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About social exclusion in rural areas in France: the case of elderly

Keywords: rural areas, ageing, social exclusion

Abstract

Rural areas are frequently considered as likely to generate isolation, loneliness and risks of social exclusion for vulnerable people who live there. With investigations in two types of rural areas – fragile rural environments and rural areas subject to periurbanisation, we analyse interactions between the characteristics of the populations and characteristics of territories in the occurrence of social segregation and exclusion processes. The analysis will be based on the situation of pensioners and elderly people. We will show how residential and social trajectories of the people constitute an essential factor of inclusion vs exclusion in these territories.

Introduction

Since many decades, social exclusion becomes not only problem of poor people, who don't have enough to satisfy their primary needs but also problem of people, who don't find a place in social interactions. With dependency problems, this question takes a new sense. The exclusion of elderly is to consider as a situation of nonsocial participation or as non-take up to public services or social and cultural exchanges. Any geographic, climatic and social conditions let the people away from services or amenities. Through the analysis of social interactions, Chicago school and human ecology (Park, Burgess, Mc Kenzie, 1925) allow to understand social exclusion in an innovative way. For the first time, they think together the geographic and social characteristics of an environment and the mentalities or the art of life the people who live there.

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Empirical work in rural environments and about old people, make us test this frame of conceptual references to analyze the place of ageing people in the rural land. We are especially interested with rural environments, which are geographically isolated.

We have recognized three groups of elderly in these areas:

- ageing people who are living here since many decades, and often are born here
- ageing people who are born in this place and then leaved for a job and finally returned here for retirement
- and ageing people, who arrived in this environments just for retirement

In the way of Chicago school and with the concept of neighborhood effects (Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley, 2002), we consider neighborhoods not simply outcomes of individual choices and behavior; but as social ensembles that exert their own causal powers. We try to show how the situations of disadvantage are connected or not with the geographic isolation of any pensioners groups. In this paper, we would like to put in discussion the connection between territory and social exclusion, in the case of rural areas through the perspective of life curse. To understand the social inclusion vs exclusion of elderly in these rural areas, we analyze the consequences of their social and residential mobility and the dynamic or static tendency of the territory.

Immersion and surveys in French rural areas, 2004–2011

Over a period of several years, we conducted research in two types of rural areas.

The isolated rural areas that we studied, through a two-year immersion at different times of the year to take account of seasonality, are geographically distant from urban centres and therefore more distanced from the urbanisation trend than other rural areas. That being said, they are affected by some of the general trends such as the decline of the farming population, a certain ageing of the population and a discreet diversification of the population groups living there. Areas subject to peri-urbanisation, where we conducted interviews include small municipalities (of less than 2,000 inhabitants) located at a distance from an urban centre but which are gradually “de-isolating” owing to the development of transport and the arrival of new populations looking for affordable property. Our remarks will be informed by prior research work and the data resulting from this recent research².

² This prior work provided us with the following resources: observation journals of the public space in four municipalities in Creuse, Ardèche and Savoie; a corpus of 24 interviews with 68- to 95-year-olds in Ardèche and Creuse; a corpus of 12 interviews with people aged over 75 in Savoie, a corpus of ten interviews with elected representatives, 15 interviews with professionals and organisations working in social and medical care for the elderly.

I. About rural environments: the risk of vulnerability and relegation

With the reduction of pauperism, it becomes relevant to consider social exclusion in connection with the concept of vulnerability. Vulnerability contains a predictive dimension. It is supposed to be the situation of people, who can meet risks in their existences. The damages could concern their health, social and economic situation, environments... According to Villagrán de León (2006), we can think vulnerability as predisposition of populations to be affected by a prejudicial event or as their inability to face the damages and disasters, which could arrive. The exposure to these risks depends on the social and environmental contexts in which people live. External difficulties, and coping capacities are connected with the disadvantage and the resources of the social background, the home and the local environment, and the neighborhood³. Perceptions of the “rural world” generally oscillate between the romantic myth of harmonious communities living in idyllic landscapes and off-putting images of deserted wastelands bereft of modern conveniences and home to a few remaining old people with obsolete lifestyles. Nevertheless, the country knew the last half century many evolutions. Landscapes but also people who live here and economic activities are changing and the frontiers between cities and country wear away. In this context, the analysis of exclusion’s and vulnerability’s problematics must be renewed.

