

“A triple enclave comparison. Differences and similarities in recruitment and working conditions among Romanian farm workers in Cuneo (Italy), Kent (UK) and Lleida (Spain)”

4th International Seminar on Migrations, Agriculture and Food Sustainability: Dynamics, Challenges and Perspectives in the Global Context

Madrid, CSIC, 26-27 January 2017

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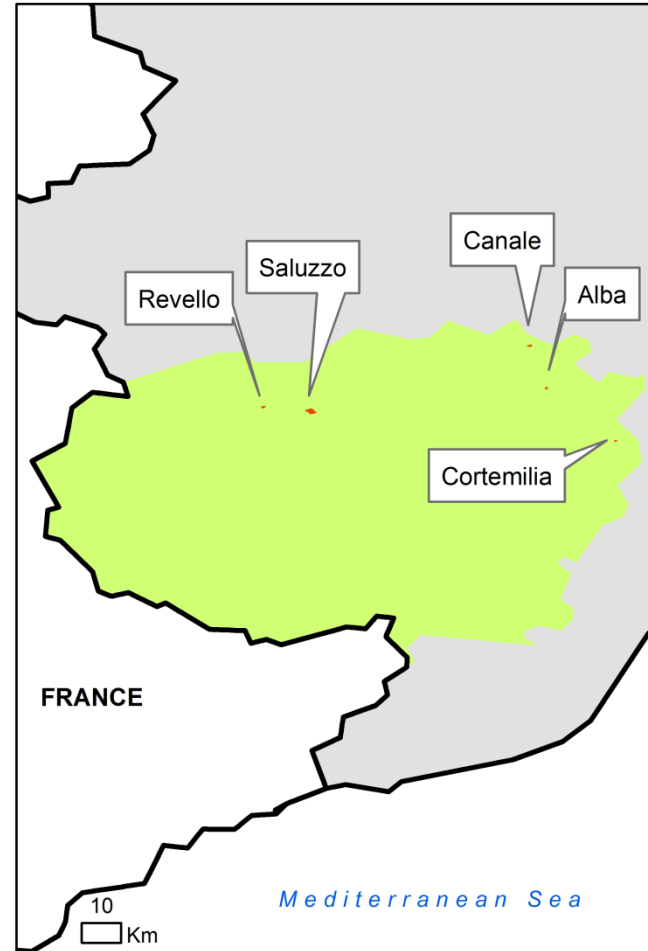
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Introduction

- Methodology: Analysis of interviews conducted in the three enclaves (Cuneo, Lleida, Kent) within the Temper project concerning seasonal work in agriculture.
- Importance of focusing on agricultural enclaves instead of focusing on the national context analysis
- Focus on Romanian agricultural workers: working conditions, recruitment, migratory and working trajectories
- Differences after the 2007 entry of Romania in the European Union, and after policy changes that took place (closure or reduction concerning the use of programmes promoting seasonal work)

The Province of Cuneo (Piedmont Region, Italy)



Agricultural context in the Province of Cuneo

Two specific areas in which the fieldwork has been conducted:

- **Area of Saluzzo:**
 - Third most important area of fruit production in Italy (mainly peaches, apples, kiwi)
 - Agricultural season from June to November without interruption
- **Area of Langhe Roero:**
 - Production of wine and hazelnuts
 - Discontinuous agricultural season, between February and April and between September and November
- High labour demand during season, centre of attraction for both foreign born and Italian labour force
- Lack of functioning national temporary programmes, promoting seasonal agricultural work and circularity

Characteristics of agricultural labour in Cuneo

- Fieldwork: 11 interviews to Romanian farm workers (Cristina Brovia)
- Romanians form the major portion of communitarian foreign workers in the Province of Cuneo. Being EU citizens, they have regular permits to stay in Italy, and others obtained the Italian citizenship
- Two typologies of Romanian agricultural workers according to interviews:
 1. Permanent workers, with long-term stay in Italy and often stable in the province of Cuneo since their first arrival.
 - longer stay, better integration, higher possibility to find jobs with better working conditions and longer period of employment (from seasonal harvest to control, packaging and storage, transformation, sometimes within the same company)
 2. Seasonal circular workers:
 - role of personal networks, allowing to move for short periods without having problems of accommodation (students during summer holidays)
 - private cooperatives, which act as a private intermediary between entrepreneurs and foreign farm workers. Also in case of cooperatives, workers arrive, thanks to private connections with other co-nationals.

Working conditions according to interviewees

- Different opinions concerning the agricultural sector:
 - opportunity to improve living conditions
 - “refuge sector” because of its seasonality, precariousness and bad working conditions
- Seasonal contracts (1 to 6 months), one-year renewable contracts, and in a few cases permanent contracts (long-stay workers)
- “Grey-work”: under-declaration of hours and/or days of work. Especially during seasonal harvest, employers mark between 4-5 and 10-15 working days per month, even if the effective days of work amount to at least 25 per month.
- 7-8 working hours per day for 5-6 working days per week, but during harvest up to 10-12 hours per day
- Average wage on a range of 5/7 Euros per hour
- Importance of personal network at destination in finding a job; informality between workers and employers, with the formers acting as guarantor for new incoming workers

The Province of Lleida (Catalunya, Spain)



Agricultural and legal context in Lleida

- Lleida is one of leading provinces in the production of fresh fruit (pear, apple, peach, cherry, nectarine) in Europe
- Enormous dependency on the availability of workers, especially during harvest period (between June and October) up to around 8-9000 workers per day (Serra, 2015)
- Programme of recruitment of foreign seasonal workers in countries of origin, called *contratación en origen*, mainly used between 2003 and 2009 (permit with maximum duration of 9 months per year)
- In Lleida the programme has been especially implemented by the organization of agricultural businesses *Unió de Pagesos*, with a maximum of 6000 workers in 2007 (Díaz *et al.*, 2013). Since 2009 only 300 persons per year are hired, most of them coming from Colombia (Serra, 2015).

