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Migration and the reconfiguration of rural places: The accommodation of difference in Odemira, Portugal

Maria Lucinda Fonseca  | Alina Esteves  | Luís Moreno 

Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning,
Universidade de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal

Correspondence

Maria Lucinda Fonseca, Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, Universidade de Lisboa, Rua Branca Edmée Marques, 1600-276 Lisbon, Portugal.
Email: fonseca-maria@campus.ul.pt

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Abstract

International migration reconfigures rural places by engaging localities with globalising forces. Accommodating newcomers, be they farming labourers or lifestyle migrants is a challenge at the local level due to the clash of interests, different visions on how the land should be managed and development promoted. Using Odemira as a case study, the paper has two goals: to show the change brought about by foreign investments in agribusiness, international labourers and lifestyle migrants to a rural place; and to highlight the strategies devised by local actors in the accommodation of new demands of language and housing. Language classes for adults and housing provisions are far from satisfying the needs. Schools display more flexibility to accommodate migrant children, whereas the agribusiness firms are increasing its lobbying capacity for their interest by pushing forward the approval of an exceptional regime that authorises the installation of workers in precarious accommodation located on the farms.

KEYWORDS

accommodation of difference, agribusiness, international migration, Odemira, rural change

1 | INTRODUCTION

By engaging with the globalisation forces, rural places are reconfigured and repositioned in the world map. Localities that were once peripheral, going through population and economic decay, attract agribusiness investors, who bring in national and foreign labourers, but also lifestyle migrants who are looking for an imagined rural “idyll” (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009, 2016; Gosnell & Abrams, 2011; Marsden, 1996; Woods, 2011).

Population flows of diverse kind, financial transactions of distinct purposes, import and export of varied agricultural products and services show “... the unique entanglements of diverse social, economic, political and cultural relations.” (McDonagh et al., 2015, p. 3) that occur in rural places in a continuous process that alters not only the way they connect to other places, but also their internal composition.

The emergence of the “global countryside” (Woods, 2007) as a space “... that has become increasingly integrated and interconnected through globalization processes [...], but which is also contested and marked by the redistribution of power.” (McDonagh et al., 2015, p. 3) awakes researchers' awareness about the profound changes that transform the rural world.

Besides economic flows, international migration is one of the main driving forces of change of rural areas. This transformative capacity is economic, social, cultural and environmental (Bosworth, 2010; Jentsch & Simard, 2009; Stockdale, 2006; Woods, 2016) and is an essential factor in the “rebound” of places that were under population and economic decline for decades (Morén-Alegret & Wladyka, 2020). Change, however, often brings conflicts of interests among local actors due to distinct visions on how the land should be managed, public resources ought to be

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shared and development be implemented (Woods, 2011). Through strategic negotiations, tactical standstills and office bureaucracy, intervening players forge rearrangements of power relations and new equilibriums.

Portugal's position in the international migration flows and its late rural restructuring delayed the arrival of foreign labourers to rural areas comparatively with other Southern European countries where intensive farming attracted agribusiness investors much earlier (Corrado et al., 2016; Fonseca, 2008). One of the localities where the presence of in-migrants for agricultural work is not new, as well as lifestyle migrants is the municipality of Odemira, in the Alentejo region, with a substantial part of its territory incorporated in a Natural Park with specific environmental regulations. Despite its peripheral geographical location in Portugal, it is a rural locality deeply engaged with globalisation processes, part of a cobweb of connections that reaches out to several continents, permanently being remade by actively taking part in global commodity chains, labour and amenity migration, and commodification of natural resources—hallmarks of globalisation (Woods, 2007).

Drawing on qualitative interviews with local actors, the goal of the paper is twofold: on the one hand, to shed some light on the reconfiguration of Odemira due to the transformative role of international labourers and lifestyle migrants in the economic, social and demographic fabric of that rural place; and, on the other hand, to show the strategies devised by local actors in the accommodation of new demands in the fields of language and housing by migrants, in a context of growing demand of produce, amenity migration and enforcement of strict environmental regulations concerning land use.

The paper is organised as follows: a review of the literature concerning the reconfiguration of rural places in the global context through the flows of people and capital highlighting the role of migration for local development; then, the case study of Odemira is presented, stressing the main changes concerning population composition, economic activity and real estate prices. The challenges and clashes of interests brought about by the coexistence of a myriad of foreign citizens, economic activities and a Natural Park, leading to a constant process of renegotiation of power balances are also discussed. A section on the efforts taken by local actors to accommodate so many concurring interests precedes the final remarks where the transformative role of international migration flows on Odemira is resumed and further avenues for research are pointed out.

2 | RECONFIGURING RURAL LOCALITIES UNDER GLOBALISATION: IN-MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The process of globalisation is not something coming from above, as if descending upon places like a veil. Rather it happens through places Woods (2014a). The way each rural locality is transformed by engaging with global processes and networks depends both on local specific features (e.g., natural amenities, demographics and productive base) and on how rural communities respond to

external forces, shaping its outcomes. The articulation and negotiation of local politics with global forces leads to “small, incremental changes within localities, including the fusing together of local and global entities to produce new hybrid entities” (Woods, 2014a). This process of reconfiguration is occurring permanently, changing the nature of rural localities by creating a “global interrelatedness” (Woods, 2007). Moreover, the most striking features of each rural place depend of the degree of penetration of the globalising processes, but also on how these processes are incorporated and mediated at the local level (Woods, 2007).

