

TOWNS WITH LIMITS AND TOWNS WITHOUT LIMITS: EMERGENT URBAN OUTSKIRTS TO THE SOUTH OF MADRID (CASTILLA-LA MANCHA)

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ABSTRACT

Despite the effort made by the planners to establish a precise separation between the countryside and towns, the understanding of the urban process often goes beyond these tight limits, which do not pick up its territorial effects on the environment. In postmodern and postindustrial towns, it is more and more evident that these administrative limits do not adjust to the new urban forms nor correspond to the real ranges of towns. The reason of the disarrangement lays on the growing tendency of the population and some economic activities to set up beyond these limits. Those are now articulated through relation networks instead of the traditional continuous spaces. As a consequence, this tendency changes the appearance of the city.

There has been a deep transformation in the urban morphology during the last four decades. In this process, the coexistence and the juxtaposition of compact towns have been playing a title role. Those have inherited centuries of history and the growing process throughout the 20th century. Nowadays, it is also important the diffuse patterns of urban expansion, that are dissolved in the immediate space. This has entailed, on the one hand, the growth of big and medium-sized towns and, on the other hand, an outstanding modification of the territorial planning.

In those towns located to the south of Madrid (Castilla-La Mancha), there are projects for urban planning whose field of action does not go beyond the limits of the municipality. The lack of response to the requests for new surfaces in some of these cities, provoking thus an

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increase of prices, has led a part of its urban dynamics to peripheral municipalities, where plannings are less restrictive and prices cheaper.

Two different elements can be pointed out when trying to explain the origins of this process. Some authors think that it is a decentralization linked to the changes involved by a scientific-technical-informational period that make possible the urban transformation. New Information and Knowledge Society Technologies make easier the installation of enclaves rural spaces, which display clear urban features in their economic activities, mental structures, and way of living.

The impact and generalization of means of transport is one of the factors which have made a major contribution to the redefinition and dispersion of our towns. In this sense, it has been of paramount importance the relation between the private vehicle and the construction of highways, which have played a title role in the decentralization of metropolitan areas. On the other hand, we should not turn a blind eye to the influence of the new IT and telecommunications during the last decade on the decentralization and on the increase of the mobility and the distance between residences and work places.

Other authors regard the process as a transposition of the changes taking place in economy; they would have to do with the transition from a «Ford» model, centralizing and overfull, to another which is decentralizing and flexible; the latter is reflected on the new logics of space planning.

Indovina has explained the process of formation of the diffuse town as the result of four stages: the first one is characterized by the disappearance of rural features on the outskirts of towns; the progressive implantation of small and medium-sized companies in these sectors would take place in the second stage; the third one is the most dynamic, and its most particular element the immigration of the urban inhabitants, who are attracted by the low prices of estates; the fourth and last stage is characterized by the dissemination of urban services and functions. Reality demonstrates that fragmented and dispersed urban spaces keep on growing according to that trend. These areas show low densities of edification and are territorially bound to some communication infrastructures close to the conventional towns.

Changes in the urban dynamics lead to an increase that has been moving from the traditional big cities to those that are medium-sized and small. In Spain this process began in the 60's, though it reached its summit no sooner than the 90's. In many Spanish big cities the phenomenon has involved a loss of population that has benefited their respective outskirts. The processes of industrial restructuring in metropolitan areas and the subsequent displacement of economic activities towards the outskirts later than a decade ago were the starting point of the process in Spain.

The territorial impact of the disperse city allows to make a distinction between «metropolitan areas», where diffusion reaches a range between 10 and 25 Km, and the urban functional regions, whose scopes may be as long as 100 Km. From a demographic and functional point of view, there is no doubt that they are obviously different urban realities. These manifestations, which are evident in the big cities, can be seen more and more clearly in the medium-sized towns.

The main aim of this paper is to reflect on the displacement of a part of the growth and dynamics from the towns in Castilla-La Mancha to outlying municipalities. Towns in Castilla-La Mancha have been undergoing a different performance in the last decades, having been

observed a significant dynamics in towns over 50,000 inhabitants and in provincial capitals. The reasons are diverse and bound to some recent processes. We will consider, on the one hand, the main factors of urban growth during the last 20 years, and on the other hand we will try to identify the areas of urban expansion towards outlying spaces which have not been paid enough attention up to now. Our proposal is a first approach to the phenomenon, whose manifestations are different in the seven towns included in the analysis: the five provincial capitals (Albacete, Ciudad Real, Cuenca, Guadalajara y Toledo), Talavera de la Reina, and Puertollano.

Revitalizing factors in the medium-sized towns in Spain explains partially the changes taken place during the last three decades in the towns in Castilla-La Mancha. The historical condition of this region as a passage zone deals with the dependency relations held by its towns with the big extraregional cities, especially Madrid. The seven towns studied respond in their dynamics and localization to a logic of medium-sized towns existing on the outskirts of the big cities (Toledo and Guadalajara) or that of connected towns (on the one hand Albacete and Ciudad Real, and on the other hand Talavera, Cuenca, and Puertollano). We can regard as revitalizing elements the accessibility levels, the growing and more and more modernized commercial offer, the incorporation of new administrative and educative functions, and the revaluation of the historical heritage related to tourism. At the same time, this dynamics has had an effect on their respective outskirts, where a part of the population growth has been received, though with some variations. Thus, the service sector plays a title role. Despite not being dealt with in this essay, we must also underline the importance of the industrial activities, which have risen from dislocating processes.

In order to analyze the suburbanization process, we have chosen an area with a range of 25 Km around the seven towns. For each of the urban supramunicipal areas, we have resort to the use of seven items (demographic dynamics, labour mobility, socioeconomic structure of population, and dynamics observed in house building). Thanks to them, we can identify the incidence of the relations between residence and work place, which are determined by the growing use of means of transport, particularly the private vehicle; we can see the residential performances of the urban population (these municipalities have become alternatives to the high prices that must be paid for urban surfaces); we can appreciate the specialization to the service sector of the population on these urban outskirts; and lastly, we must underline the demographic dynamics, which is, above all, the result of the identified processes and very meaningful in some municipalities.

In this analysis, we have developed a synthetic indicator of suburban expansion from these four items. The indicator allows us to assess the global impact of each of them. By making use of this indicator, we have established a proposal of classification in which we show the impact of the suburbanization on the outlying municipalities in the seven towns from Castilla-La Mancha.

