and Ferras, 1968; Dalla Rosa, 1972; Poinard, 1975) or works by historians looking at one particular group (Ponty, 1988; Milza, 1993; Stora, 1992). Nevertheless, from the 1990s onwards, rural studies started to address this issue once again,⁽⁸⁾ prompted by the political and demographic context: while foreigners settling in rural areas was nothing new, the recent increase (Figure 2) and diversification (Appendix Table A.2) of this population required new studies on the topic. As the Europe Union is constructed, the broader question of the representation and status of foreigners arises. For Buller, the long-standing lack of studies on foreigners in many countries

(7) Without denying the premise that international migration is primarily influenced by the major cities of host countries, several empirical works have shown the value of taking other types of space into account when theorizing international migration flows. In his first works on the migration space of Tunisians, Simon revealed the variety of zones in which Tunisian workers settled in France, according to economic opportunities in the host country and their region of origin, attesting to a 'sociological sharing of the migration space' (Simon, 1976). He described in particular the expansion of the migration space through deconcentration, in favour of less densely populated zones in the periphery of the major cities of initial settlement, such as Paris and Lyon.

(8) Evidence of this turning point is the Association of French Ruralists Conference of 1993 in Nantes, entitled 'The Foreigner in the Countryside' (Buller, 1994; Vicente, 1994).

(France, Great Britain, etc.) is associated with the establishment of rural studies as a field, based primarily on notions of belonging, proximity, and endogeneity, in direct contrast with the notion of ‘foreignness’. The previous openness of the countryside to strangers—whether from another region or another country—would have been hidden by the focus on community (Buller, 1994). At a time when rural areas were being transformed and the profiles of any foreigners present were changing, analysis of foreigners living in the countryside would provide a fresh approach to rural demographic dynamics. The situation most frequently studied has been the attractiveness of the French countryside to Northern Europeans, particularly the love affair of the British with South West France.⁽⁹⁾ The residential mobility of British retirees looking for a better way of life (the ‘rural idyll’) has been interpreted as a form of ‘international counter-urbanization’ that links urban and rural areas on an international scale. For Buller (2008), the growing scientific interest in this subject since the 1990s can also be linked with the concurrent development of a research agenda on the development and restructuring of rural areas.

Some research on the residential migration of Northern and Western Europeans is more broadly aligned with works on the demographic and economic revival of rural areas (Talandier, 2008; Pistre, 2012). The observation of a ‘rural renaissance’ (Kayser, 1989) in effect since the 1970s, accompanied by the emergence of more positive representations of the countryside, mark a turning point in the perception of urban-rural relations in the late 1980s. After the long dominance of a vision of the ‘urbanization of the countryside’ (Juillard, 1973), which envisages the transformation of rural areas under the pressure of urban dynamics as a sign of their gradual disappearance, works on the rural renaissance have helped to renew this field of study. This is also a period in which ruralist geographers started to seize upon the phenomenon of suburbanization (in the French context, the process of a town or city expanding towards its surrounding countryside in a more diffuse and discontinuous manner than the traditional suburb), perceived as a major dynamic in contemporary rural life. The urban-centric approach to suburban spaces, which has long rendered many rural dynamics invisible, particularly migration to these areas, has contributed to the delayed consideration of the role of immigrants in these dynamics,⁽¹⁰⁾ yet statistically visible since the 1980s⁽¹¹⁾ (Figure 2).

(9) In the early 1990s, the Interministerial Delegation on Land Planning and Regional Attractiveness (DATAR) funded a report on British nationals in rural municipalities since the late 1980s, resulting in the first substantial contribution to knowledge on this issue (Barou and Prado, 1995). On the British side, the Economic and Social Research Council funded a study on the residential migration of British nationals to rural France, led by Buller and Hoggart (1994a, 1994b).

(10) In terms of transformations in rural geography, we might also suppose that the dominance of agrarian and agricultural geography, which had declined but not disappeared in the 1970s, might have contributed to concealing the dynamics of immigrant populations other than those of migrants involved in farming.