This interrelatedness is materialised in a set of in and out flows that link localities around the world building an interdependency among them. The interconnectivity is supported by financial flows (investments), information fluxes (through social and printed media), but also population movements. These flows are new opportunities for rural business activity (Bosworth, 2010), that if adequately incorporated and mediated at the local level, can build thriving regions. In post-industrial economies, a differentiated human capital is particularly relevant for local and regional development reinforcing the robustness of regions. Several empirical studies reveal that a higher level of human capital—especially when institutional conditions enable synergies with other kinds of capital—decreases regional shocks, thus making regional economies more resilient (Bristow et al., 2014; Clark & Bailey, 2018; Pike et al., 2017). Rural regions affected by out-migration and population ageing are under considerable disadvantages. This disadvantageous situation can, however, be overcome through migration although this is a debatable issue with previous studies highlighting the relevance of positive rural policies to sponsor in-migration, return and retention of human capital that enables endogenous development (Stockdale, 2006).

More recent theoretical approaches to endogenous development stress the role of in-migration to fuel rural development, considering the context of global interconnectivity of the present world (Bosworth & Atterton, 2012). According to the neo endogenous development perspective, not only are in-migrants business creators, increasing income and employment through entrepreneurship, but they also build connections beyond the rural localities where they reside (Bosworth, 2010). Their social capital is instrumental in linking the local with the extra-local through trading opportunities, information exchange, technologies and human capital (Bosworth & Atterton, 2012). These connections enhance the potential of local areas to shape their future by leading “... local business activity [to] maximize local resources and [engage] beyond the local area to maximize economic potential ...” (Bosworth & Atterton, 2012, p. 257). In the words of Bosworth (2010, p. 974), migrants function as catalytic agents for rural business activity to expand. However, the association of in-migration and development of rural regions cannot be taken for granted. As clearly stated by Woods (2016, p. 587) “... international migrants have the potential to contribute to economic development in rural areas, if their skills, training, connections and entrepreneurial agency can be effectively harnessed and supported.”. As highlighted by McDonagh et al. (2015, p. 7), this is a reflexive process combining internal consideration about the features of the

region, the challenges caused by globalisation and the future envisaged for the region.

2.1 | Challenging the rural idyll: Migration, change and the accommodation of difference

By engaging with networks that are neither fixed nor contained at the local level, rural places are the outcomes shaped by the intertwining of local features and globalising forces. They are places where the extra-local is fused with the local originating new configurations (Woods, 2007). These spatial and relational configurations are in clear contrast with the image portrayed by real estate agents, tourism agencies or the entertainment media of the rural world as a tranquil and genuine place with ancient “typical” practices, unspoiled by disruptive modifications. This modified and idyllic image of rural places, produced “... to meet the expectations of investors and customers.” (Woods, 2011, p. 22), often obliterates the harsher aspects of living in a rural place, like poverty, discrimination or environmental issues. The same rural space can be a place of recreation for some and of intense exploitation for others.

Oftentimes, rural regions that are attractive for the retired middle classes, as recreational areas, also attract labour flows due to investments in intensive farming production. This multifunctionality (Potter & Tilzey, 2005) may involve a dynamical population turnover that is not new for rural areas, but lifestyle migrants, looking for a crystallised rural idyll, may not be aware of. The materialities resulting from different ways of living the rural world imprint remarkable changes in the social, economic and demographic fabric of the hosting places (McAreavey & Argent, 2018). The rural realm as space of productivist agriculture, with intensive production of food and fibre, and the rural realm as a space of recreation have very distinct demands and consequences at several levels. The productivist paradigm of production intensification, with remarkable material effects in the environment, society and economy of rural areas, shows the clash of interests between the different groups populating the rural world (Woods, 2011). If on the one hand, investors need to import workers, use modern machinery and want to amalgamate farm units in order to maximise agriculture production, those aiming at the good life in the rural milieu, look for material and immaterial cues associated to an imagined tranquillity, environmental quality and immutability (Gaspar, 2015; Gosnell & Abrams, 2011; Sardinha, 2015).

Accommodating population groups with very distinct needs and interests is challenging at the local level. Farmers, agribusiness corporations, labourers, lifestyle migrants and non-farming residents hold different visions of how the land should be managed (Woods, 2011). Conflicts become more palpable if environmental regulations pertaining to natural parks and protected sites are enforced (Morén-Alegret et al., 2018). In places where intensive farming and nature's conservation dispute natural resources (land, water, air and landscape), the role of state agencies and local authorities in regulating the use of the rural environment is crucial to find a balance between private and public interests (Kristensen, 2016). However, policy circles

with divergent interests inside the state can influence the political constructions of the rural (Woods, 2011, p. 262) and the articulation between bodies holding responsibilities at different levels (from the supranational to the local) can be conflicting with distinct planning instruments intervening in the same territory with contradictory orientations.

