

# AGEING AT HOME AS PREFERENCE: A CASE STUDY OF OLDER SPANISH POPULATION.

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## Abstract

One of the arguments utilised to support the ageing-in-place policies is that this residential solution is the most desired by older people. This statement is supported by empirical evidences that have interpreted such behaviour, i.e. the fact that older people mostly reside in their own homes, as a “choice”. However, there is another less common approach to elderly living decisions based on the assessment of their stated preferences (Mellander, Florida et al. 2011; Hjälml 2013). That means not putting the focus on whether older people are effectively ageing at home, but it is more about what their ideal preferences are in regard to the best environment to growing older. The aim of this paper is to explore the ideal preferences of Spanish population aged 65 and over about the preferred setting to live in later life, identifying the factors that condition the election of each one of the alternatives (the own home, co-residence in a relative’s home and institutions). The results are analysed regarding to two hypothetical situations: what would be the preferred living situation in case of a healthy ageing and what would it be in case of frailty. The data for the analysis will be drawn from the survey Encuesta de Mayores 2010 (IMSERSO). The empirical analysis utilises a discrete choice model approach by means of different specifications of Logit techniques, namely a Logit Regression Model and a Multinomial Logit Regression Model. The results point out that the ‘ageing at home’ option is the most desired when elderly people foresee a healthy old age. However, the order of preferences changes when they are asked about their desires in case of disability, showing that co-residence at relative’s home remain being a preferred solution to seek care and support in later life for older people in Spain

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## **Background**

In the study of living preferences in later life, researchers have used two main operational strategies. Firstly, to explore the housing choices by analysing the observed residential behaviour of individuals and households, i.e. to opt for a change in dwelling or to remain in the same accommodation, to choose between ownership or tenancy, etc.; as an expression of the preferred option in terms of utility-maximising and functionality. These approaches are based on the *revealed preferences* of individuals, which are the final outcome of the decision-making process and, therefore, are heavily influenced by structural constraints as market conditions and availability of resources (DeJong, Rouwendal et al. 2012). The use of this perspective has been profuse, above all in economics, treating to identify the factors that condition the housing consumption and its consequences over global dynamics (Clark and Dieleman 1996; Mulder 1996; Vander Hart 1998; Tatsiramos 2006; Bonnet, Gobillon et al. 2008; Sabia 2008).

The second strategy of researching housing choices in later life is by means of the *stated preferences*. Under this perspective, the focus is put on the ideal choices that individuals or households declare when they are asked about their intentions when face a hypothetical situations; the place where they would like to grow old, with whom they would like to live in five years, etc. The stated preferences are not observational and they do not imply an authentic decision-making process, but they are informative opinions about the expectations, aspirations or goals that people have that not necessarily are manifested any time. Compared with the revealed preferences, the construction of stated preferences is essentially linked with psychological factors as it is a speculative exercise, where the real conditions that individuals are experiencing have lesser weight than in the case of revealed preferences. Evidently, stated preferences are not exempt of external influences given that the decisions made about imaginary situations are assessed by the consideration of real conditions and previous experiences of individuals.

The importance to investigate the stated preference of older people lies on when the living choices are only explored through the observed residential behaviours, as commonly occurs referring to 'ageing in place', it runs the risk that the resulting picture is biased. Revealed choices are the final result of a decision-making process in which the original preferences are shaped by the limitations that individual have to face to achieve a determined residential situation. Social and financial resources, health status or personal relationships act as constraint factors that shape the baseline desires of individuals, conditioning the possible options, and, therefore, the final behaviour. In some way, stated preferences are the subjective basis of the decision making process, while revealed preferences are the ultimate consequence of this evaluation.

The relevance of older adults' stated living preferences lies on the effect that a mismatch between wishes and reality can have for later-life well-being. To remain living in an unwanted

place, even if it is the own home, can lead to negative outcomes such as isolation, loneliness or frailty. Then, to achieve an accurate understanding of the benefits to live independently in old age and to develop a solid ground for ageing in place as policy practice, it is necessary to consider the aspirations and expectations that older people have about where and with whom they prefer to live, regardless the living situation they are experiencing.

