

THE IMPORTANCE OF FLOATING POPULATION IN RURAL MUNICIPALITIES OF THE INLAND OF IBERIAN PENINSULA. ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION IN CASTILLA Y LEÓN¹

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INTRODUCTION

The demographic losses in rural municipalities are a constant for more than a century and if at the beginning of XX century half of the Spanish population lived there, in the middle of it there was only a third and it is a little more than a tenth of the population at the present, which is a consequence of a settlement model concentrated in the coastlines, the large and medium-sized cities and the main fluvial valleys. Nevertheless, the number of municipalities has hardly decreased, defining wide territories for their low population density, restricted economic power and growing needs of social and healthcare services. Castilla y León is a typical example, because it preserves a low population density and a high municipal fragmentation, with three quarters of the surface occupied by municipalities and with less than one thousand inhabitants, whose survival depends on a «seasonal economy» linked to tourism, which attracts a large floating population.

The analysis of this external input does not present problems when it comes from regulated tourism, but does so in the non-regulated or residential one, which shall be calculated in light of indirect data and surveys. In the non-regulated type, the interior tourism dominates, headed by Spaniards who travel short distances in 90% of the time for many reasons, staying in private accommodations. In Castilla y León, a region which historically is host to many migrants, the significance of these movements is bigger because of both the maintenance of family ties and

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the preservation of former homes when those ties disappear. In addition, there are numerous second dwellings of visitors from other regions and the territory presents a high attractiveness for rural tourism, which holds the first place among the Autonomous Communities.

The importance of the external, demographic and social contribution, as well as its temporary character does not hide a reality defined by its strong ageing population, its natural and negative migratory balances, as well as the limited entity of most of towns. These circumstances, helped by the economic crisis, have motivated the redefinition of the local administrations map in a new model of regional planning, redistributing competencies in order to create economies of scale. However, from a geographic point of view, the problem should not be solved just considering the number of residents per municipality and it must include additional parameters derived from its territorial reality. Among them, the relevance of floating population is crucial to know its real economic viability.

I. THE CONTRIBUTION OF AN INLAND TOURISM CLOSELY RELATED TO THE MIGRATORY EXODUS

The seasonal character of inland tourism responds to holiday periods, but its calendar displays specific features. The monthly variations show increases in March and April -Easter Week- which are above the Spanish average, though they are lower than it during summer and they are very far from the variations recorded in the beach tourism destinations. The festivities also involve an increase in the number of displacements, especially if the closeness of weekend allows extending the stays, exceeding national average rates as well as at Christmas time. Temporal distribution varies depending on whether travellers come from inside or outside the Community, providing outside travellers a more accurate reflection of this seasonal factor. Half of the visitors move for leisure or vacation reasons, travelling short or medium distances, because the majority comes from neighbouring regions or their own Community and they use their own car. These journeys, which are apart of package holidays, are made by couples with high or medium educational level and underage children, they visit homes of relatives and friends for short weekend stays and they can even stay longer when their dwellings are rented.

Although the monthly distribution does not reflect exactly the causes of displacement, its classification and origin enable us to specify the impact that it has in population variations and as well to know when they take place. More than the half of journeys are done at weekends; they increase if the linking of holidays encourages the arrival of visitors from other regions. This concentration is independent of the purpose of the travel, even though it is for cultural tourism, visits to relatives or leisure reasons. By contrast, seasonal holidays attract proportionally less residents in the Community towards towns, but the number of foreign visitors increases. However, from the point of view of the impact in local economies, it is not as important the number of travellers as the time they spend at their chosen destinations. Summertime achieves one third of overnight stays, weekends a quarter, and even more at long weekends, while joining Easter and Christmas holidays we hardly obtain another 10%. Apart from these dates, the stays related to visits or leisure are scarce and they are distributed randomly during the year, having employment or study stays a greater economic impact.

The emigrant population, still linked to its place of origin, has a great value and, whether it lies in other nearby regions or in Castilla y León cities, it takes advantage of rest days to

return home. Madrid is the region with the largest number of residents from Castilla y León and which provides the greatest number of visitors; it is followed by País Vasco and in less quantity by Asturias, Aragón, Galicia, Cantabria, Castilla-La Mancha, Navarra, La Rioja and Extremadura. Proximity explains the large number of short stays of travellers from the area, adding other visitors who have got second homes. Finding out the exact destination of the latter is more problematic, but it appears that the majority of them go to rural areas, because a 69% just go for a walk in the countryside or for enjoying the nature. Three quarters of the visitors choose to stay at family homes (6.4million) or in their own homes (5.7); in both cases their stays are longer (Instituto de Estudios Turísticos, 2008). The figures of regulated tourism, although they are high, are far from the former figures, whether we talk of hotels (1.7) or rented dwellings (0.9). Both include rural tourism partially, in which Castilla y León holds the first place at national level, attracting more than one fifth of those who practise it in Spain. The main points of origin coincide with those of non-regulated tourism, with a stronger participation of Andalusians, Catalans and Valencians. By adding the international tourism, regulated tourism overcame the four million people in 2008.