(11) The use of a consistent geographical breakdown in Figure 2 has the effect of overestimating the weight of urban areas in past periods: it considers as urban areas that were not yet urban in the 1960s and have since been (peri-)urbanized.

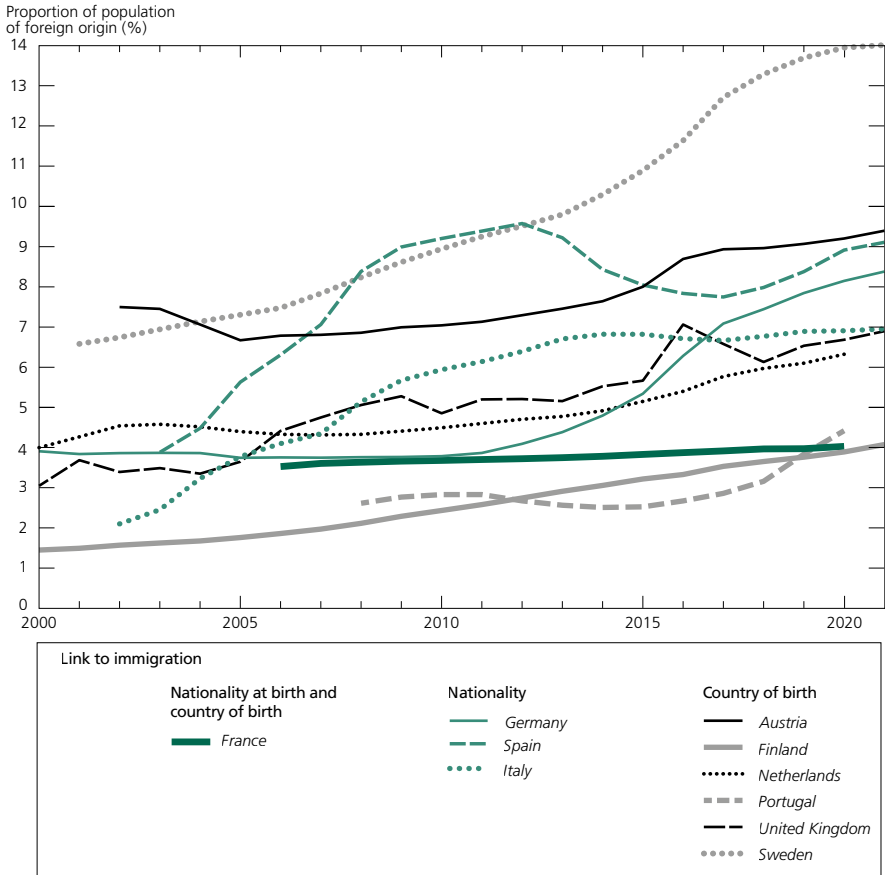
II. Since the 2000s: diversification of migration flows, internationalization of research, and a dynamic approach to spatial locations

1. The diversification and internationalization of research on immigrants in rural areas

The first decade of the 21st century marks a turning point. First, census results in France and many other European countries revealed an increase and diversification of migration flows in Western Europe, including in rural areas (Figure 3). In certain countries such as Sweden, Germany, and Portugal, this increase was significant and rapid, whereas in others (Finland, France, and the Netherlands) it occurred in a more continuous and moderate fashion from the early 2000s onwards. These trends were linked to a combination of multiple factors: European enlargement facilitating international mobility; wars and geopolitical instability in Africa and the Middle-East; and the transition of certain countries, such as Spain, from countries of emigration to countries of immigration. Secondly, rural areas were seeing continued diversification of their functions and remained attractive on a demographic level for the whole population (Pistre, 2012). From a scientific perspective, this is reflected in several developments: increased research on immigrants and international migration within rural areas, both in France and in other Western European countries; an internationalization of research on these topics, with the framework for the analysis of immigration to rural areas becoming more Europe-focused, after a long period with little international comparison (Jentsch and Simard, 2009); and the diversification of the forms of immigration studied, primarily through research conducted ‘in parallel but separately’, to use Woods’ description (2016). More specifically, rural areas have been chosen to explore three main types of migration.

