

# URBAN DECONCENTRATION IN THE TERRITORIAL SYSTEM OF GALICIA: A CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL APPROACH

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of studies by Berry (1976) and Beale (1975), many other studies have taken on the subject of the most intense —suburban— or discontinuous —counterurban— life in the outskirts of compact *civitas* all over the world. This phenomenon, which we have called urban deconcentration in this article (Durà, A., 1996, 44), is intimately linked to structural factors of the economy (Fielding, A.J., 1996, 1986; Castells, M., 1999) with a clear geographical emphasis that will be described below within the spatial framework of Galicia.

## 2. URBAN DECONCENTRATION IN GALICIA: DATA AND CONCEPTUALISATION

According to our criteria, urban deconcentration could be described as a process of population decentralisation that springs from densely populated enclaves —or within the space of a traditional compact city— and concludes in other smaller areas with a lower population density or new functionalities within a given territorial system. From a broader point of view the following definition could be applied:

- In the first place, it could include both people who leave large urban areas to live in smaller ones or in the countryside (which is more correctly explained as «counterurbanisation» or even «periurbanisation»), and those people who decide to leave the centre of the city to live in the immediate outskirts (which is also called «suburbanisation» or in some cases «rurbanisation»).

- On a secondary level, the size of the entity is not significant. These trends towards urban decline take place both in large cities and in medium and small towns, which are particularly important in the territorial hierarchy of Galicia.

Now that this has been explained, there are various points worth commenting on in Galicia. The most immediate ones show a dramatic demographical decrease in the seven main cities. Up to 1991 their intercensus growth rates, excluding Ferrol due to its industrial redevelopment, remained very high and were still being fed by generalised and classical centripetal city-country movements. The last reference point is the census of 2001, which shows that these figures have gone down and also that we are experiencing the beginning, mainly in A Coruña, of a change in the migration trend in which city centres are starting to lose inhabitants or at least attract significantly less people.

If the population distribution per entity size is analysed, the number of people who live in towns with populations between five and twenty thousand inhabitants went up sharply and constantly from 1950 to 2001. These towns are therefore the main destination of the urban deconcentration that has been evident in Galicia since 1991.

Indeed, if we calculate the growth rates from the last two census lists available, the municipalities with the heaviest growth rates —Ames, Barbadás, Cambre and Culleredo, for example— are very close to those of the large urban agglomerations in the region. It would therefore appear that centrifugal migration is becoming much weaker and the limits of traditional compact cities are becoming more flexible.

### **3. THE UNIQUENESS OF URBAN DECONCENTRATION IN GALICIA**

The urban deconcentration processes that have been documented have without doubt taken place in settlements that were completely disseminated beforehand, embedding in the landscape a mixed and interlinked presence of industrial, urban and rural horizons on strips of land that are very broad and a few miles outside city centres in Galicia. This has given rise to new housing developments that have greatly overstepped municipal administrative limits and led to the creation of a real and original diffuse city (Dematteis, G., 1998; Indovina, F., 1998); which apart from taking up a large amount of land, energy and natural resources and symbolising non-sustainable development, bears excessively high infrastructure and running costs.

How can we define the limits of these diffuse spaces which have been consolidated by population «decompression» over the last few years? The answer might lie in the creation of new instruments for measurement, i.e. indices that can define rururban expansion in Galicia under consistent theoretical criteria.

### **4. CLASSIFYING THE DECONCENTRATED SCENARIO: THE NEED TO CREATE NEW STATISTICAL INDICES**

It was Cloke (1976a, 1976b) who correctly warned that only the use of statistical tools that can always be improved for the situation could be the starting point for defining theoretical limits in a given territory. In our case, the aim consists of the cartographical identification,

with a certain flexibility, of the most significant dimensions of urban deconcentration in Galicia through a statistical index — which has been called «socioeconomic and functional dynamics» (hereinafter SFDI)—.

