BEYOND TOURISM: EUROPEAN RESIDENTIAL MOBILITY AND NEW POPULATION CENTRES

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The process of modernisation that began on Spain's Mediterranean coast in the 1960s is a paradigmatic example of urban planning and tourism development focused on the production of urban land demanded by both the national and international real estate markets. The evolution from farming and fishing societies to societies whose economic development is based on the activities related to the property market, has concurred with new social processes, such as the growth of international residential tourism, and intra-European retirement migration from central and northern Europe towards the Mediterranean region.

Such movements of people are linked to the appearance of lifestyles and residential strategies associated with leisure functions, and life projects more closely related to the search for self-realisation, and a better (and intangible) quality of life, than to the typical activities of the work context. The different types of residential mobility we are referring to are not easily categorised. As well as the traditional tourists that spend their holidays in some town in the Mediterranean area, and make use of a private dwelling, the presence of other groups of tourists has become more frequent in the last few decades. They are more heterogeneous, have very diverse mobility patterns, and create different bonds with the host society.

In Spain's Mediterranean region, this framework of new mobility forms and multi-residential lifestyles has been incorporated into an urbanisation process based on the construction of second homes on a massive scale in environments with potential tourist appeal. The geographical manifestation of these dynamics has produced new urban enclaves detached from the traditional urban centres. The distance between such settings alludes to both the irregular distribution of social groups on the territory, and the lack of relationship between these groups. We are referring specifically to the growth in the number of housing states (*urbanizaciones*, in Spanish) separate from the traditional town centres where an unusual number of northern European citizens reside.

Our first goal is to approach the matter from a quantitative perspective that may allow us to identify the extent of these trends towards the concentration of people with distinct socio-demographic characteristics, in housing estates socially and spatially away from the

traditional urban centres on Spain's Mediterranean coast. Second, we aim to understand, from a qualitative perspective, the circumstances of the European citizens living in those *urbanizaciones*. Especially, we try to comprehend the social problems that the residents face due to their distance from the Spanish society.

The study was designed using a methodological approach able to integrate geographical and social aspects. The provinces located on the Mediterranean coast have 44.75% of the second homes registered in Spain. The figure helps us to understand the link between these properties and the urban activity associated with the traditional 'sun and sand' tourist destinations. Consequently, we decided to analyse the towns within these 11 provinces. After identifying the most evident processes of concentration of foreign population in the Alicante province, we analysed again the demographical data. Our aim was to identify those towns where the processes of socio-spatial separation between the traditional urban centre and the new housing estates with a high concentration of foreign residents have become more intense. Once we identified 17 towns in the Alicante province, we decided to focus on the town where such dynamics are most powerful: San Fulgencio. In doing so, we wanted to work with an «extreme case». San Fulgencio's case has a remarkable analytical value in that it reflects in a most intense and evident way the trends towards the concentration of northern European residents in new urban enclaves, spatially separated from the traditional urban centres. Then we began to collect qualitative data. We conducted fieldwork between April and June 2008. We came into contact with the town's residents, and held informal conversations with them. Furthermore, we carried out 20 in-depth interviews that lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and were conducted with a guided that included questions about the interviewees' opinion on economic, socio-cultural, and political issues.

Through the analysis of quantitative data from Spain's Office for National Statistics we can appreciate how the convergence of the tourism function of the second homes with the migration of northern European retirees to coastal areas in southern Spain has generated configurations of the territory, in which new forms of geographical and social distance can be identified. The protagonists of these new configurations are northern European citizens that tend to become 'encapsulated' in housing estates located on the towns' periphery. The empirical identification of this phenomenon, and the study of its basic characteristics are explained in the Analysis section of the article. We have identified trends towards the development of apparent parallel societies with their own cultural features as a result of the concentration of people of the same nationality in a space away from other areas where most of the residents are Spaniards. We have also identified the appearance of lifestyles guided by leisure rather than by the attempt to enter the labour market. These results are coherent with the findings of other studies that have researched the lifestyles of residential (non-labour) migrants in the Mediterranean regions.

The qualitative research explains how British nationals that decide to purchase a property in these areas seek to go back to the local human scale in a sunny location. In a way, they are trying to recreate a pleasant rural community life on the Mediterranean.

Their common culture and similar socio-demographic profile facilitate the development of a framework of shared expectations about the relationships in the neighbourhood. The fact that the housing estate is geographically 'isolated' reinforces the tendency towards homogeneity. Our analysis shows the discontent of foreign residents arising from the

problems of the housing estates. The intensification of such state of affairs may lead to conflicts of interests because the residents of these housing estates demand services that often differ from those demanded by the residents of the traditional urban centre. In other words, they are pleased with the social composition of their new environment but they admit their disappointment about the infrastructures and facilities available in the housing estate. Thus, the social conglomerate that shapes the housing estate tends to uniformity: a national minority whose common denominator is a shared cultural tradition establishes ties that become increasingly stronger, and later realises that they share the same economic and political interests.

The wishes of young families encounter more difficulties: the troubles associated with the low quality of the urban infrastructures are aggravated by the problems linked to the lack of adaptation to the Spanish social life. Retirees can to a certain extent avoid such problems, but that is not the case of the active population and the teenagers. Withdrawing into one's own community to the point of creating something resembling a closed social system is an acceptable option for retirees, as long as their ties with Spanish institutions are not cut, particularly those with health care centres. However, that does not seem to be a satisfactory alternative for younger residents.

The irregular residential logic of the protagonists of these flows of population, between tourism and residential migrations, leads to confusion. The residents of the housing estates follow mobility patterns that make public management more difficult. This situation gives rise to dissatisfaction among northern European residents, who perceive contradictions between their requirements, and the means that the local council provides to meet them.

To avoid the situation becoming unsustainable, we suggest reinforcing the policies of information about the rights and duties of European citizens that decide to live in Spain. Although it is rather naïve to think that future urban planning will be rationally developed, and will try to join the housing estates and the traditional urban centre, we believe it is necessary to organise public transport services at a local level, and also between towns, to improve the connection between both spaces. It is also advisable to support those associations that include Spanish and foreign citizens, as well as to encourage inclusive cultural initiatives, that is, initiatives not exclusively aimed at one of these groups.