First, labour migration research witnessed a renewal since the 2000s, with the increasing arrival in rural areas of Western Europe of workers from Central and Eastern Europe, following EU enlargement (Morice and Michalon, 2008). Labour migration to rural areas in Southern Europe has been established and studied for a number of years, particularly migration from North Africa to France, Portugal, and Spain, from the Balkans to Greece, and from Latin America to Portugal and Spain (Kasimis and Papadopoulos, 2005; Fonseca, 2008; Hugo and Morén-Alegret, 2008). On the other hand, migration from Eastern Europe and from outside Europe to rural areas in Northern Europe constitutes a new phenomenon (Jentsch et al., 2007; Kalantaryan et al., 2021). This field of research is tackling new questions, such as the links between the globalization of employment sectors (manufacturing, construction, the agriculture and food industries, tourism), patterns in migration flows, and developments in national immigration policies (Rye and Scott, 2018; Michalon and Weber, 2022). While some works explore the connections

Figure 3. Population of foreign origin as a proportion of population in rural areas of various European countries



Note: The OECD's Municipal Migration Database contains data provided by each country's national statistics office. As a result, data are not available in the same time series for all countries. Some countries provide annual data drawn from their population registers, others data from population censuses, which may be conducted at varying intervals. Another implication relates to the characterization of populations: the term 'foreign origin' covers populations defined either by their nationality or by their country of birth. Differences in definition are shown in the legend using the 'link to immigration' qualification for each country. In the case of France, the database uses the criteria of nationality and does not contain information for municipalities of fewer than 2,000 inhabitants. For this reason, detailed data from the 2006 to 2020 censuses were used, based on the French statistical definition of the immigrant population.

Coverage: All local administrative units (municipalities or equivalent) categorized as rural areas (sparsely populated) according to the European Commission's 2021 Degree of Urbanisation Classification.

Sources: INSEE, RP 2006–2020; OECD, Municipal Migration Database, 2022.

between structure and migrants' agency (Woods, 2016) or the changes such migration brings to an area (Lascaux, 2022), their main focus remains the integration of migrants into the local area and the issues associated with migrants' living and working conditions.

A second body of recent research looks at the settlement of asylum seekers and refugees in rural areas and small towns throughout Europe. Research in

this area has been prompted by an overall increase in the flow of exiles towards various EU countries and by strong media attention surrounding the ‘migrant crisis’. Few and far between until the early 2000s (Bonerandi et al., 2004; Hubbard, 2005), studies on this topic have proliferated since 2015 in France, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, and Denmark (Whyte and al., 2019; Berthomière et al., 2020; Weidinger and Kordel, 2020; Woods, 2022). These works show, in particular, how rural areas have been targeted as part of neo-liberal policies aimed at dispersing refugees across national territory and spreading the costs of their accommodation; and how these national policies have been received at local level, from pragmatism—the arrival of exiles is sometimes considered a lever for demographic and economic revival for territories in decline—to social tensions relating to issues of accommodation and hospitality, and the experiences of exiles who have settled in a rural environment (especially in comparison with the urban experience).

Last, a third body of research has explored amenity migration (Moss, 2006) and lifestyle migration⁽¹²⁾ (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009). This type of migration is motivated by the desire for a better quality of life, connected with ‘consumption’ in rural areas, perceived as spaces that can provide the ‘rural idyll’ (Bell, 2006) and desirable natural landscapes. The settlement of British (pre-)retirees in rural areas of the West of France (Dordogne, Brittany, etc.) has been used as a major case study, shaping this research field at European level (Buller and Hoggart, 1994c; Benson, 2011). In addition to continued analysis of the French case, forms of lifestyle migration have also been studied in other European countries, including Portugal, Spain, and Sweden (Eimermann, 2015; Kordel, 2016; Cognard, 2019). After showing how lifestyle migration transforms rural areas into zones of consumption (of leisure activities, natural amenities, etc.), recent research has approached this type of migration from a ‘productive’ perspective, particularly by looking at entrepreneurship. It shows how, by their actions, entrepreneurial migrants in the tourism, agriculture, or artisan sectors play a part in transforming the countryside and the socioeconomic structures of rural areas (Deller et al., 2019; Eimermann et al., 2019; Berthomière et al., 2021).