The predominance of accommodation in private homes is explained by means of the prevalence of visitors, the return of emigrants and, to a greater extent, the residents' spatial mobility, who lead more than half of displacements. The intensity of emigration suffered by Castilla y León towards Madrid, together with the touristic power of Meridional mountain and the abundance of second homes in it explain the high intensity reached by the internal tourism in that region. This attraction is also led by the Merindades of the north of Burgos among the population from Vizcaya, as well as by León in Galicia and Asturias, encouraging tourism in outlying areas. In the intraregional tourism, the demographic weight of urban centres marks the differences, as a direct result of the attraction in previous stages of emigrants from the same province.

In conclusion, this is a tourism related to the continued existence of kinship ties and the possibility of free accommodation, including in the second case both family dwellings and second homes of former migrants or tourists who were born outside the Community, demonstrating the importance that rural exodus maintains in actual dynamics of the small municipalities, generating flows that revive the local economy.

II. THE ABUNDANT AVAILABILITY OF DWELLINGS IN RURAL AREAS

The inland tourism masks the role played by rural centres as receiving centres, by providing data at provincial and regional level, but not at municipal one. It must be analysed both the amount of available housing stock and its occupancy, because the accommodations are predominant. At municipal level, the *Real Estate Cadastre* provides the information, although it does not indicate the main or second character of the residence, whereas it does the *Estimate of Housing Stock* at provincial level. A combination of all the parameters is found in the *Population and Housing Census*, which entails the problem of its ten-year periodicity.

From 2000 to 2010, there is a considerable increase in the number of dwelling building permits, declining rapidly since 2008 due to housing crisis. Single-family homes were 39%, a large proportion of these are located in rural or peri-urban areas, and consequently the spatial distribution of residents and residences was far from coinciding. Cities and their peripheries

concentrated two thirds of the regional population but only half of the dwellings, due to the smaller size of family units, the significance of the unoccupied homes in villages and also the abundant presence of second homes in them; if the housing stock grew 19%, second homes reached 26%. Its relative importance is higher in *Ávila*, *León*, *Segovia* and *Zamora*, giving the first place in absolute figures to *Ávila*, *Burgos* and *León*. These changes consolidated the dominant position that was already occupied by *Ávila*, with a modern housing stock, in a better state than the other provinces' and whose rise was due to the proliferation of urbanizations used as second homes. Without reaching these limits, the housing stock evolution in *Burgos*, *Segovia* and *Soria* presents very similar trends and, together with *Ávila*, these provinces have got the higher number of visitors coming from outside the Community. The influx of Madrid extends to the whole south-eastern sector of *Castilla y León*, as well as the influence of *País Vasco* to the north of *Burgos*. *Zamora* has also experienced a boom in this regard, due to the maintenance of family homes by emigrants, as well as many of them have bought a new house, to which will be added other tourists of diverse origin (Ministerio de Fomento, 2010).

Real State Cadastre estimates the availability of accommodations in private homes, comparing the population with the housing stock capacity. The occupancy level of dwellings shows differences between urban and rural areas; market towns are very important in these rural areas, where the medium size of families is higher. Differentiating among the total number of dwellings and the owner-occupied housing is fundamental, considering as well its level of habitability, which is in inverse proportion to the demographic loss. Regions with lower population density and areas with many new residential developments, present very low occupancy rates, due to they increase their housing stock with dwellings of non-registered owners. Those with lower density are mostly very small centres that hardly receive seasonal visitors, whereas the floating population constitutes one of the bases of its economy in the regions with new residential developments. This information is combined with the inhabitants/dwelling relation, which is less than the national average in *Castilla y León*. There are several reasons and they go beyond the low population density, including the high number of empty new construction homes, especially in *Ávila* and *Soria*. A quarter of the occupied dwellings have a single resident, generally over fifty years old. This situation is more extreme in rural areas and it reflects the large number of underutilised dwellings for the greater part of the year, though the relatives use them during holidays and weekends.

After these houses belonging to families, second homes are the most common ones used by tourists, representing 41% of the existing homes in rural areas; this proportion is even larger in less important rural villages. Municipalities with less than ten thousand inhabitants, with a third of the regional population, bring together nearly two thirds of the total of these dwellings, which in many cases are predominant, because by losing population and occupation in main housings, the proliferation of second homes has increased their relative importance. Although the relevance of second homes is evident, figures must be clarified by means of other factors, as the proportion of empty homes and dilapidated housings; this proportion is higher in rural areas except in more dynamic market towns. After doing these corrections, the provincial distribution of second rural housing and its capacity to accommodate floating population shows the attraction potential of *Ávila* and *Burgos*. The difference with the rest of provinces is evident; second homes exceed half of the housing stock only in some rural municipalities of *Segovia* and *Soria*.

The combination of the sources of information indicated let us see the importance of second homes in areas of higher tourist attraction, outstanding the southern belt of Ávila and Segovia, extending to municipalities of Soria, as well as the Merindades of Burgos, where these dwellings equal or outnumber the primary residences. On each one of the regions mentioned, the service centres gather the bulk of the maximum available occupancy, while in relative terms, these are the lowest population centres where the impact of this temporary contribution gains significance. The *Survey of Local Infrastructure and Equipment (EIEL)* confirms the revitalization of the rural world in the summer, that also affects to weekend visitors in a lesser extent throughout the year, multiplying several times the number of people registered in the census in the highest tourist influx.

