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RURAL DEPOPULATION IN SPAIN: GENESIS OF A PROBLEM AND INNOVATIVE POLICIES



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1. Introduction

Depopulation is a **demographic and territorial phenomenon** consisting of a decrease in the number of inhabitants in a territory or nucleus relative to a previous period. The fall in absolute terms of the number of inhabitants can result from a negative natural growth (when deaths exceed births), negative net migration (emigration exceeds immigration) or both simultaneously. Therefore, the causes which explain it can be complex and require deep analysis for a proper diagnosis.

Economic factors play a crucial role in these depopulation processes: the areas affected by them are usually economically depressed, backward or scarcely dynamic in relation to other areas of the same country. In general depopulation processes have been triggered on the European continent as a result of high migration rates from these areas to expanding urban centres, phenomenon taking place in the early decades of the second half of the twentieth century known as the rural exodus, given the figures it reached and its impact on the places of origin of emigrants. The reasons that led so many people in most European countries to migrate to the cities had to do with the higher wages paid there, greater job opportunities, or better facilities or services. In short, people emigrated because of the city's capacity to provide higher levels of material well-being.

For the migrants' areas of origin, depopulation had significant consequences by unleashing a dangerous demographic dynamic, as those tending to migrate were the predominantly young and adult populations. Aging in the areas of origin has a resounding effect. In addition, it generates a low birth rate, given the weakness of the population in the reproductive age-group; thereby natural growth (the difference between birth rates and mortality) ends up being negative. This can cause, even when outflows weaken, depopulation to continue given that deaths may even exceed births. Depopulation also tends to generate a self-sustaining vicious circle that complicates the future of the areas suffering from it. Thus the loss of human capital of the most enterprising takes place, affecting economic dynamism negatively. Investment decisions or entrepreneurship are subdued as a result of existing low expectations. In short, the demographic decline is usually accompanied by economic decline.

Depopulation phenomena may exist in **all fields**, including large cities and densely populated areas. However, when affecting areas of low density, with unbalanced age, gender and qualifications structure, which lack an urban system as a mainstay of the territory, the future outlook is very negative. For those **declining rural communities**, existing throughout the European map, demographic desertification is a symptom of serious structural problems that can lead to their **disappearance** in the short term, i.e., dashing **personal projects** and erasing **communities** backed by a long history and even with great future potential. Hence policy management **is very difficult to design and implement**, because besides it being necessary to outline strategies that integrate different levels of government coupled with strategic vision, it requires impeccable implementation. Addressing the urgent and important, with **an innovative and discriminatory approach**, in addition to being very difficult to accomplish, it can generate misunderstanding and comparative grievances with other political and territorial partners.

This paper attempts to summarise the causes and development of this phenomenon, based on data and experiences studied in Spain, assessing the policies implemented so far and their outcome, and proposing an alternative approach that can contribute to the definition of specific European measures to address a phenomenon of growing importance, and which has experienced particularly serious cases for some time.

2. The origin of the problem of depopulation in Spain.

2.1. The dynamics of depopulation

A **large part of Spanish territory** is currently **sparsely populated** with municipal densities well below those considered critical, such as **5 in h. /km²** and **10 in h. /km²**. On map 1 it can be see how the areas below these thresholds dominate the northern half of the Spanish interior. Strolling through these places and stopping to appreciate their standstill, gives an insight into what a **demographic desert** means, more so than any other statistical indicator, even more so because the official figures recorded are significantly higher than those of the already minimal actual residence, .

Although most of these cells or municipal units **never had high densities** (The map from 1900 warns that most spaces within Spain did not exceed 20 in h. /km²), and there were no significant urban centres, these were however communities that maintained a certain **demographic and social balance**, meaning that **the traditional economy was sustainable** in that context, with even a certain level of diversification. Traditional agriculture and livestock therefore existed alongside underemployment and low living standards, but inserted in larger markets, capable of sustaining small-scale, pre-industrial manufacturing and local craftsmanship, as well as basic services, maintaining small demographic oscillations within a slightly increasing or stable trend, hardly ever decreasing.

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards this situation begins to change as a result of the beginning of the industrialization process in Spain. In the beginning, modern industry was highly polarized, both spatially and by sector, without sufficient power to induce the profound transformation of Spain as a whole. As a result, the rural population grew in Spain, especially once the demographic transition began and birth rates declined very slowly, while mortality did so much faster. Expanding cities had limited ability to generate strong rural-urban migration. Despite this, in the early decades of the twentieth century, when industrialization gained momentum, internal migration in Spain intensified and rapid urban population growth was able to coexist with the moderate growth of the rural

population as a result of the demographic transition. However, some rural areas close to very dynamic urban areas, as was the case of Barcelona, began a gentle demographic stock loss. Rural depopulation was not yet a phenomenon of significant scope. Likewise, around 1940, the total number of farmers and the total number of rural inhabitants remained about the same as it had been in 1900. Certainly, it is safe to say that the rural migration balance was negative, as greater population natural growth was recorded than final growth. Relative, but not absolute, demographic decline had already begun in rural areas I.e., the rural population in Spain had declined in relative terms, from representing 68% of the total population in 1900 to 52% in 1940, but in absolute terms it had still increased slightly (from 12.5 million in 1900 to 13.3 in 1940).