Moreover, the clash of interests resulting from “... plural rural communities co-existing in the same territorial space ...” (Woods, 2011, p. 187) can lead to substantial disparities in service and amenities provision to the different groups of residents revealing lobbying abilities permeated by class, ethnicity, legal status or citizenship. For example, changing the local development plan to build dwellings for seasonal migrant workers might not be lifestyle migrants and environmental agencies' priority, whereas it certainly is for agri-food companies wanting to expand business. Integrating foreign children in the local schools can require the adaptation of curricula, a change often only authorised by national-level educational bodies and which may not receive the applause of non-migrant families.

The accommodation of difference can be conflictual and unbalanced, requiring permanent negotiation and resilience on the part of all players. Using the case of Odemira, a rural place in a peripheric position in Portugal, the next sections will show that local actors are active agents involved in incorporating, manipulating and adapting globalising forces of change, rather than passive recipients.

3 | DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The next sections are based both on primary and secondary sources of information with a mix of qualitative and quantitative data. The characterisation of the demographic and economic dynamics of the municipality of Odemira was carried out based on documentary sources and on statistical information published by Statistics Portugal [Instituto Nacional de Estatística (INE)]. The source of data on foreign residents is the Aliens and Borders Office [Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (SEF)] and corresponds to the number of documented foreign citizens living in the country. In addition, primary data collected in the ambit of the CRISIMI¹ (Esteves et al., 2017; Moreno et al., 2016; Pereira et al., 2016) and P-RIDE² projects were used.

Seven semistructured in-depth interviews were conducted between February and June 2015, to the Local Authorities, one NGO, one immigrant association, three major fruit and vegetable companies, and one association of local producers. In order to do a follow-up of the situation, a focus group with some of the individuals interviewed in 2015 was conducted in November 2017.

In a first stage, the interviewees and the participants in the focus group were reached through information provided by Odemira's Office of Social Issues (Local Authorities), and these contacts led us to further potential interviewees. The set of questions posed to local actors were different according to their role in the social, administrative and economic fabric.

In order to obtain specific information, the president of one of the civil parishes facing serious housing challenges also joined the

group, as well as the coordinators of the projects Growing Together and Gira Mundos (part of the project STe6g funded by the Choices Project) and a representative of the Council for Child and Youngsters Protection. A total of 12 local actors took part in the focus group. Moreover, through the course of several events organised by the Local Authorities, we were able to conduct one more interview with a small berries producer in July 2019.

4 | RECONFIGURING A RURAL PLACE: GLOBALISATION, CHANGE AND CHALLENGES IN ODEMIRA

4.1 | Some background elements

The municipality of Odemira located 200 km south of Lisbon in the coastal area of Alentejo is the largest municipality of Portugal (1,721 km²), but it is also one of the least densely populated (14.4 inhab./km², against the national average of 111.6 inhab./km²). It has a 55-km-long coastline, and approximately, 44% of its territory is part of the Sudoeste Alentejano and Costa Vicentina Natural Park (PNSACV) altogether with Natura 2000 network. In the 1960s and 1970s, it was deeply affected by rural exodus with a 33% population loss between 1960 and 1981, that is, going from 43,999 to 29,463 inhabitants. Population decline is still presently felt, although since 2001 at a much slower pace due to international migration flows. According to Statistics Portugal, by the end of 2019, the population residing in Odemira reached 24,717 inhabitants. Population ageing has been a concomitant phenomenon to population decrease, and in 2019, the ageing index was 234.4. The high proportion of ageing people is visible in low education levels. According to the 2011 census, 22.9% of the residents aged 15 or more had no schooling, and 37.5% only had between 4 and 6 years of school attendance.

Local economy is essentially based on tourism and intensive export-oriented farming of vegetables and fruit with a strong foreign investment component. The small size of the native resident population and the remarkable development of the tourism and agribusiness sectors pushed enterprises, mainly since the 1980s, to hire foreign labourers. Therefore, following a counter-cycle trend comparatively with the rest of the country, between 2011 and 2019, the number of documented foreign residents in Odemira grew 158.1%, whereas in Portugal, there was a 35.8% variation (Table 1; Figure 1). Consequently, in 2019, documented foreign citizens from 68 different

nationalities accounted for 33.0% of the total resident population in the municipality of Odemira, a much higher proportion than that for the country (5.7%).

However, it is also worth mentioning that despite the growing number of immigrants, between 2011 and 2019, the population decline in Odemira and in Alentejo Litoral is more pronounced than in Portugal. Therefore, international migrants are a very important agent of demographic, economic and social transformation of this area.

4.2 | Change: Engagement with globalisation processes

The engagement of Odemira with the globalisation processes through European foreign investment, firstly Italian and latter Spanish, began in the 1970s, after the construction of Santa Clara dam and the Irrigation Perimeter of the river Mira. In the early 1980s, an American, Bill Bond, installed a watering pivot at Flor do Brejo, to produce Iceberg lettuce. However, it was only after mid-1980s that, taking advantage from cheap Portuguese labour force and European Union (EU) funds, Odemira, became a supplier of European markets with fresh produce when Spanish and Moroccan-based enterprises were not so competitive. Despite the constraints imposed by the legislation concerning the Natural Park to land use,³ the success of the businesses attracted new foreign investments expanding the sector even further towards wider and more robust varieties of small fruits, together with cut and ornamental flowers, and pushing employers to hire immigrant labour force due to the scarcity of native workers.