These three primary approaches demonstrate the recent development of research on immigrants in rural areas of Europe, the convergence of prisms of analysis across different countries, and the internationalization of scientific literature, facilitated in particular by the digitization of publications since the 2000s. They also reveal the persistent segmentation of this research, which tends to interpret the rural settlement of immigrants through specific migration types. In this sense, rural areas have appeared, since the 2000s, to be favoured zones for investigating certain contemporary migration trends. This allows us

(12) Benson and O’Reilly (2009, p. 3) define lifestyle migration as follows: ‘the spatial mobility of relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or full-time to places that are meaningful because, for various reasons, they offer the potential of a better quality of life’.

to explore the relationships of different groups with rural areas, but does not really help when it comes to highlighting possible co-presences and inter-relations between these different populations.

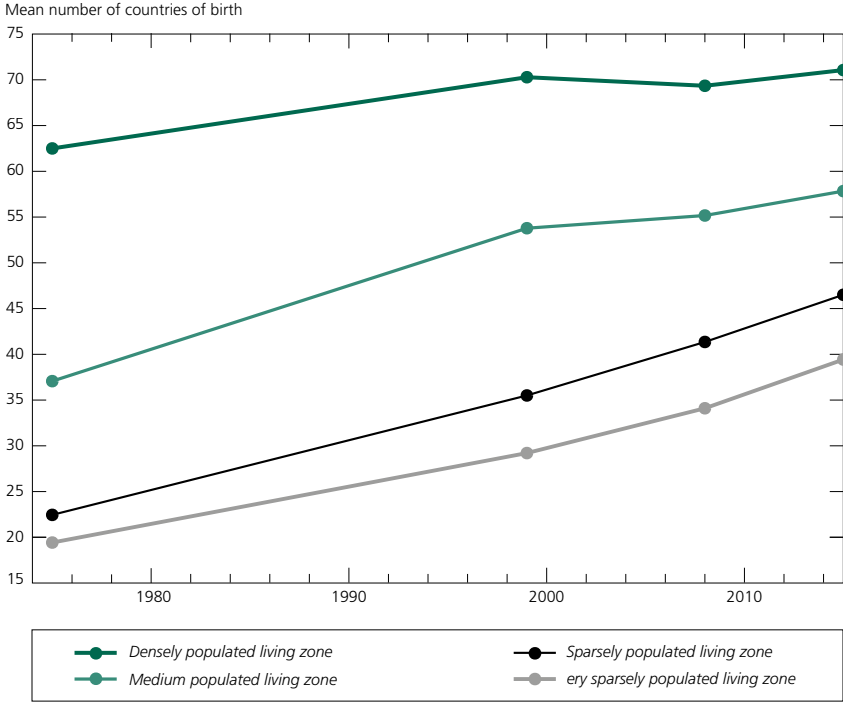
2. A move towards more holistic approaches to the geographical movements of immigrants

In response to this fragmentation, recent research has developed more holistic approaches to the settlement of immigrants in rural areas. This shift was initiated in the late 2000s based on Woods' work on the 'global countryside' (2007), a concept that echoes the 'global cities' described by Sassen (1991) and aims to engage rural studies in globalization issues. The term global countryside does not describe an actual place but a hypothetical space, permitting theoretical reflection and empirical analysis on the transformations of rural areas produced by the linking of locations on an international scale. Research conducted from this perspective draws on the variety of forms of international migration in rural areas and explores the effects of these new dynamics on the integration of migrant populations and on local development (Gkartzios et al., 2022). Unlike urban (densely populated) areas, rural (sparsely or very sparsely populated) areas of France have seen a substantial diversification in the geographical origins of their population since the 2000s (Figure 4). From the 2000s to the 2010s, the collation and comparison of research on migration dynamics in rural areas across various Western countries was undertaken, as part of a growing research agenda on these issues at European level (Hugo and Morén-Alegret, 2008; Jentsch and Simard, 2009; Kordel et al., 2020). While France was initially absent from this trend, various recent works have highlighted the co-presence of different immigrant populations in rural areas (Berthomière et al., 2021).