But the absolute demographic decline would take place during the second half of the twentieth century. During the phase from 1950 to 1975, when economic growth reached spectacular rates from all points of view, large transfers of population from backward regions to the leading regions also took place, with rural families heading for urban areas the major players in the migratory movements. For example: between 1961 and 1965, municipalities with less than 2,000 people lost about 100,000 inhabitants each year, which would be like a whole new city of 100,000 inhabitants appearing every year while one hundred small municipalities disappeared. In more general terms: if in the 1950s just over 11 million people lived in municipalities with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants, currently around 7 million do so. The population in municipalities with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants represented in the fifties 39% of the total Spanish population, while today it represents only 18% (or hardly 25% even when taking into consideration municipalities between 2,000 and 10,000 inhabitants). The fall of the rural population was around 40% in the second half of the twentieth century and was very noticeable in most regions, although more intense inside the country (where losses exceeded 50%, i.e., towns and villages lost more than half of their population) than in the Mediterranean and Cantabrian area (with losses of less than 50 and 25% respectively). These regional disparities make it possible to identify the lack of employment opportunities outside the agricultural sector as one of the causes of the rural exodus.

From the 1980s, rural exodus began to slow down, a trend that has persisted to this

day. There are at least two complementary explanations. First, the Spanish economy experienced a tough adjustment following the global oil crisis of the seventies, being forced to face painful restructuring in several key sectors. In addition, unemployment levels began to rise to alarming levels. This was the deferred cost of Franco's economic policy, which slowed structural change and deagrarianization during the fifties (by not favouring a greater degree of openness and liberalization) and subsequently designed a growth model based on protecting mature sectors, which with the logic acceleration of liberalization and democratization after the death of the dictator (towards membership in the European Economic Community), found itself unable to compete in the international market. The result was not the return of the population to the countryside, but rising levels of urban unemployment. Under these conditions, the attractiveness of urban destinations declined in the eyes of potential rural migrants.

But there was a second reason for slowing down the rural exodus. The biological depletion of the rural area was one consequence of the intensity of the rural exodus of the period 1950-1975. Indeed, migratory flows had demographic impact because not all the rural population was equally effected: they were targeted based on a number of personal characteristics. First labourers migrated and then smallholders, but above all, the bulk of emigration was dominated by young people and women. Differential female migration was a reaction against the subordinate position that women held in traditional rural society. In 1991, in the Spanish countryside there were only 85 women per 100 men in the age group ranging from 35 to 39; in cities, this ratio was 105 women for every 100 men. At the beginning of the century, in the group between 16 and 29 years, there tended to be 10-15% more males than females, but masculinisation reached even greater proportions in the towns and villages of Aragón, Asturias, Cantabria, Extremadura , Castilla-León, Galicia and La Rioja.

The first decade of the 21st century, with the very rapid economic growth of the Spanish economy, implied substantial changes. The pace at which depopulation occurred in rural Spain on the one hand decelerated and on the other showed great heterogeneity of behaviours. In much of the western half of Spain, rural areas were losing population in absolute terms, although at a somewhat lower pace. On the other hand, in most of the

eastern half of Spain, its rural areas increased their demographic stock. The explanation for this change in behaviour had to do, especially with the massive influx of immigrants to Spain during economic boom years. The intensity of arrivals was such that it seemed it might be the counterpoint to depopulation. However, the economic crisis that began in 2008 returned the problem to its starting point. In the early years of the crisis some influx of immigrants still remained in rural areas, but this could not offset the demographic fall caused by the negative natural growth. Later the almost paralysis of immigrants settling, once again emphasised the problem of depopulation to its fullest extent. Recent population forecasts until 2030 conducted by the National Institute of Statistics indicate a sharp contraction of the Spanish rural population in the next two decades.

2.2. Consequences of depopulation: aging and persistence of the problem

As a result of the abandonment of rural areas by important contingents of people at reproductive age, especially women, rural areas have reached a degree of aging well above what is already characteristically high in developed countries. The situation has become particularly extreme in some regions such as Castilla-León and Aragón, close to the major centres of growth of the Spanish economy, with extensive traditional farming and baseline low population densities (already before depopulation). Aging of the rural population, according to what we have just become aware of, implied a decrease in the average migration propensity. In more colloquial terms: the intensity of rural-urban migration began to decline because around 1975-80. The vast majority of those who had to (or were able, or wanted) to do so had already migrated. Those who chose to remain in their villages during the 1950-75 wave of immigration did not easily change their minds within a framework such as 1975-2000. This does not mean that migration disappeared, as the imbalance in living standards between town and country continued to encourage displacement. But there were no longer massive displacements as in the previous period: there was no demographic reserve, a biological base of potential immigrants similar to that accumulated up to 1950. The intensity of the rural exodus, paradoxical as it may seem, caused a slowdown in migration flows decades later

However a question arises: aging caused a slowdown of migration, but, did it not

perhaps generate a second population via?: the emergence of negative natural growth. Of course, the appearance of an excess of deaths as regards births has been one of the most daunting aspects of the recent demographic evolution in the Spanish countryside. At the height of 1975, natural growth was already negative in rural areas of the north-eastern quadrant of the peninsula (particularly declining demographic trajectory because of the proximity to the great centres of development of the Spanish economy: Basque Country, Catalonia, Madrid and Valencia) and in rural areas of some the provinces of Galicia and Castilia-Leon. Around 1992, deaths already exceeded births in the entire northern half of the peninsula (with the only exceptions of Guipuzcoa and Barcelona, due more to the use of municipalities with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants as a loose indicator of rurality than other phenomena), and in some provinces in the southern half, such as Albacete. Since the beginning of the century, the annual rates for the average birth rate of the Spanish rural area are around 6-7 per thousand (6-7 children born per 1,000 inhabitants), while mortality rates are 11-14 per thousand. In line with these ranges, a recent estimate puts the annual average natural growth of the Spanish rural population, for the period 1991-98, at -5000%.

