

# Multiculturalism as an Asset in Senior Care

## A case study in a Swiss nursing home

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### Context / Purpose

The population of Switzerland is aging. The growth rate is still positive only thanks to immigration. Because of the general shrinking workforce and of the growing needs of the Eldercare, the Health sector is dependent on foreign workforce. What do senior patients think of this situation?

### Method

Semi-structured interviews

### Panel

Selected patients of the nursing home **La Fondation Les Baumettes** near Lausanne (French speaking area)

### Issues

- Limited size of the panel
- Induced bias due to old age and cognitive problems of interviewees

### Swiss Demographic Data

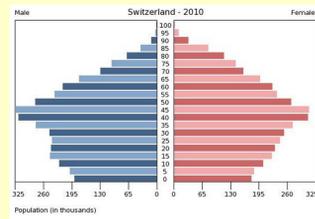


Figure A  
Swiss Population, 2010

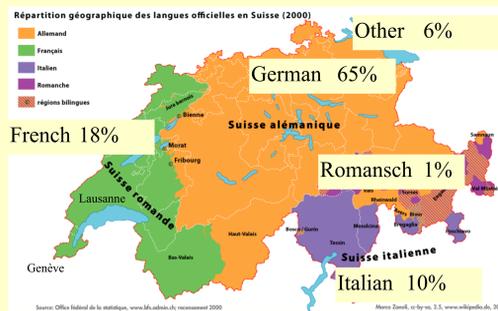


Figure B  
Cultural + language Areas

Population 7.9 million

Growth rate 0.199%

65 years old and over 17%

Dependency rate 27.1%

Life Expectancy male: 78.34 female: 84.16

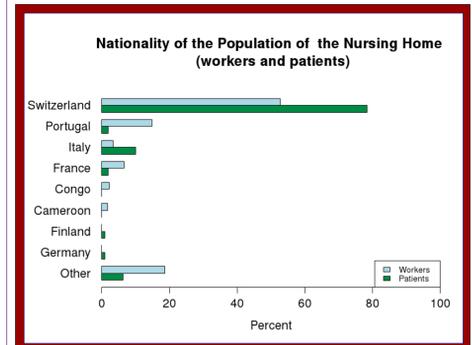
Swiss Nationals ~75%

Foreign Permanent Residents ~25%

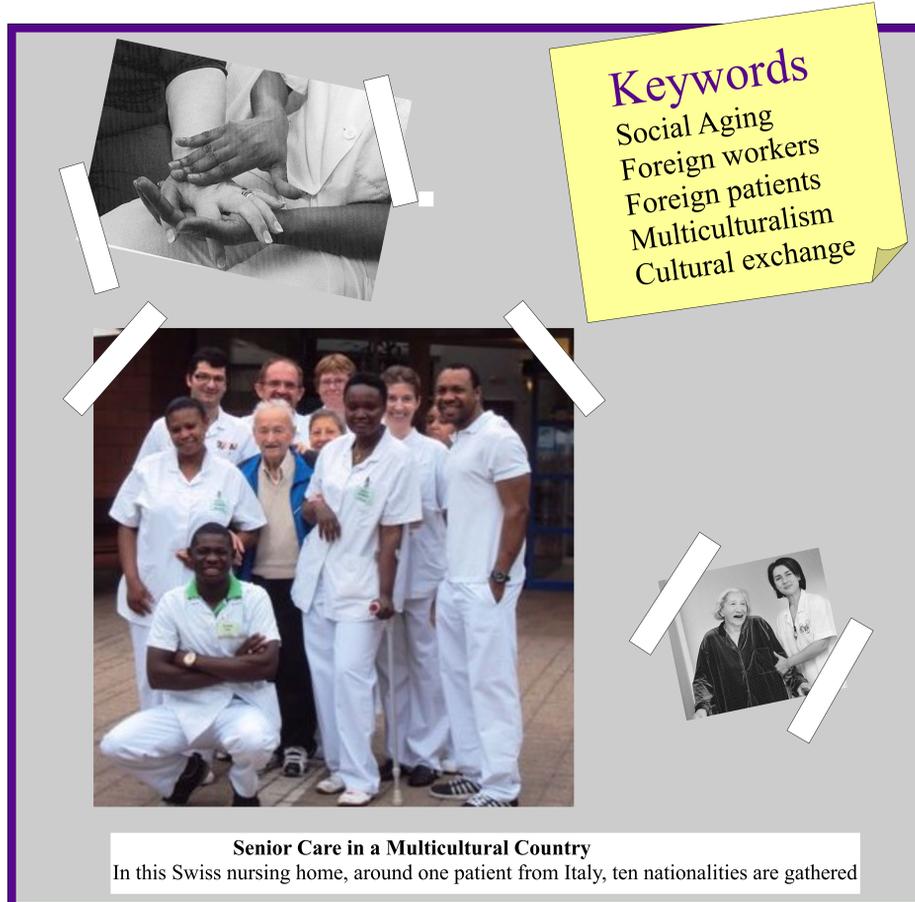
### 1. Description / Data

The population of the nursing home reflects the multicultural face of Switzerland and illustrates the successive flows of immigration

Workers + Patients together =  
37 nationalities!



*Treasuring diversity all together!*



**Keywords**  
Social Aging  
Foreign workers  
Foreign patients  
Multiculturalism  
Cultural exchange

**Senior Care in a Multicultural Country**  
In this Swiss nursing home, around one patient from Italy, ten nationalities are gathered

### 2. Results

Majority of the panel...  
-did not know that care givers were of other nationalities than Swiss, and did not care about this

-was surprised by the number of different nationalities in the nursing home

-was aware of the shrinking of workforce and was feeling grateful towards the foreign caregivers coming to Switzerland to help them

>For the senior patients, skin color, country of origin and nationality do not matter, as long as caregivers speak French and communicate clearly and politely

>Senior patients enjoy discovering other national food, music or habits as a way of *travelling without moving* and/or *escaping boredom and loneliness*

### 4. Conclusion

-Swiss tradition of multiculturalism and open-mindedness is integrated by senior patients and important to them

-Multiculturalism is internalized as the positive norm and perceived by senior patients as the proper behavior to display

-For the senior patients, personality of workers and ability to communicate are more important than nationality

-Cultural exchange is positive for senior patients and enhances everyday life in the nursing home

**Multiculturalism turns out to be an asset in Senior Care**

### 3. Implications / Recommendations

This case study focuses on senior patients' perception of their foreign caregivers.

Further work could be done by interviewing caregivers to analyze how they cope with multiculturalism, and then widen the topic to study the effects of immigration on the workplace in the Swiss Health sector.



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