In Spain, as in the rest of Southern Europe, to grow older in a private setting is the most extended living patterns even in the most advanced stages of later life, as is confirmed by the rate of the institutionalised population that is maintained at very low levels (Fernández-Carro 2013). This picture has to be interpreted with caution because, in Spain, remaining in a private setting in old age is not associated with independent living in the same sense as it could be interpreted in the Northern-Western part of the continent. Despite that the picture is gradually changing, relocating in a relative's household to cover care needs is still quite a frequent mechanism of support when an older member of the family cannot be self-reliant for longer. In Spain, the option to remain at home as alternative to institutionalisation has been a ubiquitous practice long before that 'Ageing in Place' became the mainstream concept that it is nowadays. As shown by the 2011 census data, around 96.5% of Spanish elderly aged 65 and over reside in a private setting. In contrast, those that live in collective homes barely reach 3.5%. Institutionalisation thus represents an option for a small minority. Even in the older-old age cohorts, when impairments and support needs are intensified, 88.9% of Spanish population aged 85 and over remained living in a private setting in 2011 .

**Table 1. Standardised rates of population aged 65 and over by type of setting, Spain, 1981-2011 censuses (%).**

	1981	1991	2001	2011
<b>Private homes</b>				
Male	97.8	97.6	98.0	97.2
Female	96.8	96.4	96.8	96.2
Total	97.1	96.8	97.2	96.5
<b>Collective homes</b>				
Male	2.2	2.4	2.0	2.8
Female	3.2	3.6	3.2	3.8
Total	2.9	3.2	2.8	3.5

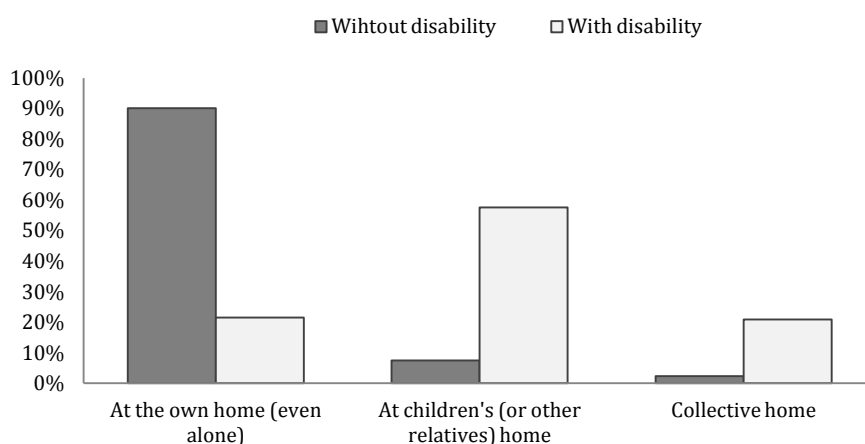
Source: Spanish Censuses 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011, Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE)

The particularities that define ageing-in-place experience in Southern Europe are conditioned by; (1) the way in which the care responsibilities towards the older frail members of the family is understood converts co-residence into an option to provide/receive care often valued by both the older population as and their carers (2) the deficient development of welfare states contribute to the shortage of housing/care alternatives, deriving in an increase of the weight

that families has on the provision of care (3) institutionalisation is still a stigmatised residential solution for both the older population and their families and is associated with those who present severe health problems or without close family networks. This perception is more likely in the oldest-old generations, as they are precisely those who are more exposed to being relocated to collective homes, but they are also likely to provoke a feeling of guilt among adult children for institutionalising their elderly parents.