These effects of the rural exodus on the age structure of the affected communities are also reflected in the generational turnover rates, which measure the proportion of those aged 15-19 relative to those of 60-64. This is to assess how many people would (in the absence of migration) be approaching working age and how many people would be retiring in the next few years. The decline in the birth rate and the aging of Spanish society as a whole have led to a clear decrease in the rate of generational replacement for the whole country over the last half century. But the process has been particularly dramatic in rural areas. In 1950, rural areas still had a higher replacement rate than that of cities, as a consequence of a more rejuvenated age structure and its status as a "demographic reserve". In 1991, rural areas became dangerously close to a situation in which, even in the absence of migration, the working population could begin to decline as a result of the number of retirements being higher than those reaching working age.

But, then, have these vicious circles of rural exodus led to an acceleration of depopulation (or at least to the maintenance of population loss rates)? The answer is usually negative: the reduction of migration intensity has been strong enough to compensate for the

emergence of a second means of depopulation (higher number of deaths than births) and thus lead to reduced rates of population loss in rural areas. However, although depopulation has not accelerated as a result of aging, what has happened is that even when rural-urban migration has slowed significantly, depopulation has continued. The negative natural growth has led, even in the absence of major migrations, to the dynamics of population decline in many rural areas continuing.

The demographic dynamics we have examined, with the massive outflow of very large contingents from rural areas and the consequent aging of these had resulted in a decline in absolute terms of the population in much of rural Spain, to the extent of generating extensive demographic deserts with densities below 5 or 10 inhabitants per square kilometre.

The intensity of depopulation can be appreciated if we consider, with reference to NUTS III Spain, that those having lost population in absolute terms between 1950 and 2000 cover 53% of Spanish territory. It is therefore a problem that affects a large part of the territory.

The area in Spain most affected by depopulation can be found in the territories around the Iberian System. Specifically three provinces (NUTS III) located in this area (Cuenca, Soria and Teruel) have the lowest population densities, ranking in the latter two cases below ten inhabitants per square kilometre and in the former only slightly above. We are therefore facing one of the largest demographic deserts in Europe. These provinces already had low population densities in 1860 (13, 15 and 16 inhabitants per square kilometre, about half the Spanish average in that year). Until about 1950 there was even a very slight positive population growth, but in relative terms they lost population within Spain as a whole, as the increase rate was considerably lower in comparison. Since 1950 they have experienced an undeniable decline in absolute terms. The magnitude of this decline is impressive. Between 1950 and 2000 Cuenca has lost about a third of its population, and Soria and Teruel more than 40%. Although in the first decade of the 21st century these provinces gained population in the context of the strong influx of immigrants to Spain, since the crisis in 2008, figures in recent years have shown negative growth.

Population growth between 2000 and 2015 was very slight: almost zero in Soria and less than 2% in Cuenca and Teruel, when in Spain the population during that period grew by 15%. Most worrisome is that since 2008 the three provinces have lost the new population quickly: between 4% and 5% in just seven years.

3. Policies against depopulation

3.1. Changes in land management since the eighties: the predominance of politics and neglecting the territorial context.

The death of Franco, the former head of State, in 1975 implied a radical change in how to manage policies, from an authoritarian and unitary dictatorship¹ to a **decentralized democracy**. It was a long, zigzagging process that would not be considered closed until a decade later, especially regarding the territorial issue. For it is in **1986** when after tough and lengthy negotiations the Integration Treaty comes into force in European **communities**, culminating an age-old collective yearning², to feel fully involved in Western values on an equal footing, driving a single bold and inclusive project throughout countries. And it is also from **1987** when most of the newly formed **Autonomous Communities** (Recognized *ex novo* regional governments just a few years earlier) start a second term and with their Statutes (basic rules) approved and with acceptable **sufficiency and financial stability** to exercise their **competences**.

Since then, it is around these two mainstays, **European integration** and **decentralization**, that all regional policy in Spain revolves on how to tackle territorial

¹ There is a relevant discussion in Spanish political science regarding whether the Franco regime was merely authoritarian or totalitarian as well, or during which stages. The most relevant figure and also the most discussed on this topic is Linz (1964). "An Authoritarian Regime: The Case of Spain" in *Cleavages, Ideologies and Party Systems* (eds. Eric Allard & Yrjo Littunen) Helsinki: Academic.

² The idea that "Spain was the problem and Europe the solution" emerges among the intellectual elite at the start of the 20th century. See, among many others, Lorente, J.J.S. (1994). "La idea de Europa en el pensamiento político de Ortega y Gasset". *Revista de estudios políticos*, (83), 221-246.

issues. And it is the **Constitution of 1979**, currently in effect, which allows this to fit in at national level. Its distributive proposal for powers and budgets is similar in design to Europe on a continental scale, that of "**cooperative federalism**"³. This is based on the responsible participation of all administrative levels and agents (*stakeholders*) in the coordinated and efficient management of public services according to their geographical dimension. In the case of Spain, given the greater closeness and flexibility of citizens to regional governments, it should become both a way to deepen its democracy and to integrate, economically, culturally and demographically heterogeneous territories, so they might feel an active part of a shared and renewed political project ⁴.