In 1986, the English enterprise Vitacress (previously named *Iberian Salads Agricultura Lda*) expanded its business to Portugal with a 90-ha farm in the municipality of Odemira to grow fresh salad vegetables. In 1987, the Norwegian-owned firm Frupor initiated its activity with a 150-ha farming estate initially growing Chinese leaf and decorative foliage, mostly for export to the Nordic countries. The enterprise has continued to expand and to diversify its production by acquiring more arable land for biological farming of carrots and vineyards. Seizing the opportunity of benefiting from the support given to multifunctionality of rural landscapes, Frupor also offers rural tourism for those wanting to experience life in the countryside. In 1988, the enterprise Odefruta, owned by a French investor, with more than 500 ha, specialised in the production of vegetables and fruit, mainly strawberries also set up business in Odemira. In the ambit of the Operational Programme for the Development of the Zone Between the rivers Mira and Guadiana, the enterprise benefited from EU funding but went bankrupt in 1994⁴ (Moreno et al., 2016). Despite this unsuccessful venture, intensive farming in Odemira continued to flourish. Thus, in 1997, the enterprise Sudoberry (with investments from the United Kingdom and the United States) started its operations with a particular focus on the production and export of red berries, strawberries, blackberries and raspberries, occupying a total area of 100 hectares, either in outdoor or greenhouse production.

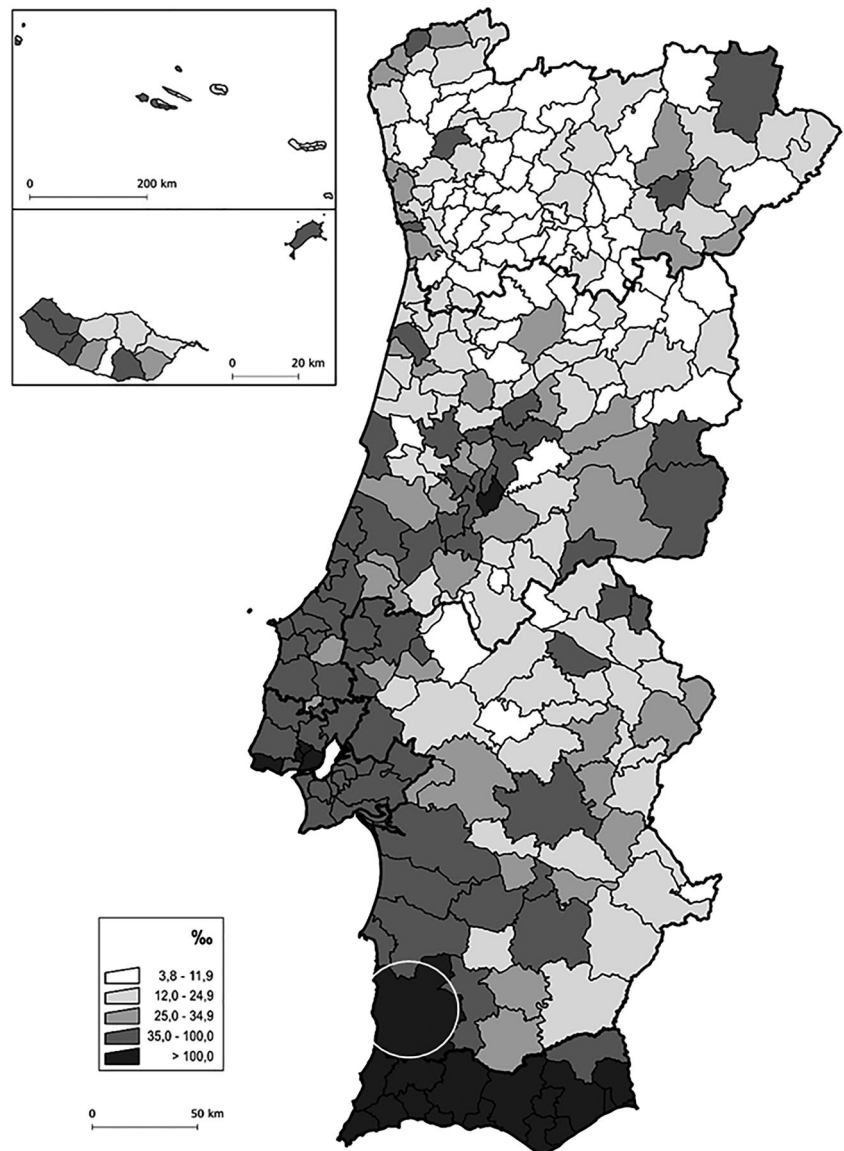
The internationalisation of farming production in the municipality of Odemira (and in the Alentejo Litoral NUTS III region) continued to

TABLE 1 Population growth rate 2011–2019 (%)

	Total population	Foreigners
Portugal	−2.3	35.8
Alentejo	−6.6	3.9
Alentejo Litoral	−4.5	76.3
Odemira	−5.0	158.1

Source: INE (Statistics Portugal) and SEF (Aliens and Borders Office) with authors' calculations.

