

THE DIVERSITY OF THE BASQUE MOUNTAIN AREA. A TYPOLOGY STUDY FOR TERRITORIAL POLICIES

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I. INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVES

The starting point is based on three basic suppositions (specificity of the mountain area, territory-specific policies and internal diversity) which shape the objectives of this article. The key objectives, which are primarily methodological, consist in defining a typology for mountain areas, analysing the characteristics that are specific to each type of area and establishing a diagnosis to help implement type-specific policies and measures. Due to the fact that such policies tend to centre on the promotion of sustainable development, when selecting and analysing type delimitation criteria we have considered environmental, economic, social and territorial related aspects, with particular emphasise on the latter three. The Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (CAPV) was selected for the application of the methodological process. Despite its small surface area (7,234 km²), the Basque region has two significant features which makes it an excellent territorial test bench for the objectives proposed. Firstly, it is a predominantly mountainous area, with the Cantabrian Cordillera in the east and the Pyrenees to the west. Based on the delimitation established under the next heading, this mountain area covers 6,093 km², which is nothing less than 85% of the Basque territory. It extends across the Atlantic and the Mediterranean watersheds, a situation which gives rise to some extremely different natural, landscape and organisational environments. The Mediterranean watershed represents a mountainous area which is under-populated, in decline and rural, whilst having some outstanding environmental values. In contrast, the Atlantic watershed is far more urbanised and industrialised, reflecting the after-effects of a highly advanced economic, landscape and social transformation. When analysed at a more detailed scale, as will now go on to see, some new differentiated areas emerge.

II. A DELIMITATION PROPOSAL FOR THE BASQUE MOUNTAIN AREA

The geographical delimitation of the Basque mountain area is based on two precedents which set out certain criteria which were considered appropriate for the objectives of this work. Firstly, the criteria established in Directive 75/268 on Mountain Agriculture and Less Favoured Areas and which have been included in article 2 of Spanish Act 25/1982 on Mountain Agriculture. In the Basque Country, 187 municipalities have been declared to be mountain agriculture zones, accounting for 85% of the total surface area. Secondly, the criteria provided by CIMA (Spanish Mountain Research Group) which adopted the previous delimitation whilst introducing various amendments directed at excluding those municipalities not meeting the mountain characteristics. The following criteria served to exclude some of the ZAM municipalities (mountain agriculture zones) from the list of mountain zones:

- a) Predominantly urban municipality, coastal municipality or both together.
- b) Provincial capital
- c) Medium towns or small industrial centres located in a valley protected by mountains but with scarcely any mountainous areas within the municipality.

Based on these premises, the proposal presented in this work gives yet more shape to the delimitation by making the CIMA group criteria yet more explicit and operative. The urban nature of the municipalities as an exclusion criterion was applied in two ways: firstly the municipalities in the metropolitan areas of Bilbao and San Sebastian were excluded and, secondly, those medium towns and small industrial towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants in 2007 were also excluded. The resulting map groups together 152 municipalities which account for a surface area of 4,543.6 km², equivalent to 64% of the Basque area. These mountain municipalities are home to 277,197 inhabitants, scarcely 13% of the Basque population.

III. TYPOLOGY OF THE MOUNTAIN MUNICIPALITIES IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY

The presence of municipalities with differing social and economic characteristics makes it difficult to study the Basque Mountain area as a complete unit. After confirming the existence of such differences it was considered advisable to seek a municipality typology to reclassify the municipalities into groups having the most similar characteristics, which would then facilitate the establishment of the most adequate type-specific development policies. A series of variables were selected for the cluster analysis: population density, number of inhabitants, growth rate, ageing index, male to female ratio, population percentage working in agriculture, contribution of the industrial sector to the municipal GAV, contribution of the services sector to the municipal GAV, number of industrial establishments, percentage of cultivated land, percentage of forest land, percentage of built-up land, percentage of second homes. The subsequent analysis conducted identified three groups or clusters of municipalities having similar characteristics in the Basque Mountain Area.

1st Cluster: The Sub-Atlantic and Sub-Mediterranean Mountain Area

This first cluster comprises 16 municipalities, with a surface area of 1,261.4 km² (27.8% of the area classified as pertaining to the Mountain Area) and a resident population of 11,521 inhabitants. The cluster characteristics are as follows: scarcely populated areas with an extremely low average density (9.13 inhabitants/km²), although the majority of the municipalities are currently gaining inhabitants, as a result of the counter-urbanisation process. Despite this, there has been little improvement in their poor demographic structures which still show gender and age imbalances. Farming activities still occupy pride of place in the economies of these municipalities, which boast the highest percentage of farm land of the three groups. A large percentage of the working population works and resides in the same municipality. These are the least industrialised and least urbanised municipalities, with extremely low percentages of residential land and land for economic, industrial and tertiary activities. In contrast, they stand out for their natural values and environmental quality; there is a considerable spread of second homes.