However, the **1979 Constitution** and its regional decentralization, while successful at its first task, **failed** however, to build an effective and stable system for the settlement of territorial problems in Spain, neither in economic or political aspects. As the consequence of, on the one hand, the growing importance of centrifugal nationalisms in the territories with greater cultural differentiation, always dissatisfied about the self-government achieved, whatever its level, and disdainful of its competence and financial equality with the other autonomous communities; and secondly, central governments' lack of conviction and commitment concerning decentralization, of a thorough interpretation without bias. This **disloyalty** on both sides, permanent political maneuvering, undermines the credibility of an acceptably designed but poorly executed territorial management system , **not** allowing **advantage to be taken of** its important **potential**, which includes the political function of "**regional planning**"⁵, equivalent to European "cohesion", so necessary at national and regional level. So the initial uncertainty of the Spanish Constitution to balance asymmetry and equilibrium between its regions, believing that political dynamics would naturally cause it to evolve into a structure close to cooperative federalism, has become bogged down in a dead end. On the one hand, there are those who still believe in that and on the other, those who protect bilateralism and the "differential factor" i.e., in an

³ Broadway, R. et al. (1989). "Tax-transfer policies and the voluntary provision of public goods". *Journal of Public Economics*, 39(2), 157-176.

⁴ Aja, E. (1999). *El Estado autonómico: federalismo y hechos diferenciales*. Madrid: Alianza editorial.

⁵ Art. 148, 3rd of the Spanish Constitution, in which this function of government is assigned exclusively to the autonomous communities.

"asymmetric federalism"⁶ on issues of tax, culture and competence, which, while not impossible, is always very difficult to manage in the absence of political loyalty (case of Bavaria or Quebec or in States where the respective parties assume collaborative positions).

Consequently, during these three long decades⁷ **decentralization has not fulfilled its initial task of promoting territorial realignment.** Its agenda should have been to fulfil an important role, an active regional policy, to coordinate strategies for different areas of government and administrative levels, and anticipate shared challenges for its territories and citizens. Instead, the absence of constructive dialogues in vertical partnership (central administration with regional and vice versa) and (between different regional governments) has prevented the creation of inspirational projects for the whole country, wasting the potential that a federal or autonomic system holds to establish synergies between different levels of government. In that vein, the political energies have been absorbed, fundamentally, but not only, by **discussions with a symbolic content** of maximising territorial identities and singularities, to increase ownership of powers without any reflection on the appropriateness of their scope, or in finding **financing** formulas with "more is better", leaving arguments about effective and efficient implementation in the background, or openly omitting substantive discussions on how to advance convergence and regional solidarity, promote inclusive competitiveness given the increasing spatial segmentation and innovate cooperation between administrations and organizations. The media and electoral spotlight has in essence listened to the political noise, generated by costly infrastructure and short-term returns, without the need for clarity and rigor in their approaches. Something incompatible with the silence of the "Empty Spain"⁸, more in need of qualitative and strategic projects.

Accordingly, by **default, regional policy**, that which caters to the specific problems

⁶ Domínguez, F. M. C. (1999). Asymmetrical Federalism: The possible resignation of balance. *Spanish Journal of Constitutional Law*, 19 (55), 359-363.

⁷ An interesting analysis of this can be followed in Martinez-Herrera, E., and Miley, TJ (2010). "The constitution and the politics of national identity in Spain". *Nations and Nationalism*, 16 (1), 6-30.

⁸ A more literary than academic essay stirring the debate on depopulation, incorporating collectives and cultural areas that had barely approached the topic is that of Del Molino, S. (2015). *La España vacía*.

of the territory and its people in a structured and strategic way, that which in addition to providing efficient services within administrative competences, inquires about development, the future of its citizens and its present welfare, has been non-existent, **it was left in the hands of Brussels**, both by the central government and by the regional.

3.2. The lack of specific policies in Spain on Sparsely Populated Areas (SPA)

This gap, where regional policy in Spain has not existed as such for the last forty years has had an impact on all issues commonly included in its agenda, in particular, in our case, local development, depopulation and demographic problems, which have experienced legislation and public investments in an unsystematic and disjointed manner.

One of the causes has been that for both the central and autonomous governments, **the regional issue** has been **identified** with **autonomous region funding**, reducing its significance and reformist potential, as is only part thereof, albeit a relevant but incomplete one. Here financial capacity is key to establishing measures autonomously and adequately, but it directs political discussion **more** towards **how much** as opposed to **how**. In addition, its contents are not made within the conceptual framework of theories of growth and development, but in relation to expenditure functions that a territory has to face to solve "market failures"⁹ of a regional spatial nature, with a much defined microeconomic approach. I.e., how education, health, welfare policies, infrastructure, environmental protection, etc., must be provided with efficiency, equity and stability, given that private economic activities, which are moved by profit criterion, do not spontaneously decide their allocation and the public sector must complement them or provide them in full. Although obviously overlapping discourses between development and the tax authority theory of fiscal federalism are many, with identical arguments for the most part, the questions raised

Madrid: Turner.

⁹ Musgrave, R. Musgrave, P. (1992). *Hacienda Pública. Teórica y Aplicada*, 5^a edición, Madrid: McGraw-Hill.

and the methods to solve them conclude that alternative assessments and deliverables are required. I.e., from the tax authority theory perspective there is no deliberate intention to influence the determinants of development, its causes, but to offset results exercising spending powers¹⁰.

Accordingly, in Spain, we have to qualify, whether there has been an **important public policy** with territorial distribution of **funds from the state government to regional and local levels** of the administration, and that it was not aimed at promoting regional convergence, or addressing problems of a geographic and demographic nature, such as rural development and depopulation, but it is in accordance with **the general criteria of efficiency and equity** related to public spending functions, equitable provision of basic services forming part of the traditional tasks of the Welfare state and certain national public assets -infrastructures.

