

Immigration: comparative level

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Presentation

Catalonia is not an exception as a European country as regards the evolution of the immigrant population. Even so, it is clear that there are some elements which convert the Catalan experience in immigration into a specific reality.

The comparisons with other realities are difficult as realities are never homogeneous. Cases were selected which, for different reasons, appeared to be suitable to compare with Catalonia. Geographic or cultural proximity, similarity in terms of demographic or territorial size, the existence of dilemmas of identity or historical circumstances, the degrees of self-government, are some of the elements which have been of influence on choosing the examples selected. It is worth saying that some of the studies commissioned are not present in this comparative exercise, for reasons beyond the promoters of the study. It is also worth warning that the original works received, by specialists in immigration from each area, have a series of technical and content-related disparities which often hinder the drafting of general conclusions.

Previously, and by way of introduction, we offer a brief comparative view of the situation of Catalonia, the Land of Valencia and the Balearic Islands, as realities which share a common linguistic area.

Catalonia, in its most immediate context

Catalonia, the Land of Valencia and the Balearic Islands have all experienced very intense growth in the foreign population over the last few years. At the beginning of 2007, the average foreign population in these three territories was around 15%, above the average for Spain as a whole (which is currently around 10% of the population).

Although the Balearic Islands and the Land of Valencia are the territories which proportionally have the highest proportion of foreign population, with over 18% in the Balearics and almost 15% in Valencia, a close look at the origins of these populations reveals that in both cases there are extremely high percentages of people originating from the countries of the EU of fifteen members. If we focus on the foreigners from the most developed European countries (EU 15) we see that in Catalonia they represent only 14.5%, while in the Land of Valencia they double this proportion with 33% and in the Balearics they represent 41% of the total foreigners.

If the reference is the EU 27 as a whole, the proportion exceeds half of the total foreign population both in the LV and in the Balearics, while in Catalonia it represents less than a quarter of the foreign population (24%).

All this is important when it comes to tackling any analysis on immigration, because it is possible to establish considerably different needs and opportunities between the origins of these EU foreigners, especially between those from the Europe of fifteen members, and those from the rest of the world (non-EU). As regards needs, and always with the risk represented by generalizations, we can accept as reasonable a very different starting point between those people from countries from our socioeconomic environment and others from what we can identify as developing countries and who in any case have a considerably lower per capita income than us. The former come with part of their economic situation resolved and do not always come as future workers and consequently do not establish dynamics characteristic of migratory processes. Their most appropriate category is that of foreigner.

The other foreigners, those from less economically developed areas, are essentially labour immigration, and come to improve their economic opportunities. And the arrival processes are mainly characteristic of migratory processes, involving family or local networks. But in case this was not sufficient, and as far as we know from sociological studies, we can also establish differentiated perceptions in the receiving society, especially on analyzing the connotations behind the concepts of immigrant and foreigner. It is obvious that almost all foreigners from non-EU countries and also those EU citizens who do not belong to the Europe of fifteen members, such as Romanians, are perceived as immigrants, while those from EU Europe or other highly developed countries are perceived as foreigners.

In all cases the South American communities are pre-eminent, followed by the communities from the Maghreb. Two important differences are perceived between Catalonia and the Land of Valencia and the Balearics in relation to their immigrant population. The first is that the structure of origin of these populations in Catalonia has greater fragmentation, that is to say from more origins but with each of them having less relative weight in numbers. In the Land of Valencia and the Balearics the top 10 nationalities account for almost 70% of the total foreign population, while in Catalonia they only just exceed 60%. The second difference is related to the Maghrebi population. In Catalonia this represents 20% of the total foreign population, while in the LV and the Balearics it only just reaches 10%.

Beyond this demographic view and the differences that can be appreciated in each territory, the other differentiating element has been government action. Indeed, it has been above all the government of Catalonia which has planned an action in different spheres aimed at facilitating the incorporation of foreigners/immigrants into Catalan society. There is a wide range of actions. And in any case the educational and socio-healthcare spheres are where most actions have been established and at the same time best received by the professionals from the sector. In this respect Catalonia is clearly a pioneer compared with the Balearics and the LV.