FIGURE 1 Foreign resident population per 1,000 inhabitants by municipality of residence, 2019, and location of Odemira. Source: SEF and INE, with authors' calculations



increase throughout the 1990s with the American company Driscoll's, world leader in the production of red berries, setting up business here in 1998. This corporation holds several farming units in Odemira,⁵ being also a shareholder of Lusomorango, an organisation of berries producers established in 2005 and presently encompassing 40 local producers (*Agricultura e Mar Actual*, 26 March 2018). The presence of farming corporations directly involved with large commercial distribution chains brought Odemira, a “global agricultural enclave” (Taboadela et al., 2018), in full force into the global agri-food supply chains (Gadea et al., 2017).

As previously mentioned, the growing labour force demand for intensive farming had to be satisfied through flexible immigrant labour force. Referring to the Municipal Plan for the Integration of Immigrants (Comissão Municipal do Imigrante, 2015), Esteves et al. (2017) identify four migrant waves: in the 1980s, the main flow was coming from Northern European countries, namely, Dutch and Germans, being composed of lifestyle migrants and the owners of some agri-business companies presently hiring foreign labourers. In mid-1990s,

the first waves of Eastern Europeans, mainly from the Ukraine and Moldova, and a few Brazilians were engaged in the farms. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, these workers were gradually replaced by Bulgarians and Romanians, as soon as these citizens were able to incorporate the EU labour market with full rights. More recently Thais, Nepalese and Indians, many hired by international temporary recruitment companies according to farming seasons, migrate between the Algarve, Alentejo and the Oeste regions, settling their residence in Odemira.

All in all, presently, one may find two major strands of migrants in Odemira (Esteves et al., 2017; Moreno et al., 2016): a larger group composed by labourers who find jobs in national and international enterprises producing small berries, vegetables and cut flowers, mostly coming from SE Asia (Thais), the Hindustani Peninsula (Indians and Nepalese) and Eastern EU member states (Romania and Bulgaria)—Figure 2; and a less diversified strand, from Germany, the Netherlands and United Kingdom, made up of the CEOs of international corporate farming and those looking for the “good life” through

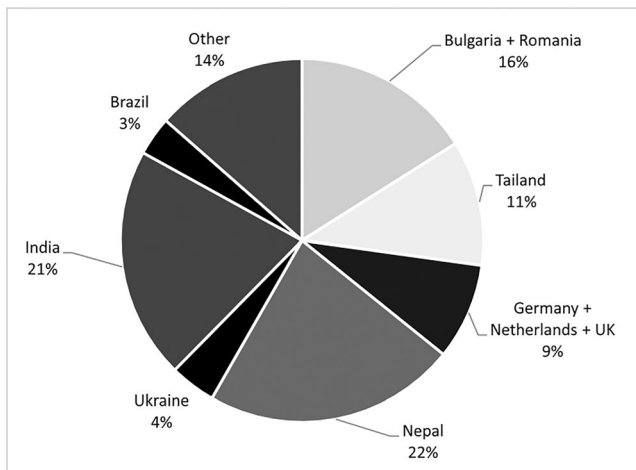


FIGURE 2 Documented foreign population living in the municipality of Odemira by nationality, 2019 (%). Source: SEF database

the search of a quiet coastal retreat or even spiritual fulfilment. The Tamera eco-village, the Community 108 and the Mooji retreat estate are examples of eco and healing communities whose members come from a variety of geographical origins for alternative lifestyles in Odemira (Taboadela et al., 2018). These representations of the destination (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009) may sometimes intersect with economic activities like eco-farming, arts and crafts, gourmet food, and local development initiatives⁶ as a way of self-realisation and/or as an economic complement to modest incomes from the origin country. Despite this non-negligible economic concern, the income comfort of the second group is much higher than the first one. Moreover, the legal status is also of utmost importance, with EU citizens freely travelling, residing and working in the Schengen area, whereas TCN have to deal with heavy bureaucratic procedures, often depending on having a labour contract (Esteves et al., 2018).

Besides striking demographic changes in the population composition, the incorporation of Odemira in large scale agribusiness also brought about alterations in real estate prices. Between 2010–2013 and 2014–2018, the average value of transacted properties (total and rustic) grew faster in Alentejo than at the national level (Table 2). Whereas rustic properties often represent a new interest in

agricultural investment, supported by the recent expansion of water retention and irrigation support infrastructures, in the case of Alentejo, urban properties involve more diversified uses (housing, commerce, industry or services). In Alentejo Litoral, and in Odemira, one can find the highest values of transacted properties, showing the repositioning of these areas in the context of broader “framing territories” (Morén-Alegret et al., 2018). In fact, both new farming land and new residences (including several of the lifestyle migrants and others) are the result of the structural changes associated with the repositioning of Portugal and, certainly, of Alentejo coastal area and Odemira, in food specialisation and human diversity inherent to the globalisation process.