2nd Cluster: The Atlantic Mountain Area

With 93 municipalities grouped together, this is the largest of the three clusters. It covers a surface area of 2,382 km² accounting for 52.5% of the area classified as pertaining to the mountain area with a resident population of more than 86,000 inhabitants. It is the most representative part of the Mountain Area on the Basque Country Atlantic watershed and, based on statistical criteria, the majority of the municipalities included within this group are strictly rural. Its average density continues to be low (36.38 inhab/km²) although it is higher than the first group. This cluster is experiencing widespread growth due to positive migratory flows of people from within the region, whilst its demographic structures are not too deteriorated. Farming activity, although above the average for Spain, is relatively low. These are the municipalities that are less dedicated to crops and have a high percentage of woodland, with considerable reforestation. The almost nonexistent development of tertiary activities forces a considerable number of people to commute each day to other municipalities to work. Industry is becoming more important. The areas conserve considerable natural and landscape values. In general second homes have a limited presence.

3rd cluster: The Industrialised Mountain Area

The third cluster differs considerably from the previous two, particular from the first one: as a result of their demographic size, the majority of the municipalities are considered to be urban; population densities are high; recent growth is low; balanced demographic structures; these are highly industrialised municipalities; they have shortcomings in the services sector; farming activity is almost marginal; except for a few exceptions, crop land area is minimal and the percentage of woodland is less than for cluster 2; intense land artificialisation for residential uses, economic activities and infrastructures; limited presence of natural and protected spaces; finally, this cluster has the lowest percentage of second homes.

IV. GUIDELINES & CONCLUSIONS

In order to achieve the most appropriate measures for the municipalities included within the 1st cluster, territorial policies and the resultant management plans should centre on the following guidelines:

- a) Actions must be focussed on maintaining a “living mountain area”, by attracting human capital through the settlement of a young population.
- b) Promotion of economic diversification based on environmental resources, although not exclusively.
- c) Establishment of decisive and binding measures for the protection of natural or only slightly artificialised areas (Hamilton, 2006).
- d) Conservation of crop lands, particularly those of the greatest agrological value, accompanied by effective incentives for environmentally respectful farming practices.
- e) Measures favouring the installation of small-scale industries, located in pre-existing settlements.
- f) Control of the consequences of counter-urbanization to ensure that the new residential and economic uses are adapted to the territory carrying capacity.
- g) Actions to decelerate the spread of second homes and to promote permanent housing particularly for those whose workplace is located in the same mountain area.

The objectives for the sustainable development of the municipalities in the 2nd cluster can be summarised as follows:

- a) Halt work-related spatial mobility, by promoting tertiarization.
- b) Control of urbanisation and industrialisation with sustainable management guidelines for the territory.
- c) Specific avoidance of the invasion of the countryside for scattered or low density residential uses.
- d) Dynamic conservation of the farm-house landscape.
- e) Promotion of forestry diversification and forestry practices which are less harmful to the environment and landscape.

The pivotal points for the territorial policies and measures directed at the 3rd cluster are largely the same as those that would be applied to any urban area:

- a) Strong control on urban expansion, with regard to residential development and economic activity; this requires supra-municipal planning.
- b) Direct growth inwards towards the heart of the existing urban centres through reconversion and rehabilitation measures.
- c) Promotion of economic diversification through the development of tertiary activities.
- d) Industrial policies that stimulate innovation and competitiveness within the integrated territorial planning framework.
- e) Protection measures for non-urbanised areas and the recovery of deteriorated areas.

As a general conclusion, we would highlight the fact that, even in an area as small as the Basque Country, three differentiated mountain area clusters have been detected, each of

which requires type-specific attention when establishing territorial policies and action and management plans. The guidelines designed for each group of municipalities are fundamentally different, specifically directed at the character, potentialities and deficiencies of each particular cluster. Furthermore, the methodology used is open and applicable to other mountain areas: Open in the sense that it offers the possibility of being modulated to suit different spatial scales. Each scale would require an adequate degree of detail for the typology delimitation, and for the analysis, diagnosis, guidelines and, where appropriate, more specific action proposals. It is also considered to be open due to the fact that, as each extensive mountain area has its own specific characteristics in its territorial environment as a whole and also in its internal geographic sub-areas, from a methodological point of view, a particular system of criteria is called for in order to define the delimitation and analysis indicators. This system would moreover be dependent not only on the innate uniqueness of each area but also on the purpose and application objectives required by the research in question.