III. THE UNEQUAL SPATIAL INCIDENCE OF POPULATION CEILINGS

The connected population, according to the *Population Census*, includes displacements caused by work, studies and availability of second homes, this last reason has a greater impact in the demographic burden of rural municipalities. It is accompanied by the regulated tourism and the accommodation in other dwellings, also taken into account. These visitors add an additional burden in provision of services and use of infrastructures, although they also create earnings for the local economy. There in lies the interest in quantifying the total floating population and the reasons for their presence, distinguishing them by their origin and scale, because the more their origin is concentered, higher will be the quantity, by including both inter-provincial and intermunicipal displacements.

The connected population reached one million people in 2001 and the quotient between total and resident population was 139%, the second largest in Spain after Cantabria, highlighting the role of Madrid and País Vasco for the same reasons. The studies and work do not produce considerable outflows from other regions, though a great number of visitors from Castilla y León live in municipalities outside their residence place for work reasons (40% of the whole floating population). Dismissing intra-provincial displacements, the count is reduced by half, demonstrating the importance of short-haul journeys, which are rising due to the expansion of peri-urban belts. By contrast, the connection of second homes involves longer distances among provinces of the Community as well as outside it. At local level, the *Census* confirms the plan already described using other available sources and it highlights the importance of the outflows to Ávila and Segovia, as well as the role played in them by emigrants from Castilla y León, who live in Madrid, and those emigrating from País Vasco to Burgos, from Asturias to León or from Aragón to Soria. Geographical proximity explains the origin places of the connected population, bearing in mind that the enormous demographic weight of Madrid reduces, in relative terms, the presence of other visitors. Castilla y León is the main destination for travellers coming from the Spanish capital, but it also holds the first place in extra-regional journeys by visitors from Asturias, Cantabria or La Rioja, while travellers from Galicia and País Vasco rank the second place (FAMILITUR, 2010).

The phenomenon of connection was already visible in rural municipalities in 1981, finding the highest differences between habitual and temporary residents in the least populated villages of Ávila, Burgos, Segovia and Soria. The exogenous contribution, just considering leisure journeys, has increased a quarter during the last decade. The inaccuracy of the survey

answers lets one suspect that a large proportion of displacements declared «family visits» are also related to holiday reasons. According to the *EIEL* (2010), the population added during the summer reached 1.2 million people, beating both the resident population in this type of municipalities (0.9) and the population that received the entire Community in 2001. The least populous villages have seen the greatest benefit in relative terms, tripling or even quadrupling their inhabitants. The figures coincide with those provided by the sources related to internal tourism, availability of housing and evolution of connected population. These quantities rise when you analyse specific centres. The Nomenclator has been consulted for establishing with greater certitude the rural areas and for including entities, which despite being classified as urban, they do not have this character. Except in peri-urban belts, there is a rural population with over 922,082 residents, distributed in 5,145 centres and they increase a 129% during its seasonal peak. As it was showed in the municipal analysis, smaller municipalities present a higher increase, because they suffer an extreme ageing, which implies the predominance of isolated individuals or old couples, and it means that family visits tripling the resident population, and even quintupling it in entities with less than 100 inhabitants.

The main destinations of floating population, in absolute terms, are service centres located in Tiétar and Alberche Valleys (Ávila), whose residents were 61,943 in 2010, but they reached 269,275 inhabitants during the summer, increasing by 4.3 times. This rate reaches 3.2 (from 24,753 to 79,322) in the southern belt of Segovia and Sierra de Guadarrama, and 2.7 (from 26,125 to 71,016) in Merindades. Other market towns, but with a more scatter distribution, also triple their residents (Valderas in León and Riaza in Segovia) or double them easily (Burgo de Osmá, in Soria), also highlighting some smaller municipalities with in the North of Palencia (Barruelo de Santullán), the riversides of León (Valencia de Don Juan) and the northwest of Zamora (Puebla de Sanabria and Galende, among others). In short, municipalities of intermediate size with higher population density, with between 2,000 and 5,000 inhabitants, or those less populated that, without reaching the thousand, have to fulfil similar functions because they are located in low-density population areas.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The rural areas of Castilla y León have been marked by a continuous population decrease for more than half a century, which first experienced an intense exodus towards cities inside and outside the Community and, nowadays follows a negative natural dynamics, due to the high ageing of their residents. The statistics of the *Municipal Register of Inhabitants* give a very negative image, but they also mask other realities. There is a high floating population who visits relatives each summer or at weekends and retains its old residence or has built a new one. Visitors of other Autonomous Communities join to it; duplicating easily their number of inhabitants, boosting their economy and allowing both the support of business still remaining and the proliferation of new ones. But the population growth generates a further demand for services and it requires the maintenance or creation of infrastructures. The delimitation of a new map of Local Administration must take account of this reality, as well as avoiding using as the only variable the number of residents and also considering the floating population for initiating any governance and regional planning policy, which implies a redistribution of the location of equipment and service centres.