1.1. Geographical and social morphology’s

For many decades, the demise of traditional farming methods and the diversification of economic activities sounded the death knell for cultural homogeneity in rural France (Mendras, 1992). “Rural area” has over time become the accepted term for describing the countryside and is used in the plural to signify the diversity of rural morphologies (Gucher, 2014). The territories in which our investigations took place are, for two of them, in the category of “precarious, fragile countries”, aged and sparsely populated. These territories are characterized by a rural area in predominantly agricultural and with a declining low industrial fabric. The other two territories are considered as ‘near cities countries’ and more specifically ‘rural developing of urban sprawl’ and are characterized by a significant residential tenure. Agriculture is still substantial but suffered a strong pressure on land.

In those fragile rural areas, the problems of aging have both individual and collective scope insofar as the course of ageing for individuals is situated on the frame of the weaknesses of the territory and the territorial dynamics are weakening because of the ageing of the population. However, in any rural areas we investigate, the process of urban

³ The P-S-R (*Pressure-State-Response*) model, developed by OCDE is a reference in the measurement of environmental vulnerability. It combines three dimensions: Pressure as extern environmental problems; State as the current state of the environment and Response as the effort of people to cope with these problems (PNUD 2004 in Sirven, 2007).

sprawl brings a demographic renewal which limits the phenomenon of ageing, creates new social issues related to the diversification of populations.

Fragile countries studied are located in isolated, sometimes mountainous areas. They present specific landscapes, with large fields and forest, hills and mountains. The climatic conditions are rough, with a lot of snow in winter. The population is located in little villages but also in isolated hamlets or farms. In these areas, agricultural activity was, during a long time, the single economic activity, low-yield, marked by the logic of self-sufficiency. This activity has been just as much a way of life – understood as “peasant culture” as a professional activity oriented to the production. The depopulation of these regions generally corresponded to the scarcity of farms. Crafts, small trade, some tourist activities and also services become the single supports of economic and social life.

Traditionally, in this context, rural older people are considered as particularly vulnerable to isolation and loneliness. The common view presents rural areas as containing barriers to participate in normal relationships and activities in economic, social and cultural spheres. A double bind between ageing population and territory is often presented: on one hand, ageing people are considered as vulnerable because they don't access with facility to all amenities and services they could need; on the other hand territories are considered as suffering from the scarcity of young, of dynamic population and of economic boosters.

1.2. The specific case of ageing people

Rural areas today are all strongly through unevenly concerned by growth in the elderly population and by old age (Dumont, 2006). These one located on the attractive outskirts of urban clusters are subject to land-related pressure and the influx of urban populations, while isolated rural areas are more concerned about their ageing populations and depopulation, even though they are starting to see the benefits of the marked trend in counter-urbanisation, whereby households are choosing to forgo the city for the countryside without maintaining relations with the urban area (Thomsin, 2001).

The criteria generally used to investigate exclusion of the elderly in rural environments are insufficient economic resources, limited mobility, problematic access to scant services, poor relational networks and a low sense of security (Walsh, O'Shea, Sharf, 2012). But the low level of social relations and commitments is still often interpreted as the result of modest economic means. These recurring research focuses tend to present exclusion as a corollary of poverty. This last remains the key subject of the majority of research, which concentrates on the intrinsic vulnerability of the population⁴ to the detriment of regional specificities. Our research work led us in part to eschew approaches focused on economic aspects and instead analyse interactions and connections between rural areas and life courses and ageing. This approach takes account of the changes cur-

⁴ Ageing and rural poverty, a research report produced by Rural Community Network, Ireland, 2004.

rently taking place in most rural areas in France and ageing processes, which also call for a number of adaptations. It appeared to us that exclusion can be seen just as much from the viewpoint of being denied access to the things that make the lives of others as it can from a symbolic standpoint of a feeling of marginalisation vs. affiliation.