These works all use space as an entry point for analysis by looking at the processes and mobilities that shape these rural areas. This kind of approach has led to the development of new concepts for understanding the dynamics and configurations associated with immigrant populations in rural areas. This semantic and conceptual evolution was first visible in the United States, where the study of the changing geography of immigration is less new (Massey, 2008). Through the concept of 'new immigrant gateways' (Singer et al., 2008) studies have highlighted the emergence of new areas of (particularly Hispanic) immigrant settlement and concentration, away from the already saturated traditional gateways (Kandel and Cromartie, 2004; Gozdziaik and Martin, 2005; Lichter and Johnson, 2009; Frey, 2018; Kritz and Gurak, 2018). However, in the empirical analyses, studies on 'new immigrant gateways' are not limited to new entry points into national territory but include a broader analysis of the distribution of all immigrants across the United States, with it being impossible to know whether their locations are points of first settlement in the country, the result of a relocation, or starting points for an internal move.

A static view of individual immigrant trajectories is produced that makes it even more difficult to interpret the connections between individual geographical trajectories and spatial structures.

Figure 4. Variation in the number of birth countries of the immigrant population within different types of living zone



Interpretation: For each living zone the number of different countries of birth represented within the population was recorded at each census date. An average value was then calculated for all living zones within each population density category. In 1999, therefore, in very sparsely populated zones, an average of 29 countries of birth were recorded among the immigrant population.

Coverage: All living zones (*bassins de vie*) in mainland France ($n = 1,454$) excluding Corsica, for 1975. They are categorized here by their level of population density, based on the adaptation of INSEE's municipal population density chart to reflect these living zones.

Source: INSEE, RP 1975, 1999, 2008, 2015, main processing.

In Europe, on the other hand, the concept of ‘new immigrant destinations’, or NID (McAreavey, 2017a), has been developed as a more holistic and dynamic framework for the analysis of immigrants’ geographical mobility. This is a newly structured field of research, although different works do not all use the same definition or levels of analysis. Nonetheless, various characteristics are common to all the spaces referred to as new immigrant destinations: a rapid and recent growth in immigrant population; a lack of institutional infrastructure for welcoming these populations; little local historical or cultural experience of migration; and, last, the fact that this newly arrived population is often younger than the local population (Winders, 2014). Compared with works

on new immigrant gateways, the literature on new immigrant destinations stresses two points: first, the emergence of new immigration spaces within rural areas (and not just in new urban agglomerations); and, secondly, the combination of international and international migrations (McAreavey, 2017b; Eimermann and Kordel, 2018; McAreavey and Argent, 2018). Janská et al., (2014), along with Křížková et al. (2020), show that, in the Czech context, new areas of immigrant residence emerge rapidly, produced by relocation from abroad but also through internal migration, particularly to suburban areas. Several recent studies have also looked at internal migration in suburban areas of France (Fromentin, 2019; Lambert, 2013), but spatial analyses of these flows remain rare in France in comparison with other countries⁽¹³⁾ (Hugo, 2008; Simpson and Finney, 2009; Trevena et al., 2013)