Furthermore, the **autonomous communities** despite holding exclusive competence for **regional planning**, crucial to addressing these internal imbalance problems and the lesser development of some areas, have confined themselves to **more technical functions** -urban development, housing, transport- and aspects of **daily management** without integrating them into strategic plans with other stronger measures. It is not surprising that in the general dynamics of regional institutional apathy; **only** specific plans developed **to tackle** depopulation **have been developed** by two communities, **Aragón and Castilla y León**. In the former, in 2000 an **Integral Plan for Demographic and Population Policy**¹¹ was drafted. It was unanimously approved by the regional parliament, however only a few isolated measures were to be developed and always on the margins of a strategic approach, and in breach of all procedures that would have afforded it continuity. In Castilla y León something similar also occurred. It was agreed by the two main parties in the regional

¹⁰ An exception regarding regional policy which combines both perspectives, the development and correction of "market failures" which is about the design of the Cohesion Policy in the European Union for the period 2013-20 is raised by Barca, F. (2009). *Agenda for a Reformed Cohesion Policy; a place-based approach to meeting European Union challenges and expectations*. European Communities, 2009.
[<http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/policy/future/pdf/report_barca_v0306.pdf>](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/archive/policy/future/pdf/report_barca_v0306.pdf)

¹¹<http://bases.cortesaragon.es/bases/ndocumenVIII.nsf/e86600a24e054a61c12576d2002e551c/b1f55>

parliament in 2005, a policy document "**Fight against Depopulation. Regional Strategy**"¹² consisting of 73 measures, but its later development consisted of a mere report analyzing the demographic trends of the region linking to its trajectory measures in force in any case that had not been deployed as part of any strategy but given the polysemy of the depopulation they justify causes and effects with regards to it.

In a more systematic way, in a recent paper the authors of this report identified the difficulties faced by regional policies on depopulation as regards becoming effective¹³: they mature in the long term; require an interdisciplinary and interdepartmental approach, collaboration of different administrative levels, especially local, and between public and private actors; and most decisive, they combine rigorous analytical and empirical knowledge, competence and commitment in their application. I.e., it would be one of the most difficult policies to implement, not only in Spain, but in any arena, a fact recognized in some research backed by the European Union itself, as "it requires new forms of governance"¹⁴.

3.3. Europe as a benchmark for a new policy concerning depopulation

Given this situation where regional policy has failed to make a mark in the strict sense within the Spanish political agenda, only for the purpose of justifying regional funding negotiation, profound reassessment should take place as regards its fundamentals to give way to the beginning of a new stage. In particular, the situation of large parts of the desertified Spanish interior, with its unstructured economy and very serious demographic problems, requires an **urgent major response**. Likewise, as previously stated, **it must be**

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http://www.jcyl.es/web/jcyl/AgendaPoblacion/es/Plantilla100Detalle/1273562679264/_/1273562682373/Texto?plantillaObligatoria=PlantillaContenidoTextoSeccionesUnido [Consultable on 14th of October]

¹³ Sáez *et al.* (2016). "Pasividad autonómica y activismo local frente a la despoblación en España: el caso de Aragón analizado desde la Economía Política", *Ager. Revista de Estudios sobre Despoblación y Desarrollo Rural*, 21, 7-37.

¹⁴ Dubois, A. y Roto, J. (2012, 12). *Making the best of Europe's Sparsely Populated Areas*, Nordregio Working Document. <http://www.nordregio.se/en/Publications/Publications-2012/Making-the-best-of-Europe-s-Working-Documents>

thoughtful, imaginative and innovative in form and content given the complex needs of the case. In short, a sharp turn, and given that **Spain** is a cog in **Europe**, they must mesh **with one another** and, more so, considering that this is a problem which manifests itself in many other areas of the European Union and one for which the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union stipulates special treatment.

Given that when faced with other challenges, Europe exerts a powerful influence on the policy of its Member States, on their public-sector managers, even more so on its citizens and social agents. Just like what has happened in each country since its integration into the Union with: environmental matters, innovation, education, competition, globalization, the existence of European guidelines encourages more rigorous and committed performances. On these issues of land management, local development and depopulation, the European Commission could serve to spur on and widely extend the acquis developed in other areas affected by depopulation whose experience has been remarkable in terms of results. Accept the challenge of depopulation fully as a European policy of smart, sustainable and inclusive cohesion. So that opportunities open up **in the European Union to share concerns** on depopulation, and address them in a **continental perspective**, not only **geographic**, but also **social and community, as well as pursuing further the idea of comprehensive development**. There are several reasons why the European Union should support it.