Today, as we said previously, different population groups coexist in rural areas. These last are home to urban populations mainly looking for rural environments close to the urban areas in which they work land accessible for construction and, more generally, an affordable living environment. But they are also home to the retired, who are choosing to live in rural areas either as a return to the place they grew up in or in search of an ideal living environment more conducive to ageing, for economic and social reasons. Some areas are also seeing the arrival of people in socially vulnerable and precarious situations imagining they will find a more welcoming living environment away from the city (Gatien, Popelard, Varnier, 2010). Farmers, long the emblematic and majority population in rural areas, are now more often than not a minority presence, and the socio-cultural models they uphold are coming into contact with urban-based models (Hervieu, Viard, 2001).

Consequently, the rural environment is now home to the development of diverse behavioural sets (Perier-Cornet, 2003), a territory used for different ends by players seeking to fulfil different needs. These situations are likely to generate conflicts in behaviour and interests liable to weaken the local social cohesion underlying the principle of village life. Rural areas are less and less marked by networks of acquaintances and increasingly home to the coexistence of inhabitants with diverse levels of belonging, including permanent inhabitants, native and non-native secondary residents, and tourists with varying degrees of loyalty to the area. Rural areas, then, are faced with deep-seated changes that call into question their ability to produce hospitable social cohesion for people rendered vulnerable by age and for new arrivals.

While the issues of territorialised social relations and local social integration mainly concern newly-settled populations, on a more global scale they affect all the social transactions expressed in these areas. What, then, is the social place for the native or recently-arrived elderly in these shifting contexts? Do long-standing generational roots – sometimes going back over a century – suffice to foster social inclusion at an advanced age? And, inversely, what is the situation in terms of the integration of pensioners having moved to rural areas later in life? Social withdrawal, and even social exclusion, can be seen as resulting from the individual ageing process, but also as a result of the interaction between the people, groups and living environments in question. With that in mind, we will focus as much on the characteristics of rural areas as on those of their populations with a view to pinpointing the influences they exert on each other, which may foster social inclusion and participation and/or exclusion and withdrawal. We consider at first the access to social rights and services, as factors of the breakdown of citizenship. Then, we analyse the weakening of the “moral and social density” of rural areas concerned by demographic reshuffles and look at the issues of withdrawal from and continued presence

in spheres of social activity and the role played by what we call “integrating communities” in the support of these forms of participation. We will then highlight the dynamics of sociability and solidarity networks as a possible component in the protection against exclusion.

1.3. Ageing in “high-pressure” rural areas: social cohesion and integration issues

The characteristic shared by the rural areas that we focused on in our research is, to a varying degree of intensity, the pressure between traditional rural models on social organisations and new, developing models informed by city dwelling. Even if isolated rural environments remain more distant from the strong repopulation trends of areas in the process of peri-urbanisation, the socio-economic issues involved in the survival of territories – subject to ambitious development policies – lead at local level to opposing perspectives between those looking to maintain traditional farming-origin roots and those seeking to transform local structures (Gucher, 2008). Processes of hybridisation of socio-cultural models promoting social harmony in rural areas are underfoot, but the acculturation phenomena they entail do not occur without tensions or clashes.

The rural environment has become a medium for a range of social representations and constructions, bringing into contact groups of players with different and even antagonistic projects. Perrier-Cornet (2003) identifies three models of “the country under pressure”. The model of the *country as resource*, a place of (farming) production, is defended by native active or retired farming populations. The *country as lifestyle* model, upheld mainly by city dwellers, is based on residential and recreational uses of rural space. The *country as nature* model, reflecting the increasingly powerful contemporary aspirations of safeguarding nature and the natural environment, is supported by diverse populations brought together by the same ecology-minded approach.

These models of the “country under pressure” constitute the framework of perceptions and aspirations held by the inhabitants of rural areas. The co-presence in the same territory of population groups with different frames of thought both enriches and weakens the moral and social homogeneity that used to mark the rural world. The givens that formed the cornerstone of the harmonious social practices of the inhabitants of these areas are giving way to questioning and new ways of doing things, upheld by new arrivals or local players – politicians, organisations and so on – mindful of opening up to other forms of social life.