By proposing a location-based approach—via these new immigration areas—rather than by categories of immigrant population, using NIDs allows the temporal and spatial complexities of immigration to be analysed. It helps to identify the variety of spatial mobilities that combine to produce new geographies of the immigrant population, particularly in rural areas. McAreavey's book, which offers the most complete and recent conceptual framework for this notion, nonetheless steers works on NIDs towards the microscopic level of local interactions between social groups, via an essentially sociocultural approach⁽¹⁴⁾ (McAreavey, 2017a). Mostly conducted at individual level, these papers end up losing sight of the spatial patterns produced by these new settlements. Other recent analyses take a broader approach to the geographical and residential trajectories of immigrants, looking at the diversity of these populations within regions, ranging from measurements of co-presence to more detailed analyses of local communities and the conditions for the emergence of rural cosmopolitanism (Woods, 2018b; Berthomière et al., 2021; Woods, 2022; Fromentin, 2023). While conceptual considerations are still at the exploratory stage, the primary value of these approaches lies in the fact that they are looking at *processes*, in particular at the geographical mobility of immigrants and at the spatial patterns produced by this mobility, instead of focusing on specific population *groups*. Last, one of the recent developments of these approaches suggests comparing the processes observed in the North and the South, for example by analysing rural cosmopolitanism in a global context (Woods, 2018).

(13) French research is primarily focussed on the links between residential mobility and socio-spatial segregation (Pan Ké Shon, 2009), or follows on from work on the 'white flight' in America (Wright et al., 1997), questioning its existence in France (Rathelot and Safi, 2014; McAvay, 2018a; McAvay, 2018b). While such research provides valuable findings on the residential mobility of immigrants in France, its scope of study often remains urban, and, when a national approach is taken, its geographical dimension remains limited, since location is not taken into account and only one size variable (population) of the municipalities is introduced into the models (Rathelot and Safi, 2014; Solignac, 2018).

(14) McAreavey sets out the objective of her book as follows: 'I want to explore migrant incorporation in a destination area with attention focused on the challenges and benefits to both migrants and the receiving society.'

Conclusion

This article has offered a review of the literature on immigrants in rural areas of France, with a comparison against research conducted in other European countries. The aim was to identify forms of (dis)continuity in studies on this topic and thematic and epistemological developments in this research area over recent decades in France. On that basis, the analysis has highlighted the long thematic segmentation of works on the subject and the recent emergence of more holistic and dynamic approaches to the location of immigrants in rural areas. The ‘holistic’ character of these works lies in a new way of conceptualizing the links between individual trajectories and spatial patterns: while studies have long drawn narrow and restrictive connections between the main spatial locations of immigrants and particular groups in terms of origin and specific stages in residential trajectories, recent works aim to shed light on the variety of possible connections between immigrants’ geographical mobility and spatial patterns of immigration, within a biographical approach.

To explore this direction further, two avenues of research could provide a better understanding of the shifting locations of immigrants in rural areas. First, there is a need to refine the characterization of territories and geographical contexts in the analysis of individual trajectories. While there is increasing research on the residential mobility of immigrants, the spatial dimension remains largely overlooked. Studies are often conducted from an a-spatial perspective, and this is likely a factor against the analysis of immigrant mobility to rural spaces—studies on these areas being in the minority compared with those on urban spaces. Yet many of the examples presented in this article show the extent to which the social and demographic processes of immigrants’ residential mobility are rooted in distinct spatial and territorial rationales. Improving the characterization of territories in the study of immigrant mobility would therefore constitute a promising path towards understanding the drivers of immigration in rural areas, particularly in France. The use of more complex territorial typologies than breakdowns by size of municipality could also be a first step in this direction. More broadly, we need to develop a ‘configurational’ approach (Pumain, 2004; Cayouette-Remblière et Ichou, 2019) to the study of spatial mobility, in other words a better way of taking into account how the territory records individuals in positions (social, demographic, etc.) that are relative and likely to vary depending on the composition of this territory and its own dynamics (economic, political, etc.). The ‘spatial turn’ (Warf and Arias, 2008) in social sciences since the 1990s could be deepened through further consideration of the spatial dimension in the study of social and demographic phenomena, by paying attention to how the space produces different configurations and resources for individuals—something a sociology of social classes has also referred to as ‘localized social spaces’ (Laferté, 2014).