As Figure 1 shows, the ideal residential setting in case of do not need support is by large the representative mode of independent living. The 90% of older Spanish declare to prefer to reside in the own home during old age years while their physical and cognitive functions are sufficient, even if during this time they would be living alone. The option to live in the children's (or other relative) home solely represent the main choice for the 7.5% of the sample and the relocation in some kind of collective home is selected by a rather reduce proportion of older people (2.3%).

**Figure 1. Preferred setting where to live in old age in case of presence/absence of need of support, 65+ population, Spain, 2010.**



Source: Encuesta de Mayores 2010, IMSERSO.

However, the order of preference changes significantly once they are asked by their preference in case of frailty. Then, the sharing of preferences becomes more equally distributed. In the first place, more than the half of the elderly respondents (55.9%) would prefer to move into the home of their children or other relative in case of support need. These results respond to a mixture of cultural values and social practices that seek to avoid the stigma of institutionalisation for both; the older person and their social networks. The other two alternatives, to live in the own home and to live in some institution, equal their percentages around the 20% of responses. In second place, it is noticeable the increase of institutionalisation as desired option, which in a healthy situation merely represented a

residual percentage. The results reveal that the older Spanish that would choose for a supportive environment reach almost the 80% in a hypothetical situation in which they suffer some kind of disability. Despite the formal aspects of each setting obviously differ in terms of intimacy, autonomy and locus control, the underlying reason that conduce elderly to opt ideally for a supportive environment lies on they view them as the most suitable solution to receive care and support. Then, if the older person would have to deal with the appearance of some impairment, the choice for any kind of supportive environment is preferred to ageing in place.

### **Objectives and research questions**

The main objective of this paper is to explore the preferred settings to live in later life of Spanish older population, identifying the factors that condition the election of each one of the alternatives (the own home, relative's home and institutions). The questions that guide the analysis are: *is ageing in place the preferred solution of Spanish elderly? Would they prefer the same setting considering a health decline?*

The starting hypotheses are:

- i. The stated preferences vary, depending on the situation about which older people are asked. A hypothetical need for care makes elderly start to consider more seriously other types of living arrangements to cover their need for support.
- ii. Co-residence still has a considerable weight in the collective imaginary of older Spanish people as mechanism to seek informal care.

The fact that this paper is focused on the Spanish context is related with a secondary objective, which is to identify different ways in which older people accomplish independent living in Europe and to highlight the specificities of Southern European countries in this respect. EU policy guidelines cannot assume as main premise of ageing in place that the most beneficial solution for older people is to live at home without taking into account country-specific effects of this practice for themselves and for their families. The social and structural idiosyncrasies shared by Southern European countries, which is characterised by familiaristic cultural norms and by the poor development of the welfare state, seems to be forgotten at times in the creation of a common "ageing in place" policy (Genet, Boerma et al. 2012). Achieving effective measures that encourage a healthy and positive experience of ageing in Southern Europe should embrace the major role of relatives' homes as alternative to institutionalisation. Spain is a perfect example of how the housing dilemma of those frail elderly and their families does not only consider two options; ageing at (the own) home vs. institutionalisation, but that they still heavily see co-residence with relatives as a desired supportive environment. To be aware

of these particularities is essential to achieve a more realistic overview about independent living in the Europe.

## **Data and Methods**

The data for the analysis of the stated preferences of older Spanish population come from Encuesta sobre Mayores 2010 (Older Population Survey), provides data to identify the determinants of residential ideal choices in old age. One of the questions introduced in the survey Encuesta de Personas Mayores 2010 (Survey of Older People 2010) interrogated to older Spanish about the preferred place to live during old age, regardless where they are residing in the moment of the survey. This question is repeated two times presenting them two hypothetical situations: what would be this setting in case of do not need any kind of support/care and what would be the setting in case of suffer any disability that impede the normal development of daily routines.

The empirical analysis on the determinants that shape Spanish elderly preferences utilises the discrete choice model approach by means of different specifications of Logit techniques, namely a Logit Regression Model and a Multinomial Logit Regression Model.

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