As a consequence, the native elderly are confronted with a fast-paced transformation of their living environment. Attached as a whole to the moral codes of the quasi-unchanging world in which they have led their lives, emblems of a past that refuses to embrace modernity; this population is situated at the epicentre of the tensions. Some of the local players focused on the future and progress describe the rural retired as conservative, as hindrances to territorial development, and see them as clinging to the remnants of an old order perceived as moribund and devoid of a future. The native elderly,

then, are liable to become “strangers in time”. And the policies envisaged appear to seek to bypass this population and deliberately focus on ideal and future populations. For other players, the long-standing presence of the native elderly and their knowledge of local history constitute an advantage from a heritage standpoint. These perceptions are accompanied by the political will to support the elderly in the ageing process. On these perceptions depends the status given to the native elderly and their eventual social disqualification. While there are no doubts as to the social integration of natives, as the numerical balances of the population remain in favour of the autochthonous population, their gradual disqualification can be observed when and where modernisation and development approaches gain the upper hand.

Furthermore, the social integration of individuals arriving late in life can be problematic, particularly in isolated rural areas. Recently arrived pensioners are not seen in the same way. Generally younger, with urban backgrounds and proponents of residential mobility, they are perceived more as individuals with projects and skills that could be of use to the community. They are included in the broad group of new arrivals and appreciated – subject to their resources – on the strength of their contribution to the renewal and revitalisation of rural communities. The social integration of this newly arrived population hinges on two essential conditions: 1) that their personal financial and social resources do not place them under the care of the local community and 2) that their hopes and expectations of the community are commensurate with the possibilities and ambitions of local action.

The authors who are working on neighborhood's effects emphasize the influence of the social network and the importance of local resources on the well-being of residents (Atkinson, Kintrea, 2002; Hulchanski, 2007). However, we understand in the interviews the impact of the life course on the possibility of integration in these rural areas for these population's groups. The accumulation of constraints or breakages of life often leads to a strengthening of vulnerabilities. The weight of accumulated disadvantages influences the capacity of adaptation in the new environment. Each new event modifies and jeopardizes the life course (Wheaton & Reid, 2008). It's a great challenge to distinguish the impact of the new environment and the impact of life's trajectory, and adversity in the past in production of vulnerability in ageing.

Generally speaking, rural areas “under pressure” are (at least transitionally) weakened in terms of social cohesion and lose their capacity to integrate. The impact of these trends on the elderly populations living in these areas differs in line with the depth of their local roots and with local contexts. The hybridisation of ways of life occurring in rural peri-urbanised areas does not always seem to favour the emergence of new, inclusive dynamics replacing older mindsets based on social and cultural homogeneity. The relegation or exclusion of the elderly is always connected to the existence of integrating communities, such as the municipality, possessing the founding virtues of social cohesion.

II. Political ways and human community relationship as bulwarks against social exclusion

The geographic and social morphology of rural environments could be so considered as factors of vulnerability for ageing people and principally for those who are new arrived in these areas. The risk of segregation and loneliness isn't a myth. But our investigations emphasize the role of policies and of social networks as protection for vulnerability in the old age. We investigate the impact of the local environment, the social cohesion and the moral density, the role of the local amenities and policies on the wellbeing of retirees in rural areas. We prove that the weight of this objectives resources must always be considered according to the capacity of the people to use them, depending on their social trajectory and life course (Gucher, 2012). Some conditions are nevertheless necessary to make easier the life of retirees in rural environments and encourage their social inclusion. They depend on the territorial development and on the social history of the places.

2. 1. Social exclusion connected with territorial development and access to rights and services

A dual phenomenon of social relegation can be demonstrated in rural areas. Some areas are marginalised by their isolation, the absence of economic resources and the discontinuation of the (public) services that could maintain the vitality of the area (Berthod-Wurmser et al., 2009). In others, the phenomenon of relegation can be observed with certain population groups living far from the area's main towns (where rural amenities are developed) and those in poor and isolated rural areas. In the rural isolated areas, we observe any factors of social, geographical but also political "defavorisation" (Pampalon, Raymond, 2003). In this circumstances, we suppose a limited citizenship of the people, who live in these territories. Effectively, the access to their general rights seems to be uncertain. Moreover, they suffer under an inequality of treatments (in comparison with urban population) in the difficulties of the old age. This disparity in resources is combined with a nationally uneven offer of services and with mobility issues. The decline in the offer of public services in rural areas began in France in the 1990s and continues in a number of sectors, with a restriction in the number of public hospitals, the diminishing presence of private medical professionals and, more generally, healthcare professions in rural areas. Because of their demographic situation, and of the general orientation of public policies, isolated rural areas- as these in which we investigate- meet this general tendency of suppression of public services. Post offices, banks, small traders and health services are scarcely in these territories. Limited opportunities in terms of mobility and transport also play a role in the marginalisation of the elderly in these rural environments (Berthod-Wusmer et al., op. cit.).