Secondly, there is a need to move away from the static vision of the immigrant—which still permeates the reading of immigrants’ spatial distribution due to a lack of consideration of the variety of individuals’ residential stages—and to incorporate the theoretical and methodological contributions of life course based approaches (Courgeau, 2002; Elder et al., 2003; Bonvalet and Lelièvre, 2012; Dureau and Imbert, 2014) and of longitudinal analysis (Robette, 2014) within the analysis of the spatial distribution of immigrants and of population geography more generally. This involves linking international migration with internal migration in the study of the geography of immigration, in line with the approach taken by King and Skeldon (2010). Furthermore, we need to integrate an individual and longitudinal dimension into the analysis of spatial patterns. With the development of large-scale longitudinal data, administrative data in particular, it is increasingly possible to use individual-level data to produce analyses at aggregate territorial levels. By looking at all stages of immigrants’ geographical trajectories, rather than at certain stages that are deemed crucial, as well as the types of space associated with these stages (such as an urban environment upon arrival in the host country), we can identify new spatial patterns and dynamics of immigration. Perceiving the spatial patterns of these flows as the aggregate result of multiple individual geographical trajectories will help produce a better understanding of the complex and shifting geographies.

An approach that pays closer attention to the links between migration spaces and dynamics also offers a necessary counterpoint to the homogenizing discourse on the locations of immigrants that frequently occupy the political and media arena. This discourse automatically associates population groups with particular types of space. Immigrants, as population groups, and rural areas, as types of space, form the subject of such discourse, in which they appear antinomic: while the concentration and distribution of immigrants in certain urban spaces is often the subject of public debate, rural areas have long been invested with a very strong political and cultural charge, based at least partly on the supposedly homogeneous nature of their population. Due, among other things, to this tendency towards the spatialization of social and demographic issues (Tissot and Poupeau, 2005) in European debate (MacKinnon et al., 2022; Pike et al. 2023), it is essential that researchers address the issue of the links between population dynamics and territorial inequalities. This article calls for the continuation and enrichment of interdisciplinary dialogue in social sciences, particularly between geography and demography.

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APPENDICES

Table A.1. Number and proportion (%) of immigrants by type of area between 1968 and 2015

	1968	1975	1982	1990	1999	2008	2015
Large urban centres	2,406,317 8.1	2,960,533 9.2	3,138,033 9.6	3,249,479 9.5	3,394,163 9.7	4,150,073 11.4	4,779,246 12.7
Peripheries of large urban centres	306,268 4.4	352,083 4.7	344,086 4.1	355,626 3.7	382,895 3.7	454,352 3.9	525,262 4.2
Peripheries related to multiple large urban centres	124,674 5.0	132,987 5.3	122,981 4.7	117,875 4.2	116,534 4.1	128,836 4.1	137,991 4.2
Medium urban centres	76,499 4.8	96,033 5.7	98,766 5.8	96,767 5.5	93,901 5.4	105,616 6.0	114,474 6.5
Peripheries of medium urban centres	7,274 2.7	7,290 2.7	6,525 2.3	6,817 2.2	7,490 2.4	9,807 2.8	10,931 3.1
Small urban centres	109,362 5.0	133,037 5.7	135,807 5.7	127,033 5.3	119,498 5.1	128,379 5.3	137,556 5.7
Peripheries of small urban centres	5,396 3.6	5,975 4.2	5,206 3.6	4,685 3.1	4,556 2.9	5,666 3.5	6,026 3.6
Peripheries related to multiple urban centres	92,261 3.0	92,849 3.2	85,047 2.9	80,296 2.6	87,267 2.9	110,587 3.4	117,339 3.5
Isolated municipalities, remote from urban centres	106,952	106,598 3.4	100,585 3.3	93,286 3.2	102,224 3.6	143,300 4.9	153,469 5.2
<p>Interpretation: In the 1968 census, 106,952 immigrants were recorded as living in isolated municipalities remote from urban centres, representing 3.2% of the population in this type of area.</p> <p>Coverage: All immigrants resident in mainland France, using the 2020 urban zoning categories.</p> <p>Source: INSEE, RP 1968–2015.</p>							