4.3 | Challenges

As previously mentioned, the alterations imprinted in the social, economic and demographic fabric of Odemira resulting from the interaction of foreign population among themselves and with natives, and the local structures, have the strength to reconfigure places leading to new arrangements of power relations. Moreover, when change comes along with diversity, it is certainly a challenging issue in many aspects (Vertovec, 2007). As Vertovec points out “... regular contact can entrench group animosities, fears and competition” (Vertovec, 2007, p. 1045), especially when resources are scarce (i.e., health care, housing, education and social support).

The challenges brought about by the rapid growth of a very diversified population can be seen at different levels and domains. According to Odemira's Social Issues Deputy-Mayor,⁷ cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as insufficient mastering of common communication codes are the major obstacles to inclusion. She remarks “Portuguese natives, lifestyle migrants and labour migrants know very little about each other, which may foster alienation and even prejudiced ideas about each other”. The Tamera Ecovillage (Dregger, 2010), the Community 108 and the spiritual retreat of a community led by guru Mooji are examples of alternative ways of life attracting members from all over the world. Due to language barriers and cultural differences, little interaction exists between these communities and the remaining population living in the municipality. According to the opinion of the Local Authorities, that is also a challenge for integration.

TABLE 2 Average value of transacted properties (thousands of euros), and rate of change, 2010/13–2014/18 (%)

	Total properties			Rustic properties		
	Average value (2010–13)	Average value (2014–18)	Change (%)	Average value (2010–13)	Average value (2014–18)	Change (%)
Portugal	76.7	95.1	23.9	15.4	14.2	–7.5
Alentejo	71.4	79.1	10.8	36.2	49.3	36.4
Alentejo Litoral	107.9	131.0	21.4	76.7	148.8	94.0
Odemira	78.2	92.5	18.3	47.3	83.0	75.5

Source: PORDATA (authors' calculations).

The high demand of Portuguese language classes by migrants falls short of the offer provided by local services. According to the coordinator of the Local Office for Migrant Support (CLAIM),⁸ several constraints hinder migrants' efforts to learn the language: "In order to attend Portuguese language classes provided by the Institute of Employment and Vocational Training, migrants need to have a residence permit. The cycles of classes depend on funding from the national government and migrants' assiduity depends on the farming season. There are also classes funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and to attend them, migrants do not need a resident permit. Having filled the documents for regularization to the competent authorities is enough to allow them to attend classes".

However, according to employers, migrants with different education levels and migration motivations show different abilities and willingness to learn the host country's language. In the words of the Head of Sudoberry's Human Resources Department⁹ "Ukrainians and Moldovans, with a higher education level comparatively to Bulgarians and Romanians ... and sometimes they show more aptitude to ... maybe it also depends on the culture ... of wanting to learn ... and they want to settle down here, so they learn [Portuguese] faster than some Bulgarians.". When comparing Bulgarians with Thais, Vitacress's Central Planner Coordinator¹⁰ highlights the relevance of language and cultural differences for communication, saying that "... for a Thai worker [learning Portuguese] it is not the same as for a Bulgarian worker, who after a couple of months in Portugal can communicate ... [Thais] struggle a lot with language and are more closed."

Moreover, the local economic and social diversification has brought to the fore a set of conflicts of interest resulting from the growing complexity of trying to reach compatibility between public agencies and private enterprises. The public interest is represented by the government sphere and the territorial planning and management instruments (the Municipal/Local Authorities, the Alentejo Coordination Commission,¹¹ the Natural Park, the Agriculture and Ecologic Reserves, the Management Plan of the Coastal Fringe and Odemira's Local Territorial Plan) that endeavour to impose limits, for environmental and social reasons, to the "new intensive farming" businesses sponsored by national and transnational investments (Morén-Alegret et al., 2018; Taboada et al., 2018).

Wanting to expand business, either by increasing the amount of arable land or intensifying production per land unit, individual producers and the organisations representing them,¹² is making pressure on local and regional authorities and on the national agency coordinating the Natural Park. According to a small local farmer,¹³ "... new projects that have been submitted are endlessly pending for a response from the national agency supervising natural parks, preventing business growth." Moreover, a working group, formally set up in August 2018¹⁴ by several ministries, bringing together representatives of the Natural Park, of the Irrigation Perimeter of the river Mira and of the Special Protection Zone in order to devise technically sustained solutions for the coexistence of distinct interests, has not yet produced the expected report defining compromise solutions.

Due to the limitations imposed by the local planning instruments on the expansion of urbanised areas, in a context of rising demand of

permanent and temporary accommodation,¹⁵ the urgency of this document is greater than ever. Local residents owning dwellings, either secondary homes or unused farming facilities, lease their properties to foreign labourers because profit is higher and faster than renting to native families. However, foreign labourers may be kicked out of the best dwellings when well-off northern European tourists come to enjoy the Summer or when interested in acquiring real estate in the area. Informality in the rental housing market to labour migrants is commonplace. The consequences are soaring monthly rents, migrants living in shared overcrowded dwellings, often in remote locations with little accessibility to farms or in, containers placed in the premises of the agribusiness companies, and a general lack of housing in the municipality. Thus, there are latent tensions and conflicts between different actors with pressing housing needs, the local authorities and national-level environmental agencies. According to Odemira's Social Issues Deputy-Mayor,¹⁶ "The Local Authorities want to mediate in the solution of finding more dwellings for the migrants, but cannot change much in the field of territorial management due to the set of laws applicable to the region, like the Natural Park, the Irrigation Perimeter of the river Mira, the National Ecological Reserve and the National Agricultural Reserve."