Agricultural and legal context in Lleida (2)

- Main motivations of the progressive decline of the programme:
 - New legal status of Romanians within the EU: they keep coming thanks to previously built personal network or finding jobs through TEAs or employment private agencies of growers associations
 - Economic crisis: due to the availability of unemployed permanent resident immigrants and national workers, the need to hire from third countries has been reduced
- At national level, Romanians received the most permits during the programme, accounting for 63% of the total, followed distantly by workers from Poland, Bulgaria and Colombia
- Fieldwork: 11 interviews to Romanian farm workers (Serra, 2015)
- According to interviews, it is possible to find different “categories” of Romanian agricultural workers in the area of Lleida

“Categories” of Romanian agricultural workers in Lleida

1. Transition from scheme’s induced circularity to spontaneous seasonal circularity
 - Delays in the payment of salaries, fewer number of working hours (4 to 7 hours per day), low salaries (4-5 euros per hour)
 - Informal intermediaries between workers and employers (*empresarios de cuadrillas*)
2. From seasonal circular immigrants to permanent workers (or long-term temporary circular workers)
 - Long-term agricultural workers, often promoted from harvesting to managing and controlling tasks → improvement in working conditions
 - Indefinite temporary/seasonal discontinuous contracts (*contratos fijos-discontinuos*)
3. Permanent immigrants working seasonally in the agricultural sector
 - "New" or "re-integrated" in the agricultural sector (*refuge sector*), thanks to informal social networks and previous personal contacts, as a result of the economic crisis and poor employment opportunities in constructions and services
 - Intra-national or intra-European labour trajectories as temporary workers, both in agricultural or other sectors . Pattern of transnational living.

The Kent County (South East England, UK)



Agricultural and legal context in Kent

- In the UK SAWS scheme (programme for recruitment foreign seasonal workers) active until 2014
- 21 per cent of total workers hired through the SAWS scheme in UK were employed in Kent (Temper internal UK report by Erica Consterdine)
- Since 2008 SAWS fully restricted to Romanian & Bulgarian workers
- So...Romanian workers: change in status from seasonal migrant within the SAWS scheme, to European migrant

Characteristics of agricultural labour in Kent

- Fieldwork: 10 interviews to Romanian workers (Alex Urdea)
- The interviewees in Kent work for a multinational company, S&A, one of the largest independent soft fruit growers in Europe (berries, asparagus). S&A is employing over 1000 seasonal workers each year
- Within the SAWS scheme the period of stay of Romanian farm workers was limited to a maximum of 6 months. Nowadays almost the majority of the interviewees are staying in the UK for longer periods, up to 8-10 months, trying to improve their earnings and savings

“Categories” of agricultural workers in Kent

1. From seasonal circular workers to permanent residents
 - First time as seasonal pickers within SAWS scheme. Circular migration for several years: 6 months UK, 6 months Romania
 - Some of them have been promoted as supervisors or managers becoming permanent and full-time workers
 - Promotion opportunities within the same company changed the migration project, propelling settlement
2. Circular seasonal workers with short-term migration projects
 - Young Romanian workers (between 20 and 40), first arrival since 2014 after the closure of SAWS scheme
 - Importance of personal and familiar network, recruited by co-national managers and workers already in the UK. Recruitment process: online applications and interviews by operators in Romania.
 - Seasonal workers tend to prolong their stay to a higher number of months per year (up to 9-10 months), after their first stay period

Working conditions of Kent's interviewees

- Flexible seasonal contracts:
 - last for up to 12 months
 - Working days and hours are variable. Usually 5-6 days per week and 6-8 hours per day (up to a maximum of 60 hours according to the UK legislation)
 - Rest days are allocated by harvest managers and are at least 2 in a 14 days period.
- Payment is 7.2 pounds per hour (UK National Living Wage at the agriculture sector), but is requested to pick a minimum quota of 20 kilos per hour (or number of trays):
 - A bonus is set for the ones that reach the highest number of kilos per hour allowing workers to earn up to 11-12 pounds per hour
 - If unable to accomplish this minimum target per hour they would get some sanctions [“disciplinaries”] (after getting 3 “disciplinaries” one can be sent back to the country of origin)

A comparison of the three case studies

- Typologies of workers are similar in the three case studies, although in Cuneo there seems to be less seasonal circular workers
- Longer period of stay usually corresponds to better working conditions
- With the closure (or scarce use) of seasonal recruitment programmes (SAWS scheme in UK and *contratacion en origen* in Spain):
 - Decrease in seasonal circular workers, increase of long-term circular or permanent workers and higher level of informality in recruitment
- Working conditions (hours and salaries) are not particularly different if related with cost of living of each country
- Tendency to over-recruitment and decrease working hours per workers (Kent and Lleida) → increasing precariousness
- Exploitation of the most vulnerable harvesting workers: “grey-work” and informality in Cuneo; low salaries, delays in payment, and less working hours with respect to what agreed in Lleida; system of bonus/sanctions and variability of working hours/rest days in Kent

Conclusions

- Increasing liberalization and de-regulation in agricultural sector
- Worsening in working conditions concerning seasonal harvest workers, the ones which are easier to exploit due to their precariousness and vulnerability
- Foreign seasonal workers, despite the closure or the absence of functioning seasonal programmes, are still necessary in the agricultural sector because of their willingness to adjust to bad working conditions
- Cheap manpower is an intrinsic characteristic of the present globalized agricultural production process.



Thank you for your attention

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