

RURAL DISADVANTAGE: A PROPOSAL FOR ITS MEASUREMENT APPLIED TO THE TERRITORIAL REALITY OF CASTILLA-LA MANCHA

Óscar Serrano Gil

Ana Eulalia Aparicio Guerrero

Department of Geography and Territorial Planning. University of Castilla-La Mancha
Oscar.Serrano@uclm.es, Ana.Aparicio@uclm.es

In recent decades, the issues related to the environmental quality, the access to resources, well-being and inequalities have occupied an important part of researches in human geography. Some authors have considered the study of the spatial aspects of human well-being as one of the fundamental objectives of this discipline. This interest, framed in a general feeling of frustration because of the lack of actions designed to put the technological development at the service of overcoming the socio-economic imbalances, unfair situations in the world, and the progressive environmental deterioration, has materialized in several geographical works that raise these issues at different scales (Coates, Johnston and Knox, 1977, Cox, 1979, Smith, 1977, 1979).

The Spanish rural areas and, of course, those of Castilla-La Mancha, like the rest of the European ones in general, are characterized by a remarkable differentiation (Cuadrado-Roura, Yserte and Mancha, 1999) that provides an exceptional range of situations, comprising from the periurban rural areas fully integrated in the development processes and directly and immediately linked to the urban impulses, to the residual rural sectors with a small population, with high rates of aging, a high degree of social destructuring and clear agrarian profile of pure subsistence. Between both extremes there is a set of heterogeneous situations, with a differentiated regional and local distribution, which presents economic, demographic, social, territorial integration and development situations very different from each other. In any case, the rural development, born under the new potential of these spaces due to the crisis of the rural world and especially to agricultural and livestock activities, has become the main engine of action for the most disadvantaged spaces; these spaces have gone from the agrarianism of some natural regions to the commitment to rural development measures (Pillet Capdepón, 2001), which have recently introduced new investments and improvements in the affected municipalities (Gozálvez Pérez, 2001). However, the rural development, through the associated set of measures,

plans and programs and with good administrative, financial and business management has achieved a solid development in some counties and municipalities of the region, but this has not been the fulminating revulsive for other disadvantaged regions to get out of backwardness, such as Sierra de Ayllón, Sierra de Alcaraz, the mountains of Toledo or the Serranía de Cuenca.

Taking into account this context, the fundamental objective of our research is to delimit homogeneous rural territories out of the calculation of a rural disadvantage index based on a set of socio-economic indicators of the Castilla-La Mancha rural environment at the municipal level. To do this, based on the methodological proposal of Professor Valenzuela Rubio in the framework of the project entitled *Sustainable value enhancement of rural structures for tourism and leisure of rural populations* (TERRITURAL) (Valenzuela, 2008), a cast of variables or indicators grouped into three basic criteria has been selected: demographic criteria, criteria derived from the relationship of the population with the economic activity and criteria linked to the characteristics of the residential park. In the methodology proposed in Valenzuela's project (2008) there are ten indicators for the calculation of a rating applied at the district level. In our case, to the basic indicators used by Valenzuela (2008) we have added the foreign population, the active population, the Social Security affiliates and the companies registered in the Social Security, descending to the municipal level. To measure the indicators we have given a weighing between 0 and 10 in order to generate an integrated rating composed of the fourteen numerical variables at the municipal level, in such a way that when adding the values of the 14 variables we will obtain an index that will vary between 1 and 140, which are the minimum and the maximum values of rural disadvantage. In the calculation of the index some difficulties related to access and the quality of the available information has been found. Obviously, because they are standardized data, various indirect sources have been consulted, such as Social Security statistics referring to situations of labor registration of workers and the revision of the Municipal Register of inhabitants for demographic data. In the case of the Population and Housing Census of 2011, the drawbacks derive from the characteristics of the document, which more than a census in itself, is the result of the combination of: (1) a pre-census file made from the available administrative records, taking the Register of inhabitants as the basic element of its structure; and (2) a fieldwork that includes two operations, an exhaustive Census of Buildings that allows the georeferencing of all the buildings, and a sampling survey to know the characteristics of the people and the dwellings. The territorial scope of study covers the set of municipalities of the autonomous community of Castilla-La Mancha with two exceptions. On the one hand, the municipalities that surpass the 10,000 inhabitants in the year 2015 -40 localities- since from the demographic point of view, they are considered territories that respond to the characteristics of urban habitat. On the other hand, two communities of municipalities where the difficulty of accessing to the socioeconomic data has led to the absence of usable results in our methodology: Aldovera in the province of Guadalajara, made up of Albalate de Zorita and Illana; and Dehesa de Santiago in Albacete, integrated by Cotillas, Villaverde de Guadalimar, and other smaller population entities (Campillo, Parrizón, Arroyofrío and Sequernal). In short, the RDI (Rural Disadvantage Index) has been calculated in a total of 879 municipalities.