The culmination of this desire to intervene expressed by the Catalan institutions was revealed in the approval of the Statute of Autonomy. According to the same, the Catalan Generalitat has a leading social but also political role in the reception of immigration which neither the Valencian Generalitat nor the Balearic Council have yet expressed.

15 CONSIDERATIONS ON A COMPARATIVE LEVEL

1. **Catalonia is at the head** of the EU countries in relation to percentage of foreign population.
2. The growth of the foreign population in Catalonia has been sudden, unlike other countries, occurring **over less than 10 years**.
3. In Catalonia the origin of the migrations is **fundamentally transcontinental**: mainly from Africa and America. This situation also differentiates Catalonia from most of the European countries studied which are characterized by having immigration from the same continent and in many cases from bordering or nearby countries. This is not the case with Quebec, where the main origins of immigration are also transcontinental.
4. One of the specific aspects associated with the migratory phenomenon in Catalonia and which only has a certain parallelism with other autonomous communities of Spain is **the high percentage of foreigners in an irregular situation**. Although it is true that irregular immigration exists in other countries and that it is always a challenge to count it in so far as in some cases – such as the Catalan one – there is a risk of overrepresentation and in others there are simply no data, it is not very risky to consider that in the Catalan case there is a

proportion of irregular immigrants representing almost 30% of the total immigrants. Despite this necessary caution, we can state without exaggerating that this is a much higher proportion than that which may exist in any other country. The growing importance of the arrival of immigrants through family reunification makes us foresee a reduction in the number of irregular immigrants. In any case, it should be recalled that there are different causes of irregularity and therefore it would be necessary to foresee other measures to eradicate this phenomenon from our society.

5. The **legislation** in Catalonia on immigration – in this case passed by the central state institutions on having exclusive powers on this subject – is on a comparative level **fairly generous** as regards recognition of rights for immigrants, especially in relation to the foreign population in an irregular situation: education for the under-16s, basic healthcare and the right to effective judicial protection, among others. There is a generalized opinion considering that the procedures to obtain a work and residence permit are not sufficiently agile or harmonious. It is considered especially surprising that family reunification is not associated from the beginning with a work permit and even that in some circumstances people with a residence permit do not obtain a work permit.

6. The impact of immigration on the country's economy is an important but not always available detail. This is a generalized problem for the majority of countries. Despite everything, it is accepted that over the past few years in which growth in GDP has been positive in all the countries of the EU area which receive immigration (the Catalan case has been especially strong), the contribution of the migrant population has been determinant on facilitating the rate of growth of each of these areas. Indeed, it can be stated that the foreign population has arrived because there were possibilities of growth which required labour and also that **economic growth** has been possible thanks to the arrival of the foreign population.

7. As regards the regimes of affiliation to the Social Security, we can observe that, in relation to **self-employment**, the behaviour of the non-EU immigration in Catalonia is different both from that of the native population and from that of EU immigration. The most important details are those which tell us that self-employment among non-EU immigration is 5% compared with 17% of the native population. These percentages are comparatively lower than those which occur in other countries studied, which are around 10%. In the Catalan case it is important and worth mentioning that out of the total number of people registered as domestic workers, 68% are immigrants, and of these 93% are women.

8. There is no certainty as to the impact of immigration on first the existence and then the importance of the informal or underground economy. There are, in any case, two clear issues: the first is that where we now detect the existence of the informal economy it already existed prior to the arrival of immigration. The second is that the number of foreign workers employed in the underground or informal economy is related to the number of foreigners in an irregular situation. The **informal economy** is much more than that generated by the irregular population, but **it is a very important asset** of this population. The number of foreigners in the informal economy in Catalonia could be positioned at around 18% of the total immigrant population. In any case this figure represents a high percentage on a comparative level as in many countries this practice is non-existent.

9. The formulae to **reduce the informal economy** are in response to a wide range of actions, such as, for example, encouraging hiring at origin, offering administrative incentives related to residence for those who report informal economy situations, an increase in the inspection service and in the corresponding sanctions in the event of an infringement, ...