Because of what it entails in the different registers of social relations, the exclusion in rural areas involves the aspect of the breakdown of citizenship resulting from prob-

lems of access to and take-up on the rights and services available to the population as a whole (Warin, 2011).

The relative economic precariousness of the retired in rural areas is partially offset, for natives, by networks of mutual assistance and solidarity. But the same is not necessarily true in areas suffering from economic problems that destabilise the way families work, generate undesired mobility and limit the population's ability for mutual assistance. Moreover, the same situations of economic and social precariousness have a greater negative impact for people having arrived in a rural area late in life and who lack the same solidarity networks.

To fight against these growing shortcomings, some parts of the country are developing innovative initiatives such as multi-sector healthcare centres and remote consultations using new technologies, known as telemedicine. However, these projects depend on the initiative of elected representatives, the engagement of a number of partners and the availability of economic resources, as well as the project engineering resources capable of, say, responding to European calls for projects such as the European Agricultural Fund for Regional Development⁵. Beyond the issues of healthcare access, services to individuals may represent an essential basis for revitalising the residential economy. But the range of support services for the ageing is being diversified mainly in peri-urbanising rural areas, where the development of a social and community-minded economic dynamic aimed at population groups of varying ages and needs is opening up new alternatives as part of the response to ageing issues. In isolated rural areas, the strictly local recruitment of staff, their lack of mobility and their low educational level makes it difficult to implement training and upskilling projects. This situation constitutes an obstacle to keeping ageing individuals at home owing to a lack of the qualified staff and services needed to provide adequate care. The issue is of particular concern for elderly individuals having moved to a rural area late in life, unable to count on supplementary support and assistance from friends and family.

2.2. Municipalities and traditional bodies a consistently efficient integrating forces

In rural areas, inclusion and social participation are clearly dependent on the life courses of the people – those having never moved and those recently arriving – and on the characteristics of the area itself (still relatively closed or fast-changing). This explains why a number of forms of belonging develop in rural areas, engaging the way in which individuals form a part of the place and its history and the ways that they activate these community roots through social relations, as well as their contribution to collective social dynamics (Sencebé, 2011).

⁵ These points issue from research carried out in 2011–2012 for CGT IRES on social action for the retired and the elderly. The research mapped out the development of these initiatives in France in the Creuse, Savoie and Nord *départements*.

Yet our work testifies to the ongoing role of the municipality as an “integrating community” essential to inclusion. An administrative and political reference, the exclusive basis for managing community affairs, and a unifying territorial framework, the municipality stands as a “territory of identity” (Guérin-Pace, 2006) that supports not just symbolic but practical affiliations as well. In isolated rural areas and peri-urbanising rural areas alike, the municipality is the anchor point via which new arrivals “enter the territory”. The municipality’s elected representatives and administrative services – often one or two people in isolated rural areas – respond to needs of affiliation and security. Contact with elected representatives generates a sense of acknowledgement and consideration. For natives, the municipality is the medium of a shared history to which personal life courses are anchored. For the newly arrived and natives alike, relations with municipal bodies form a bulwark against exclusion or isolation. Native and recently arrived are together concerned with local interest (Guimond, Simard, 2011). These results corroborate the work of North American researchers on the investment in so-called “fragile” communities in Bas-Saint-Laurent (Simard, 2007).

Our work has underlined the fact that the social integration of the native population is based on the use of “autochthonous capital” and on logics of self-evidence. The more recently arrived elderly develop inclusion and participation strategies in counterpoint to give form to their social integration and avoid being marginalised or excluded. But for all those involved, it is the requirements of the living environment that dictate the forms taken by social integration (Gucher, 2008). Through socially-responsible commitment, it is the issues of belonging to an integrating community that are at work (Guimond, Simard, 2011)

Social participation in the first few years of retirement involves a range of different commitments. While native individuals through habit, tradition and received notions take part in collective-interest activities and contribute frequently to a range of commitments, recently arrived individuals participate strategically in activities likely to further their integration (Gucher, Laforgue, 2010). This diversity in the commitments of the elderly to social life has also been highlighted by work in Canada (Keating, 2008). Our work contributes to the issue by emphasising that these multiple forms of involvement in sociability and solidarity networks are tributary to the nature of territorial roots, in short, to prior social and residential trajectories.