First because it is a **common, European problem**, since several countries contain sparsely populated areas¹⁵. Although depopulation is a fundamentally **local** phenomenon, because what ultimately becomes empty or enters a critical demographic situation is a small town or village, this does not imply the contrary, dispensing with the **general context** in which they are included. All places, tiny as they are, are integrated into broader dynamics, affected by globalization and are interdependent. Therefore the pooling of different European areas affected by depopulation can serve to contrast diagnostics, and responses as

Sparsely-Populated-Areas/ [Available on the 14th of October 2016]

¹⁵ Margaras, V. (2016). *Sparsely populated and under populated areas*. European Parliament.
[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/586632/EPRI_BRI\(2016\)586632_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/586632/EPRI_BRI(2016)586632_EN.pdf)

well as encouraging **Network Learning** that inspires **shared, innovative and contextualized actions for the territory.**

Secondly small populations in peripheral areas provide **exceptional laboratories** to experiment **new policies**, meet the challenges facing Europe-climate change, energy, demography, globalization⁻¹⁶. Small resilient communities in peripheral rural areas, necessarily dependent on their own ability to adapt to profound crises and their own survival, can contribute to inventing their **own creative opportunities**, as talent is almost the only resource available. In fact, in Japan and the United States there are examples of recovery of small isolated populations taking advantage of opportunities offered by the New Economy and collaborative dynamics. These environments in crisis are where technology, creativity and social capital can be combined in more stimulating ways to find solutions. In this sense, the experience developed in regions such as the Highlands and Islands of Scotland or in sparsely populated areas of Sweden, Finland and Norway is encouraging and invites study and reflection when facing the prospect of formulating specific policies for other areas also in severe demographic decline in the rest of Europe¹⁷.

Finally, Europe finding an unprecedented area with a policy scarcely developed by the countries forming part of it, in which it can **take the lead**, during these times of doubt about its project, would be an important point to **recover prestige** among its citizens. That in line with analytical and governance alternatives which the Commission promotes alongside the OECD¹⁸, finding a definition of development more suited to people's living conditions, in addition to managing the program with an innovative approach applied to the critical situation in unpopulated areas , would be well received. The **sparsely populated territories** exemplify like no other the **contradictions of development**, which despite having more than acceptable economic indicators in terms of income, wealth and employment levels, expectations are negative and are often initially unattractive places to

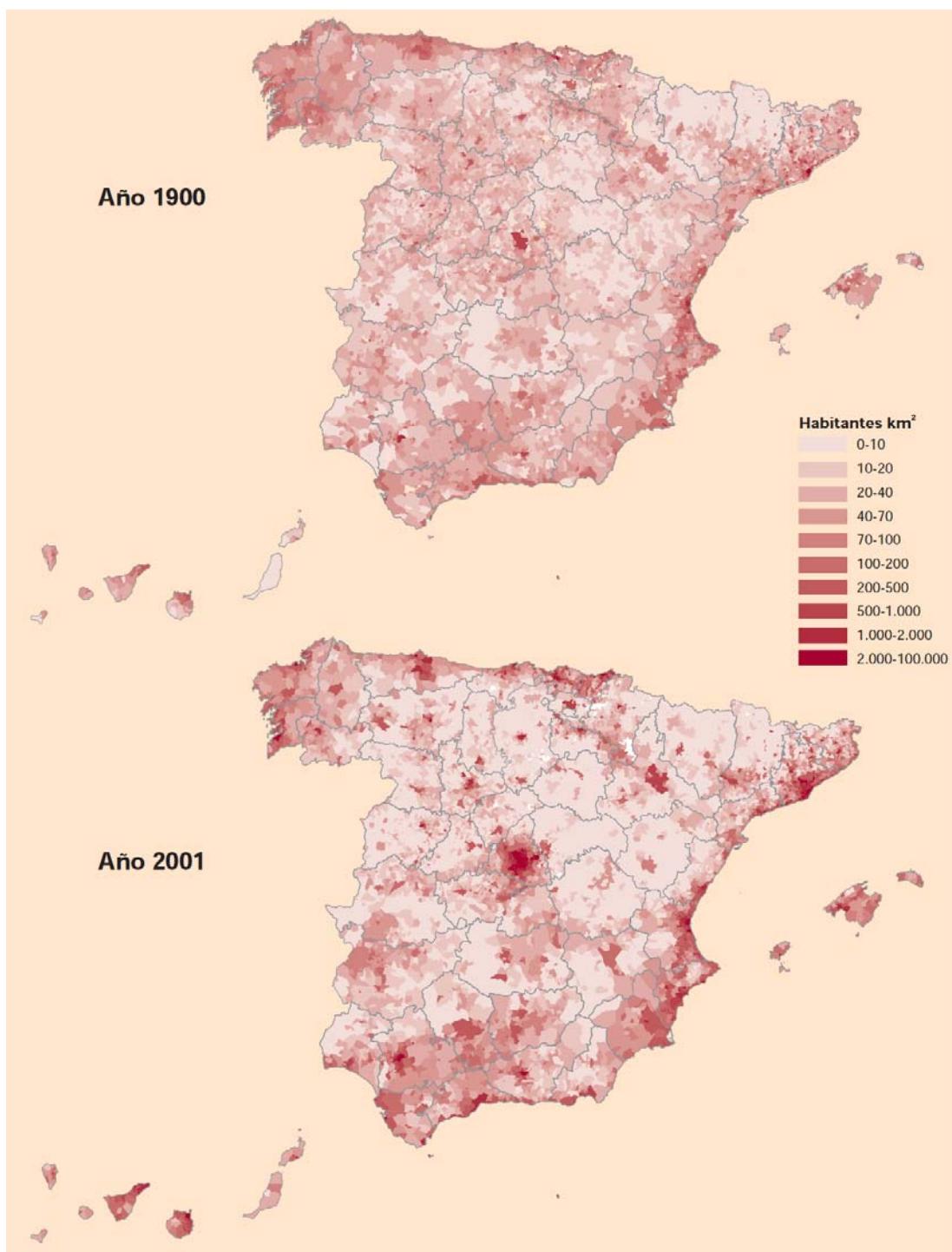
¹⁶ Commission of the European Community (2008). *Regions 2020. An Assessment of Future Challenges for EU Regions*, Brussels.

