

## **The involvedness of human mobility in a left behind place: the case of El Hierro island**

El Hierro is a small island (278 km<sup>2</sup>) located in the southwest of the Canary Islands, a Spanish archipelago in the outermost of the European Union. Its small size and its geomorphological and biogeographic characteristics have represented an important limitation to its economic development along the history.

Through history, the volcanic soils, the abrupt orography, the little rainfall, and the scarcity of ground water have occasioned big difficulties for agricultural and livestock practices.

Subsistence has relied on (i) reduced production of grapes, barley, and wheat, (ii) limited goat and sheep farming that had to be annually “moved”, (iii) coastal fishing products, and (iv) fig and cactus trees’ fruits. Therefore, the population growth was very limited, prevailing periods of strong emigration that turned El Hierro island into a Canarian left behind place. After the Spanish civil war, between the forties and eighties of the twentieth century, this out-flow intensified, both to the capitals of the Canary Islands and to Venezuela, giving rise to a migration circuit favouring the remittances investment and the periodical visits of emigrants.

At the end of the century, human mobility turned more complex. To the economic dynamism brought about by the introduction of the tropical pineapple and the revaluation of island wines, a certain amount of labour immigration (mainly composed of foreign-born immigrants and returnees or/and their families) began to arouse. Further, apart from labour immigration, European-born immigrants came to the island attracted by its landscape (some of them looking for a retirement place and other searching for new business activities).

In this regard, the possibilities of an environment of singular beauty and the sustainability measures adopted to preserve the conservation of a large part of the island space have promoted a unique tourist development, with a housing plant with small hotels and businesses linked to the so-called active tourism (diving, parapenting, etc.) boosted, basically, by the foreign population. To this minority flow of immigration has been added the arrival of former emigrants or their descendants, from Cuba and, especially, Venezuela, as well as that of other workers, most of them coming from other Latin America countries and being hired in trade and hospitality businesses. Contrasted with this fact is the emigration of young people from El Hierro, when they begin their higher education. All this creates a complex system of comings and goings that has favoured a rich human mobility, turning the original left-behind island into a place of opportunities.