In rural areas still little influenced by urban life, the participation of the retired is essentially the responsibility of traditional bodies such as municipal councils, events committees, firemen’s clubs, school associations, sports clubs and parishes. The reach of organisations is still often limited to senior clubs. Newcomers and natives are often brought together as part of a scant number of collectives, but which play a considerable role in the needs of community life. In peri-urbanising rural areas, however, a diverse range of local participation resources are developing on the initiative of new arrivals. Here it is elective motives that unify and divide the populations, and the risk of rifts between populations sometimes transpires, with natives involved in traditional bodies and the newly arrived in

organisations. This leads to the expression of power issues, primarily in terms of private concerns but potentially in terms of the day-to-day management of municipal affairs.

The continuity of commitments appears to be fairly standard until an advanced age, but fatigue or health problems sometimes lead to a gradual or sudden withdrawal from the sphere of public commitments. The initial movement generally consists in a withdrawal from formal commitments and the abandonment of the corresponding responsibilities. Most of the time, this does not involve a withdrawal to private and domestic life but a transformation in the ways in which the individual takes part in local life. For example, when the elderly begin to have mobility problems, when fatigue sets in, participating can mean “keeping informed” of the events affecting the life of individuals and the community. These “minimalist” takes on participation of the natives of isolated rural areas nevertheless provide a guarantee of inclusion until a late stage in the ageing process.

But for newly arrived individuals, the process of withdrawal more frequently signifies a threat to social integration if their history of commitment has not been long enough to confer them with an integrated social status. The guarantee of maintained social inclusion, beyond the expression of their social usefulness, can be acquired only after a long period of assimilation efforts. These phenomena sometimes explain why an individual returns to the a place of former residence or seeks to be closer to their family, searching for more firmly established sociability and solidarity resources. But such return are not always possible.

2.3. Family and neighbours, and sociability and solidarity, as support of social participation

The characteristics of some rural areas often lead to the supposition that the people living there are isolated. The factors of geographical isolation and distance, the relief of the land, scattered settlements, as well as low geographical density, are decisive to a type of sociability in which relationships with neighbours and family play a dominant role. Yet while the frequency and forms of social interaction are limited in these geographical contexts, the moral density and social homogeneity to be found there largely offsets the situation for natives. It is far from certain that the same protection is to be found in open and transforming rural areas and for people moving to rural areas late in their life.

The native rural elderly frequently coexist in a limited territory with at least one of their children or grandchildren, and sometime with their brothers and sisters, or cousins, and, for the youngest among them, their parents. The geographical proximity of the members of an extended family plays an organisational role in everyday life, expressed through reciprocal exchanges of services that generate interdependency⁶.

⁶ It is important here to emphasise that these exchanges are linked to the specific nature of the farming milieu, in which a limited social elevation of the younger generations may be observed. The property value of the agricultural land when farming activity stops constitutes an exchange value between parents and children that serves as a basis for ensuing relations.

In some, demographically stable, isolated rural areas, bonds with neighbours and family often overlap, and genealogical connections are coupled with heritage-based roots. The inhabitants of rural areas appear to know each other even before meeting, which brings the most elderly among them a feeling of considerable security. This feeling is temporarily impaired by the arrival of newcomers who are difficult to situate in local history.

Sociabilities are made more inclusive when they involve mutual assistance. Relations with neighbours are emblematic of these everyday two-way interactions and fail to be impacted by the advance of age and situations of dependency. On the contrary, they appear to foster close and long-lasting relationships, as evidenced in unprompted visits to retirement homes.

For retired individuals arriving in rural areas later in life, the family and genealogical roots do not play the same role as the main organisers of sociability as they do for natives (Gucher, 2013). Long-distance social networks develop, requiring an adjustment of expectations and exchanges. Relations are organised on an alternating register, with physical presence during the holidays, for example, and continuous presence via the telephone or another communication medium. In any case, the family cannot contribute to local sociability on a daily basis. That role has to be played by the individual in question, drawing on his or her own resources.