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/working/regions2020/pdf/regions2020_en.pdf

¹⁷ Program Arctic Smartness <http://luotsi.lappi.fi/arcticsmartness> Highlands and Islands Enterprise <http://www.hie.co.uk/>

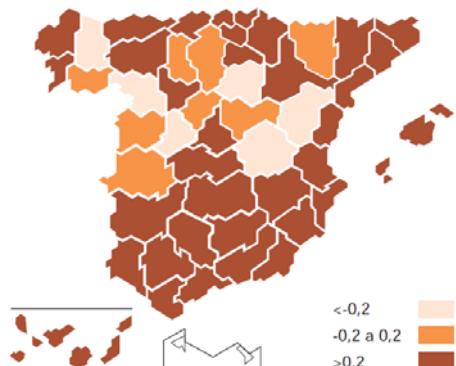
¹⁸ Widuto, A. (2016). *Beyond GDP: Regional development indicators*. European Parliament

live. However, if one looks at its potential, these territories can **become places of opportunity.**

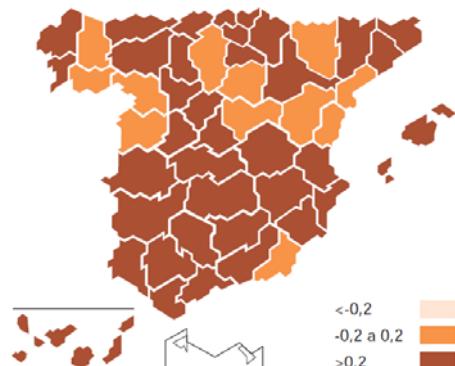


Mapa 3. Mapas provinciales de evolución de la población en los distintos períodos.
Tasa de crecimiento medio anual