After having calculated the 14 variables in the rural municipalities of Castilla-La Mancha in the years 2011 and 2015, as well as the rate of disadvantages in each and every one of them, five intervals have been established that will allow us to classify the regional municipalities:

- Values below 80.0: more dynamic rural spaces.
- Values between 80.1 and 90.0: dynamic municipalities, but with features of rural disadvantage.
- Values between 90.1 and 100.0: intermediate situations of rural disadvantage.
- Values between 100.1 and 110.0: municipalities with accused situations of disadvantage.
- Values above 110.1: maximum level of disadvantage.

In short, the establishment of a rating of disadvantage for each of the rural municipalities of Castilla-La Mancha, by calculating indicators related to demographic criteria, criteria derived from the relationship of the population with economic activity and criteria related to the characteristics of the residential park, and the consideration of the 100 index as a value from which the existence of situations of considerable disadvantage is evidenced, lead us to identify the existence of a clear socio-economic dichotomy in Castilla-La Mancha: 64.8% of the regional territory (570 municipalities), with indexes higher than 100 and, therefore, with obvious problems in the demographic, economic and residential areas, and 35.2% (309 municipalities) with less alarming and more dynamic situations, they would enjoy a low level of rural crisis. The spaces with a high rate of rural disadvantage are characterized by a low population density, sometimes constituting real population deserts (Serranía de Cuenca, Alto Tajo and Señorío de Molina), which brings about a gradual abandonment of much of the traditional productive activities, mainly agriculture and livestock; the accused aging of its inhabitants, which together with the previous variable, provokes a real demographic change in the rural populations, increasing the number of people living alone and demanding greater social, economic, and other services. It also provokes the decrease in fertility; the predominance of the primary educational level in studies, which translates into low levels of work qualification (Goerlich, Mas and Dirs, 2007); and the scarcity of foreign population in the disadvantaged territories, a population that could mitigate the impact of the dominant demographic imbalances. The best data in the economic criteria, among others those related to the affiliation of workers to the Social Security and the registration of entrepreneurs in it, become into a greater economic dynamism, with a clear domain of the services sector, reducing in many cases the weight of agriculture and livestock. These are areas that are concentrated in the vicinity of population centers that exceed 10,000 inhabitants, linked to the industrial development as in the province of Toledo –the Sagra– where the complex, dispersed and diffuse model of rural industrialization has taken advantage of the potential of the exogenous economic sectors of its neighboring autonomous community of Madrid. Something similar happens with the municipalities located in the communication axes of first order, which allows the establishment of inhabitants in the territory. Under this economic, social and industrial development, the residential park of new housing has been increased, while this effect has practically remained imperceptible in the most disadvantaged areas, except in some

specific cases. On the contrary, in recent years, secondary housing is located mainly in the areas of greatest rural disadvantage, with a considerable increase of rest and leisure in these areas.

In summary, it could be said that the mountainous regions (Montes de Toledo, Serranía de Cuenca, Sierra Norte de Guadalajara, Sierra de Alcaraz, Valle de Alcudia, Sierra Morena) are the most underprivileged in 2011, a situation that is exacerbated in 2015, when many municipalities of the region joined this scenario. On the contrary, the lowest values of disadvantage are found in the regions of La Mancha, La Manchuela and the municipalities next to the provincial capitals or bordering with the regions near the autonomous community of Madrid (La Sagra, Corredor de Henares). These central territories and those of transition to the mountain have a better socioeconomic situation in comparison with the spaces of marked rurality in the mountainous areas of the regional periphery. The latter are areas that in most sectoral programs and measures are priority objectives in order to revitalize their economies. In general, they correspond to counties and municipalities with economies dominated by activities related to the primary sector, which have sought, in some cases, the tourist takeoff supported by parameters of natural quality as the existence of protected natural spaces. Some examples represent it: the region of Montes de Toledo, which has the Cabañeros National Park; Serranía de Cuenca, cataloged as a Natural Park; the northern sierra of Guadalajara with its Natural Park; Sierra de Alcaraz and Segura, with the Natural Park of Los Calares del Río Mundo; and the Alto Tajo and its Natural Park, among others. The development of these disadvantaged rural areas involves the commitment of global strategies involving all the social agents of the territory as well as the various administrations of the region, covering all social, economic, financial, environmental, cultural and heritage aspects, and for the enhancement of its high quality natural environments. In this sense, the rural environment offers a diversity of landscapes and ways of life that as resources are unquestionable (Martínez Arnáiz, 2004: 607) and where the landscape must have and play a fundamental role as a meeting point between natural realities / environmental - social / economic (Galindo Pérez de Azpillaga, 2004).