The examples provided show the distinct visions of actors of diverse levels and positions on the strategies for engaging with globalisation and the constant negotiations of power balances due to their conflicting interests. Odemira, like other places in the global countryside, ascribed with distinct roles, became different from what it was before through the mediation of exogenous dynamics by local endogenous forces (Woods, 2007). In the next section, local projects and strategies to accommodate diversity in the fields of language, interculturality and housing will be discussed.

5 | LOCAL ENDEAVOURS TO ACCOMMODATE DIVERSITY AND CONCURRENT INTERESTS

Accommodating such a huge diversity in the territory of a single municipality has been extremely challenging for Odemira's Local Authorities. Being one of the 22 Portuguese municipalities with an "immigrant integration plan", a considerable investment was made to lead local actors to participate in its design, namely, through meetings and focus groups (Comissão Municipal do Imigrante, 2015). A Municipal Immigrant Commission (MIC) was established involving migrants from several geographical origins, as well as education, employment, social security and health authorities, and police forces, NGOs, agribusiness enterprises and producers' associations. The first Local Integration Plan for Immigrants (2015–2017) was implemented with a wide range of interventions but with particular emphasis on Portuguese language learning, service provision concerning documentation, and labour reskilling and training. Drawing on the experienced of the first Plan, a second Local Integration Plan for Immigrants (2018–2020) is being implemented with the active participation of the Local Commission for Interculturality that besides the members of the MIC was

widened and also includes one trade union, two Catholic Parishes and a Dutch artisan (Comissão Local para a Interculturalidade, 2019). Foreign CEOs of enterprises and members of the Tamera community were not invited to participate in this Commission, often leading lives apart from the local issues and not being able to speak Portuguese.

In order to promote interaction, and considering the difficulties imposed by the language barrier, song and dance, together with celebrations of “National Days” performances—materialities of international migration in Odemira—are activities sponsored by the Local Authorities and the CLAIM. As the coordinator of the local CLAIM says¹⁷ “It’s preferable to celebrate National Days and not religious festivities because it avoids religious tensions, differentiated treatment of the diverse religious communities and keeps the celebration of diversity in a ‘more neutral’ ground of geographical origin.”

The involvement of local offices of national-level agencies and other institutional actors is considered essential to sponsor migrants’ hosting and local integration. For example, the local centre for migrant integration (CLAIM), with a community outreach strategy due to the size of the municipality and poor public transportation, is funded by the municipal council, the High Commission for Migration and agribusiness enterprises, all in close cooperation with the local NGO TAIPA.

In the field of education, the international project Growing Together (2016–2018) attracted migrant parents to schools with the double purpose of reinforcing their involvement in children’s education and making schools a non-formal learning environment for adults. Despite the availability of these resources, busy working schedules and the pace of farming campaigns places many challenges to labour migrants. The huge diversity of geographical origins of migrant children, the municipal project ODETE—Odemira, Educative Territory, allowed the local schools to introduce changes in the curricula. In São Teotónio, for example, the local school for the fifth to the ninth grade was able to change the contents and the organisation of the courses because Portuguese pupils are a minority among students from 22 different nationalities. As a result of this project, both the failure rate and the early-school-dropout rate decreased substantially among non-native students. However, according to the multidisciplinary team running the Choices Programme project STE6g, offering pedagogic and leisure activities for children and teenagers in out-of-school hours, the frequent travels Bulgarian families make to their home countries has a direct negative impact in the school attendance and success of these children. In her words “When Bulgarian families visit their families for two and a half to three months, in the least busy period of the farming year, that is between December and March, they miss several weeks of classes in school.”¹⁸

The need for housing is such that agribusiness enterprises were able to exert pressure on central authorities¹⁹ to classify containers as “complementary structures of farming activity” in the farms for 10 years, thus opening exceptional conditions for local producers whose properties are in the Irrigation Perimeter of the river Mira. The Resolution of the Council of Ministers also allows enterprises to increase the proportion of land with greenhouses in the farms. The new classification of containers as more acceptable dwellings for one

decade was considered controversial and immigrant associations²⁰ criticised this precarious solution and the harsh living conditions given to labourers, manpower considered essential to expand business.

All in all, new challenges are being met with resources being mobilised at several levels so that diversity can be accommodated and disruptive events avoided as much as possible (Comissão Municipal do Imigrante, 2015). Notwithstanding the endeavours from distinct actors, the quick pace of change at the local level, and natives’ and immigrants’ needs, on the one hand, and pressures of agribusiness corporations and individual entrepreneurs, on the other, are constantly redefining power relations in a context of environmentally based territorial constraints.