The possibility of diversifying social integration spheres is reduced in isolated rural areas, and multiple belongings develop in a limited number of relational circles. The elective principle is largely inappropriate in this context and may lead to isolation and even exclusion if it remains a central aspect of the relational behaviour of newly arrived retired people. In a fairly general manner, the local sociability of newcomers is driven by procedures of participation and commitment. Bonds are created and tightened by doing things with other people and through concern for and investment in common matters. Similarly, submitting to the requirements of religious and civic rituals that bind the community is a way of showing one's desire to integrate, which then authorises the inception of relationships. But for these sociability dynamics to last, individuals need to demonstrate their determination to be *of the place* and eschew what makes them different in favour of what makes them similar (Sencébé, 2004.). The intersection of networks lends them both considerable integrating power and a heightened capacity for exclusion. Because while the bonds developed therein trigger a system of reciprocal relationships, the absence of relationships with some deprives individuals of links with all.

In peri-urbanising rural areas, the arrival of new, young and less young populations contributes to a diversification of the forms of sociability. Endogenous sociabilities, characterising the populations that live in and do not leave the community, come into contact with the exogenous sociabilities of populations that are simply passing through – tourists, for example (Granié, 2003). In addition, mixed sociabilities also develop, on the part of individuals who live in the community but travel widely, notably for their work. The

newly-arrived retired are at the crossroads of these three forms of sociability. In this context, the relationships chosen by the retired can protect them against isolation but do not provide the same long-term protection as being acknowledged and integrated as “from around here”. It is with the increase in age and decrease in mobility that possibilities of entering the public sphere diminish, that dependence and fragility require recourse to a trusted third party, that the isolation of pensioners arriving in the area late in life becomes manifest, and that the social integration of these last may become problematic.

Conclusion

The work we have carried out over several years has led us toward a multi-dimensional analysis of the social exclusion of the retired in rural areas. Based on analysis of the life courses of the retired and elderly living in these areas, we have also been able to demonstrate the impact that specific rural environments have on exclusion. Having completed our work, we can assert that the social exclusion of the retired in rural areas is a process that results from combinations of the transformations occurring in rural environments and the life changes that people are confronted with as they grow old. The “place” of the retired in rural areas reveals their transformations as much as it sheds light on the adjustment processes in the life courses of the different groups of the retired population living there. Social exclusion here results both from the weakening of integration mechanisms and the weakening of inclusion mechanisms. Integration dynamics are connected to the aptitudes and resources that people can draw on in line with their prior life course and to their more or less developed participation strategies, while inclusion processes are based on the available resources of a given area, both practically and culturally or symbolically. As such, rural areas at this point do not appear to all generate the same levels of exclusion of the elderly. Depending on the current trend in a given territory – on its stable or changing nature – the resources required for the inclusion of people weakened by age or other factors are not evenly available. Similarly, we underline the varying degrees of social integration or inclusion of the retired according to their local roots, i.e. distinguishing between natives and those arriving in the area late in life. Four dimensions of integration and inclusion can be demonstrated: the status⁷ of the retired and elderly, social participation in all its forms, the belonging to a network of social relations, and access to the services required in the support of the elderly. But the question of identity stands as a central component in the social exclusion of the retired, as it is the strength of the identity-based resources provided in rural areas that, by supporting the continuity of the identity of people despite adjustments in practices and meaning arising in old age, constitute the most relevant protection against the atomisation of social relations and the exclusion of the most fragile. So is it possible to consider the objective characteristics of

⁷ In the Weberian sense of honours, consideration and place in the social hierarchy.

territories that can often be seen as sources of fragility – remoteness, ageing, desertification, economic decline – as predictive of the social exclusion of the elderly? Likewise, the geriatric and economic fragility of the elderly are not to be seen as the decisive element in their exclusion. The origin of probable exclusion should, then, be sought in a cultural and heritage-based analysis of rural areas and through a wide-ranging approach to life courses, seen as the construction over the long term of meaningful relations. Ageing in rural areas can thus be understood as an opportunity as much as a risk of increased vulnerability.

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