Table A.2. Number and proportion (%) of immigrants living outside of large urban centres in France between 1968 and 2015, by main countries of birth in 2015

	1968	1975	1982	1990	1999	2008	2015
Portugal	87,153 10.9	177,217 19.5	163,443 18.5	151,756 17.3	153,879 17.2	171,423 16.1	198,804 16.5
Morocco	14,444 1.8	57,078 6.3	74,674 8.5	89,450 10.2	91,328 10.2	102,525 9.6	115,556 9.6
United Kingdom	2,800 0.4	5,313 0.6	8,569 1.0	17,371 2.0	35,552 4.0	100,867 9.5	101,833 8.5
Spain	216,664 27.2	175,877 19.3	145,488 16.5	128,918 14.7	106,188 11.8	87,141 8.2	82,409 6.9
Italy	213,096 26.7	180,820 19.9	160,695 18.2	142,784 16.3	114,242 12.7	93,173 8.7	80,589 6.7
Algeria	45,120 5.7	73,567 8.1	72,220 8.2	63,070 7.2	61,203 6.8	67,754 6.4	74,036 6.2
Belgium	40,072 5.0	35,435 3.9	35,167 4.0	35,897 4.1	40,290 4.5	51,123 4.8	59,119 4.9
Turkey	2,808 0.4	19,615 2.2	30,910 3.5	40,992 4.7	37,564 4.2	48,529 4.6	52,159 4.3
Germany	30,766 3.9	30,435 3.3	31,697 3.6	36,015 4.1	49,714 5.5	54,070 5.1	51,370 4.3
Switzerland	14,656 1.8	13,921 1.5	10,302 1.2	14,380 1.6	20,610 2.3	26,537 2.5	29,725 2.5
Tunisia	6,784 0.9	15,844 1.7	17,253 2.0	17,374 2.0	16,982 1.9	19,873 1.9	24,682 2.1
Poland	72,811 9.1	62,866 6.9	52,836 6.0	39,527 4.5	27,661 3.1	22,630 2.1	23,662 2.0
Netherlands	3,464 0.4	4,660 0.5	6,981 0.8	8,206 0.9	13,086 1.5	21,818 2.0	22,306 1.9
Romania	1,464 0.2	1,466 0.2	1,420 0.2	1,948 0.2	3,923 0.4	8,154 0.8	20,338 1.7
Madagascar	316 0.1	560 0.1	949 0.1	1,958 0.2	4,479 0.5	8,315 0.8	12,355 1.0
Proportion of all immigrants	94.3	93.9	92.2	90.0	86.6	83.0	78.9

Interpretation: In the 1968 census, 87,153 Portuguese immigrants were recorded as living in rural areas, representing 10.9% of the immigrant population in this type of area.

Coverage: All immigrants resident outside of the large urban centres of mainland France, as defined by the 2010 urban zoning categories.

Source: INSEE, RP 1968–2015.

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Résumé**Julie Fromentin • LOCALISATIONS ET DYNAMIQUES SPATIALES DES IMMIGRÉS DANS LES ESPACES RURAUX : ORIENTATIONS DE RECHERCHE EN FRANCE ET PERSPECTIVES INTERNATIONALES RÉCENTES**

Cet article propose une synthèse des travaux sur la localisation des immigrés dans les espaces ruraux en France, ainsi que leur mise en regard avec les travaux menés dans d'autres pays occidentaux. Il rend compte de la faiblesse et du cloisonnement des recherches sur ce sujet, qui s'expliquent notamment par le déclin de ce thème de recherche au xxe siècle, en lien avec les évolutions démographiques des espaces ruraux et le déclin des études rurales; par le rôle de la demande publique, sensible au contexte politique et social, qui réoriente les recherches sur l'immigration dans le champ des études urbaines; par la segmentation entre le champ des études rurales et celui des études migratoires; enfin, par la faible théorisation des liens entre parcours individuels et configurations spatiales. L'article propose des pistes de recherche en s'appuyant sur la démarche biographique pour offrir une approche plus dynamique de la géographie de l'immigration en France.