6 | FINAL REMARKS AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this paper, we showed the transformative capacity of the different strands of international migration upon rural areas using the municipality of Odemira as a case study. By engaging with globalising processes involving fluxes of foreign and national investment, and very diversified international migration flows, Odemira was reconfigured undergoing processes of profound territorial, social, cultural and economic change. In line with Woods’ (2014a, 2014b) ideas, we argued that in such a diversified place, rural reconfiguration, as a biunivocal process between exogenous events and endogenous, change is permanently being negotiated. In a place where provisions in some fields have not kept pace with the remarkable growth of foreign residents, diversity brought new challenges, recalibrating the power relations at the local level.

The rising real estate and land prices due to growing demand, and a general need of housing for natives and foreign labourers, puts pressure on the Local Authorities in order to make more land available for agribusiness expansion and eco/healing/spiritual communities’ growth. The balance of different interests is constantly negotiated with lifestyle migrants being particularly relevant for environmental sustainability in the long-run by taking an active role in the Municipality’s Migrant Integration Plan. The enlargement of the urban perimeter, a necessary condition for housing construction, also faces serious limitations due to the specific regulations encompassing the territory under the jurisdiction of the Natural Park (Morén-Alegret et al., 2018). However, local homeowners are making considerable profit by (informally) renting dwellings and former farming facilities to migrants, very often with derelict housing conditions, giving rise to latent conflicting situations with Local Authorities and neighbours. The new classification given to containers as dwellings for migrants show the growing influence and lobbying capacity of agribusiness corporations on the renegotiation of power balances involving different interest groups and several levels of political power.

Moreover, the range of geographical origins of those wanting to make Odemira their home imposes new demands upon public services, namely, in the fields of education for children and adults. In order to cope with the needs, local public actors are investing in

service provision, but the responses fall short of what is needed for adults. Local schools, however, have been able to present more adequate responses to migrant children, adapting their curricula to the children's features.

An interesting topic to focus on a future research is to see how far producers' associations and agribusiness corporations can lobby for their interests by pushing forward projects concerning permanent housing for workers, the expansion of the irrigated area for farming and public services for newcomers. Either through assessment reports ordered to independent consultants or by taking part in the immigrants' local integration plans, interests groups want to make the most of the market's favourable conditions against a backdrop of strict land regulations imposed by diverse agencies and governing bodies, limited funding and growing ethnic and cultural diversity. Considering the intensification of agriculture in other municipalities in the Alentejo region, there is a need for more research on the relation between international migration, accommodation of difference and change in rural areas.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The quantitative data derived from public domain resources. The qualitative data are available on request, due to privacy/ethical restrictions.

ORCID

Maria Lucinda Fonseca  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8867-8910>

Alina Esteves  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8187-8664>

Luís Moreno  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6507-1780>

ENDNOTES

- ¹ The Project CRISIMI (2014–2015) was funded by the European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals, through the Portuguese High Commission for Migration (ACM, I.P.).
- ² The Project P-RIDE-Portugal: Regional Integration of Demography and Economy (2016–2019), Project P-RIDE-Portugal: Regional Integration of Demography and Economy (PTDC/ATP-DEM/0441/2014), cofinanced by FCT-Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia I.P. (PIDDAC) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through the Operational Programme for Competitiveness and Internationalisation (COMPETE 2020).
- ³ The Protected Landscape Area was established in 1988 and the Natural Park in 1995.
- ⁴ According to the fieldwork conducted in Odemira, the bankruptcy was due to bad management.
- ⁵ According to the company's country manager "Portugal is presently one of the most relevant countries in Driscoll's European strategy, being Europe's main raspberry producer" (*Vida Rural*, 12-02-2018). In

2014, farming units in Odemira accounted for "90% of the national raspberry production" (newspaper *Público*, 30/06/2015). The general manager of Maravilha Farms, a Driscoll's group company (through Reiter Affiliated Companies) with its headquarters in Odemira, stated that "approximately 50% of the raspberries consumed in Europe are produced in Portugal" and among those, "25% are produced by Maravilha Farms" (magazine *Sábado*, 16-09-2017).

- ⁶ CARMEN is an example of a local association established by two former staff members of the Council of Europe.
- ⁷ Focus group organised in November 7, 2017.
- ⁸ Focus group organised in November 7, 2017.
- ⁹ Interviewed in April 16, 2015.
- ¹⁰ Interviewed in April 23, 2015.
- ¹¹ Territorial management agency at NUTS II level.
- ¹² The Association of Beneficiaries of the Mira River and Association of South-western Alentejo Horticulturists, just to name the two most relevant associations.
- ¹³ Interviewed in July 20th, 2018 and also in July 19th, 2019.
- ¹⁴ Dispatch No. 7675/2018 (<https://dre.pt/home/-/dre/115991420/details/maximized>).
- ¹⁵ According to the Odemira's Social Issues Deputy-Mayor, there is a fluctuating seasonal labour contingent of migrants who circulate between agricultural regions following the farming campaigns.
- ¹⁶ Focus group organised in November 7, 2017.
- ¹⁷ Interviewed in November 7, 2017.
- ¹⁸ Interviewed in November 7, 2017.
- ¹⁹ Resolution of the Council of Ministers no. 179/2019 (October 24).
- ²⁰ Newspaper *Público*, November 3 2019 (<https://www.publico.pt/2019/11/03/local/noticia/migrantes-sudoeste-terao-net-casas-continuarao-precarias-1892056>)

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