10. Like the majority of the countries analyzed, with the sole exceptions of Flanders, where foreigners have the right to vote after a certain number of years' residence, and of Scotland, where foreigners have access to voting rights for

elections to the Edinburgh Parliament, the **right to vote of foreigners is considerably restricted**. Firstly, when the right to vote is considered in Catalonia it is only in relation to the municipal elections, and secondly it is allowed for EU citizens and for those nationals whose country has signed a reciprocity agreement with the Spanish state.

11. Catalonia, despite enjoying self-government, **does not have the determinant instruments (flows, quotas, and residence)** to fix a migratory policy. With the reform of the Statute in 2007, Catalonia has taken a step forwards on receiving exclusive powers for initial reception, the authority to develop integration policies and especially executive powers – therefore shared with the state government – in relation to work authorization. The margin of action does, however, continue to be limited - in the determination of quotas - to compulsory prior participation in the state's decision on this matter, a decision which is reserved for the state government.
12. In the sphere of initial reception of the foreign population and of access to basic social services, the **local government has played an important role** which moreover, and unlike other countries, has been strengthened by the census function which in our country falls to the Town Councils. On a comparative level, there are few countries like Catalonia in which the Town Halls play such an important role in actions regarding the immigrant population and their reception, although these actions are not well funded from a budgetary viewpoint or accompanied by a law which grants the local government these powers of intervention.
13. Unlike an important part of European countries where immigration already represents over 5% of the total of their population, in Catalonia **there is no important case of xenophobic social or political organization**. It should, however, be warned that in the last electoral cycle (from 2004 to 2008) the debate on immigration was introduced into the political debate by some parties, and not always in a peaceful manner. For example, in some cases there were

recurrent attempts to associate the decline in law and order with immigration. In any case we are very far from the discourses and attitudes of the parties which in Austria, Switzerland and Flanders receive between 15% and 30% of support from the electorate.

14. In all the countries analyzed **schooling** is a strategic factor in the immigration management policy in view of the opportunities it gives to ensure linguistic integration and at the same time to motivate the achievement of equal opportunities. Catalonia is by far one of the countries which have carried out the most actions in the educational sphere focused on immigration. In any case, many of these actions exist in other countries and are not specific to one or another. The two main challenges that the countries with the highest percentage of immigration have to confront is the constant tendencies to concentrate foreign pupils in certain schools (creating a dual system) and the risk of greater failure at school, whether due to dropping out or to worse results, among the immigrant pupils. The social and economic determinants condition the results of these trends to a great extent.

15. Catalonia has taken timid steps to officially define the immigration integration model. The only references existing in recent years in any governmental document – the 2005-2008 Immigration and Citizenship Plan – backs recognition of citizenship based on residence rather than on other aspects. If this is confirmed, it would position Catalonia among the countries committed to an **open model with hardly any precedents** in our surrounding countries in which many require at least basic levels of command of the language. In any case Catalonia has, on the one hand, a pending debate on the reception model – at present at the pre-bill stage – and, in relation to the social and political discussion, there is the document laying the foundations of a National Immigration Pact.

Conclusions

Diversity obviously exists in Europe on the integration models to follow, from the countries which do not have any model, to those which impose restrictive barriers on the naturalization of immigrants (Switzerland) with the consequent risk of rejection, and others which opt for models of recognition of the differences with strategies of knowledge of the common language but without any other concerns for elements of cohesion (the United Kingdom and, to a certain extent, Quebec).

Undoubtedly Catalonia cannot postpone this debate much longer. The peculiarities of Catalonia in the Spanish and European context as a nation without a state having a language and a culture with a restricted market and therefore subject to the imbalances that the market imposes and also to the insensitivity expressed by states, mixed with the migratory reality accumulated in the last decade and with the risk that this new situation will become a further, decisive, factor of linguistic imbalance of the already unstable balance between the Catalan and Spanish languages, require urgent guidance on criteria of reception and if possible of intervention in political responsibilities which we do not currently have and which are useful to define the migratory models desired.