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

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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 Serrania 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 has 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.
Después de calcular los 14 variables en las municipalidades rurales de Castilla-La Mancha en los años 2011 y 2015, así como el índice de desventajas en cada una de ellas, cinco intervalos se han establecido que permiten clasificar las municipalidades regionales:

- Valores por debajo de 80.0: espacios rurales más dinámicos.
- Valores entre 80.1 y 90.0: municipalidades dinámicas, pero con rasgos de desventaja rural.
- Valores entre 90.1 y 100.0: situaciones intermedias de desventaja rural.
- Valores entre 100.1 y 110.0: municipalidades con situaciones exacerbadas de desventaja.
- Valores por encima de 110.1: nivel máximo de desventaja.

En resumen, la establecimiento de una clasificación de desventaja para cada una de las municipalidades rurales de Castilla-La Mancha, al calcular indicadores relacionados con criterios demográficos, criterios derivados de la relación del estado con la actividad económica y criterios relacionados con las características del parque residencial, y el considerar el Índice de 100 como un valor que evidencia la existencia de situaciones de considerable desventaja, nos lleva a identificar la existencia de una clara dicotomía socioeconómica en Castilla-La Mancha: 64.8% del territorio regional (570 municipalidades), con índices superiores a 100 y, por lo tanto, con problemas obvios en los ámbitos demográfico, económico y residencial, y 35.2% (309 municipalidades) con situaciones menos alarmantes y más dinámicas, que disfrutarían de un nivel bajo de crisis rural. Los espacios con una alta tasa de desventaja rural se caracterizan por una baja densidad de población, a veces constituyendo desertos reales (Serranía de Cuenca, Alto Tajo y Señorío de Molina), lo que conduce a un abandono gradual de muchas de las actividades productivas tradicionales, principalmente la agricultura y la ganadería; el envejecimiento acusado de sus habitantes, que junto con esta variable, provoca un verdadero cambio demográfico en las poblaciones rurales, incrementando el número de personas que viven solas y que demandan un mayor bienestar social, económico y otros servicios. También provoca la disminución de la fecondidad; la predominancia del nivel primario en los estudios, que traduce en bajos niveles de cualificación laboral (Goerlich, Mas y Dirs, 2007); y la escasez de población extranjera en las áreas desfavorecidas, una población que podría mitigar el impacto de las desigualdades demográficas predominantes. La mejor información en los criterios económicos, entre otros relacionados con la afiliación de trabajadores a la Seguridad Social y la inscripción de empresarios en ella, se convierte en un mayor dinamismo económico, con un claro dominio del sector servicios, reduciendo en muchos casos el peso de la agricultura y la ganadería. Estas son áreas que se concentran en la vecindad de los núcleos de población que exceden los 10,000 habitantes, vinculados al desarrollo industrial como en la provincia de Toledo –la Sagra– donde el modelo complejo, disperso y difuso de industrialización rural ha aprovechado potencial de los sectores económicos exógenos de su comunidad autónoma vecina de Madrid. Algo similar ocurre con las municipalidades ubicadas en los ejes de comunicación de primer orden, que permiten la instalación de residentes en el territorio. Bajo este desarrollo económico, social e industrial, el parque residencial de nuevas viviendas ha aumentado, mientras que este efecto ha practicamente permanecido imperceptible en las áreas más desfavorecidas, excepto en algunas
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, Serrania 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; Serrania 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).