Using the municipality as the main unit for analysis, the variables and indicators that make up the SFDI have been classified in three sections:

- *Homogeneity*; based on which councils which have similar demographic features (density, growth rate, percentage of population aged 0 to 19), economic features (tertiary indicator) and training features (learning indicator), have been regrouped.
- *Interdependence*; aimed at taking into account cross relationships of one municipality with others from a socioprofessional (labour mobility indicator) or migratory (population attraction indicator) point of view.
- *Theoretical coherence*; the aim is for the statistical evaluations carried out to underline the tertiary nature of the municipality (learning and tertiary indicator) and the importance of decentralisation (population attraction indicator), particular to the dynamics of our topic of study.

Finally, the index values have been presented in five stages on a map of Galicia which proportionally represents the lower (SFDI = -8,7) and higher «dynamic» points (SFDI = 27,4) of each municipality. The results obtained cover different territorial levels that will now be analysed one by one.

Once more, it is indisputable that the so-called Atlantic Arch — defined by the AP-9 motorway — is still reinforcing its social and economic vanguard role from the River Miño to the sea inlet of Cedeira. It is not for nothing that this territorial strip, that really finishes in Oporto, apart from being a key factor in Galicia's opening to potential added value generating markets and qualified employment, stands out as an inhabited continuum that will no doubt play a significant role on the political map of Euroregions. However, it is very important to separate other enclaves — either coastal or inland towns — where this index reaches very high values; in fact, and this could be one of its greatest advantages, it identifies what we have called — thinking of the fundamental work of Leo van den Berg (1982, 77-102)— five functional urban regions that should not be seen as «closed categories»:

- Three completely consolidated regions, which limit the most important diffuse spaces in Galicia and whose administrative centres are A Coruña, Santiago de Compostela and Vigo.
- Another two regions, still under formation, whose main centres are the cities of Lugo and Ourense.

Using Giuseppe Dematteis' definition (1998, 23), and adopting the content of the chosen variables and indicators, these geographical fields are structured by a pendulous mobility of the residential and everyday characteristics of those who live and work in areas with labour markets and different social configurations.

## 5. SMALL TOWNS: URBAN DECONCENTRATION OR RURAL REBIRTH?

Finally we should also highlight the values reached in the SFDI by two other kinds of entities, where the effects of metropolitan deconcentration are not as clear when determining their labour exchange and migration relationship with other territorial elements. These are:

- Municipal groups or councils with an endogenous development which can be ascribed to the presence of specific economic factors —ports, fishing, energy, etc.—; we are talking, for instance, about As Pontes, Vilagarcía de Arousa, part of the Mariña Lucense, the Barbanza peninsula or about the Costa da Morte.
- Certain small towns —or *villas*— such as Monforte, Ordes, Chantada, A Estrada, Barco de Valdeorras and Verín. Their importance as key centres of agricultural and livestock farming and the fact that they are mainly inland towns that function as regional capitals deserves special consideration.

In this sense what we have to do is explain if the current dynamics of these special small towns —with an outstanding SFDI— and their surrounding areas can be joined to a premise that authors like Fielding (1996, 93) have proved inseparable from the counterurban phenomenon: the growth of remote areas must be produced at the expense of the decreasing of existing metropolitan centres. In other words, counterurbanisation would make sense, and we think this is an argument to consider, if its arising in Galicia could be framed in the previously described processes of deconcentration in the main cities.

To prove if this last statement is true or not, four municipalities have been chosen which contain small towns —Melide, Verín, Lalín and Chantada— which clearly act as a reference point in the regions where they lie.

Once the recent population and migratory evolution of these four enclaves has been analysed, we tend to think that it is the important structural adjustments some small towns are living -together with parts of the «articulated» rural field directly by themselves- and non-conclusive counterurbanisation processes that constitute the extreme point of a previous metropolitan deconcentration, which explains its dynamism. Furthermore, statements that deny the importance and the balanced role of these old market and commercial exchange centres within the hierarchy of settlements in Galicia do not seem overly prudent.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

What we have tried to accomplish in this article is to show how, by calculating a statistical index, urban deconcentration is leading to a metropolitan landscape that is completely new in the history of Galicia, occurring hand in hand with postindustrialism and not dissimilar to what is happening in other parts of the world. We would therefore recommend that any territorial policy to be implemented in Galicia should be more and more ambitious and interdisciplinary in order to comprehend the behaviour of the five functional urban systems that are already consolidated or are still under formation. They are living with the regression of broad strips of land and small towns enjoying renewed population and economic prosperity.