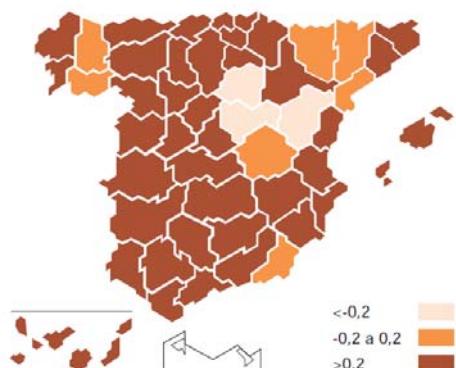
A - Período 1900-2001



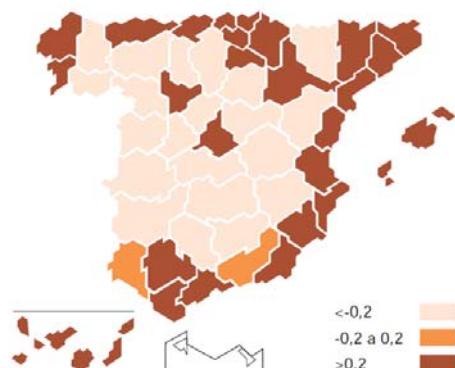
B - Período 1900-1930



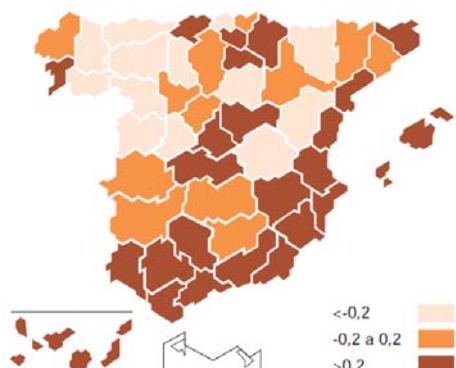
C - Período 1930-1960



D - Período 1960-1981



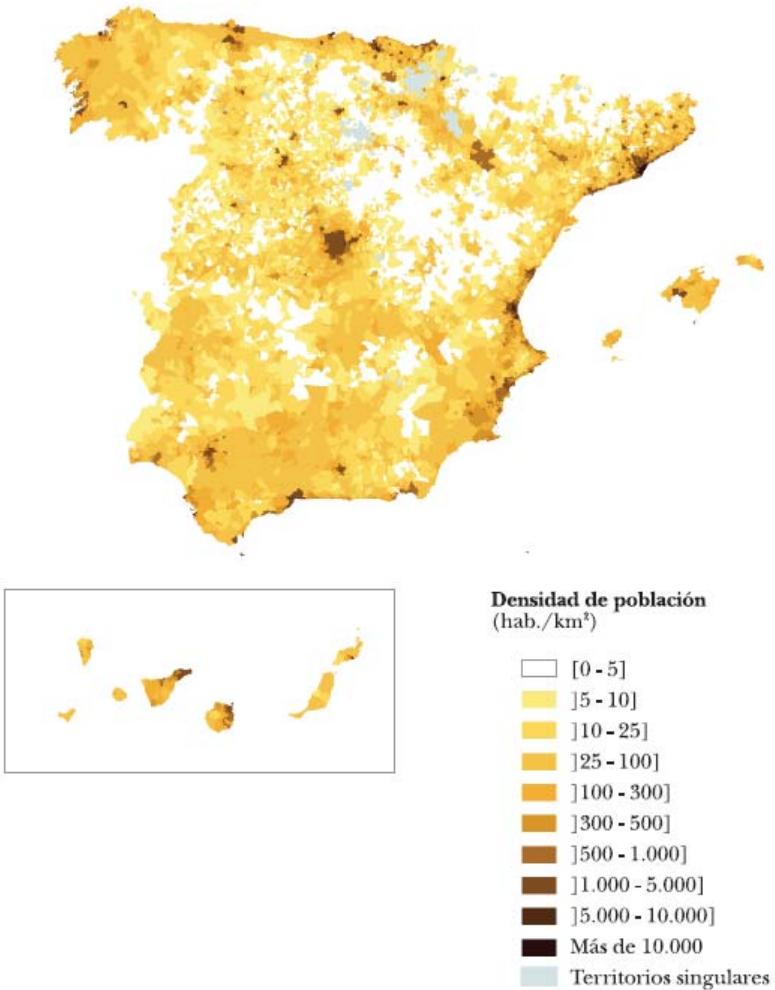
E - Período 1981-2001



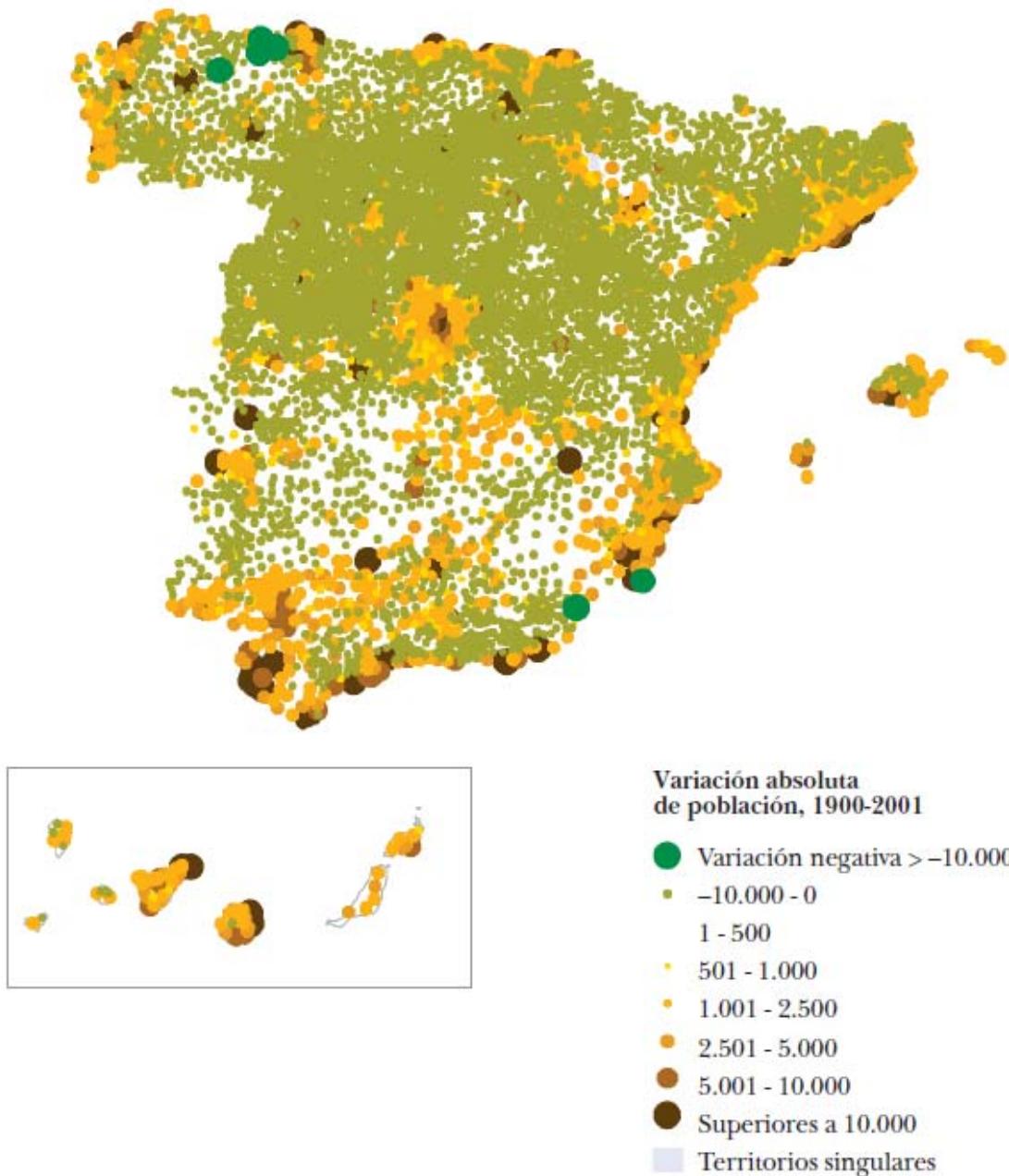
por primera vez una situación neta de evolución decreciente en 21 provincias, mayoritariamente interiores;

- la situación de estancamiento afecta sólo a dos provincias del sur peninsular (Huelva y Granada);
- la dinámica de crecimiento es netamente periférica, destacando como ámbitos homogéneos más amplios Cataluña, el País Vasco y la fachada levantina mediterránea. También aparecen en este conjunto Madrid, Valladolid, Zaragoza y Logroño (La Rioja), así como los dos archipiélagos.

Population density by municipalities (LAU 2 - NUTS 5)



Evolution of the population between 1900 and 2001 at municipal level



Concentration of the municipal population, 2001



Tramos de población municipal

- Hasta 1.000
- 1.001 - 5.000
- 5.001 - 10.000
- 10.001 - 50.000
- 50.001 - 100.000
- 100.001 - 500.000
- Más de 500.000
- Territorios singulares