Extended abstract

Population Decline in Inland Spain. The Province of Ciudad Real as Example

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**Highlights:**

1. Previous demographic diagnoses are the starting point for designing anti-depopulation policies.
2. Population decline processes are aggravated in Ciudad Real province, especially in recent years.
3. Provincial Councils could play an important role in combating population decline.
4. The behaviour of the migration rate is the main depopulation factor in the province.
5. The design of some initiatives to curb depopulation suffers from demographic criteria.

**Abstract:** Population decline of a large part of the rural municipalities of inland Spain is one of the main demographic problems currently. To proposal and implement possible solutions, it is necessary to develop in-depth diagnoses on the problem, prioritizing the lines of action to be applied in the most sensitive territories. This paper deals with the process of population decline in Ciudad Real province as an example of this rural inland Spain, which continues to lose population. Through the analysis of the *micro-data of the Municipal Padrón de Habitantes* and the *micro-data of the Statistics of Residential Variations* as main sources of information, a methodology based on the analysis of short-, medium- and long-term depopulation is proposed using, among other tools, the annual growth rate and emphasizing, in particular, the behavior of residential variations in the face of the situation of stagnation of natural growth in recent years.

**Keywords:** Population decline, rural municipalities, growth rate; migration rate; provinces.
1. Introduction and Justification

The rural depopulation of Spain has been particularly intense since the second half of the 20th century. In these areas, ageing, the departure of the young population, the gradual disappearance of public transport, low population density and the falling birth rate are the factors triggering the "perfect storm" resulting in the depopulation of rural Spain. This problem has gradually been introduced into the political agenda of Spain's Autonomous Regions. The different initiatives presented speak of a broad package of measures to curb depopulation, which, in order to be implemented correctly, require prior diagnoses, designed to uncover the true nature of the problem in each area. These studies, at least in their initial phase, must be based on a strictly demographic dimension that establishes territorial patterns of behaviour, as well as the interpretation, from a territorial perspective, of the main causes and possible consequences. In this context, we offer an opportunity to analyse the depopulation process in the province of Ciudad Real, as an example of the rural interior of Spain, which is continuing to lose population.

2. Objectives, Methodology and Sources

This paper analyses the depopulation process in the municipalities of the province of Ciudad Real. The major objective was to make a prior diagnosis, in demographic terms, of the phenomenon of depopulation that can be used in decision-making. The results obtained allow us to judge the level of implementation of some of the measures already being taken to curb rural depopulation, such as the Castilla-La Mancha Depopulation Act.

The methodology was that used in demographic analysis, with an emphasis on the statistical, graphical and cartographic tools that help to define depopulation. The first phase of the study corresponded to the collection, selection and elaboration of the main indicators. In total, 75 variables were grouped into nine demographic aspects: population size, demographic change, dispersion, sex, age, nationality, place of birth, natural movement and changes of residence.

The second phase studied the depopulation process from a demographic perspective. Firstly, the demographic change in the province of Ciudad Real was studied by analysing the population trends over the long, medium and short term (since 1900, and in the last twenty and five years, respectively). The indicator used was the annual
growth rate (ARG), which has recently been used in a number of studies, and which was applied to all the municipalities in the province. Secondly, natural growth and the migration balance were studied as determinants of the depopulation process, taking into account the same time intervals and municipal population sizes.

Two types of sources were used: general sources and specific sources. The general sources used were the information available on the National Statistics Institute (INE) website, which allows open demographic data to be consulted from a variety of sources, such as the Population Censuses, Population Registers and Residential Variation Statistics. We also used information from the Castilla-La Mancha Statistics Institute and other open-access socio-economic data. The specific sources, which are not open access, included microdata from the Municipal Register of Inhabitants and microdata from the Residential Variation Statistics for the different time periods.

3. Results

Over the long term (between 1900 and 2020), the balance for the province of Ciudad Real was positive (+0.37 % ARG), in line with the generalised gain in population at the national level. The result is based on the increasing significance of the province’s small and medium-sized towns, which grew in importance in the early 20th century and then consolidated that prominence during the rest of the century.

Focusing on the most recent demographic trend, between 2000 and 2020, the balance is also slightly positive (+0.19 %). Despite the significant increase in population between 2001 and 2007, the indicator is moderate because there has been a significant drop in population since 2008, which is when the effects of the economic crisis began to be felt. It is easy to deduce that it is spatial movements that exert the greatest influence on population loss or gain in the province, as opposed to the secondary effect of natural dynamics, which merely epitomise the demographic pattern of modern societies: low birthrates and increased life expectancy.

This discontinuity in growth can be seen in the behaviour of the migration balance over the last twenty years, as it has been positive since 2001, only for the trend to reverse from 2010 onwards. The demand for employment in the construction and agricultural markets first, and the effects of the economic crisis shortly afterwards, explain this clear discontinuity in the spatial dynamics. The significant fall in the migration balance from 2007 onwards is explained by the decrease in the number of new residents from outside registering with the municipal register.
Over the short term (2014-2019), there is a clear population decline. An analysis of the components that make up the arg reveals that the migration balance shows significant losses in the more rural areas, especially in the internal migration balance. The situation is particularly worrying in the southern districts, especially Campo de Montiel and the western areas (Montes Norte), even affecting municipalities in the north-eastern quadrant of the province that were experiencing positive growth over the medium term, and where the situation is now worsening due to the negative performance of the internal migration balances.

In short, there has been an acceleration in the depopulation processes based, firstly, on internal emigration to other parts of Spain, especially to the Valencian Community and the Community of Madrid, and, secondly, due to the halt in the arrival of an immigrant population since the onset of the economic crisis. The situation is complemented by zero natural growth since 2011.

4. Discussion

The results obtained complement other diagnoses of the depopulation process taking place in Spain, endorsing the difficult situation in the province of Ciudad Real, based, among others, on the significant loss of population in large municipalities between 1997 and 2018 and demographic stagnation, based on a number of demographic variables.

The study also demonstrates the importance of spatial mobility in total population loss or gain. The trend in the migration balances generally mirrors the mobility patterns seen in the countries of southern Europe, where young people leave rural areas and immigrants move to small towns to work mainly in agriculture. Over time, the immigrant population has diversified its activity to include non-agricultural activities, such as construction or tourism, but then these were hit by the economic crisis. All these aspects have been reproduced, in part, in the province of Ciudad Real, but in a more pronounced way, as there are no signs of recovery in the most recent trends.

5. Conclusions

The population of the province of Ciudad Real has grown slightly over the last twenty years, mainly due to the arrival of immigrants. These general figures hide the
fact that 76.5 % of the municipalities have decreased in population over the same period, and that localities with less than 2,000 inhabitants are continuing to lose population: a total of 14,443 inhabitants over the last twenty years, or more than 22 % of their population. It is therefore necessary to take a more territorial view of the problem, focusing on the role that coordination between the local administration, the Provincial Council and Local Action Groups can play in promoting innovation and territorial competitiveness. The approval of the Depopulation Act in Castilla-La Mancha and the ambitious programme of social and economic measures it proposes represents a new scenario to which special attention will need to be paid.

6. Future Directions

This study needs to be complemented by other social and economic analyses in order to contextualise the problem properly. We refer, among others, to the role that can be played by optimising the levels of rural governance and how territories can implement measures to improve the quality of life of rural inhabitants. It is also necessary to design indicators that define depopulation in terms of accessibility, undertake a detailed study of internal migration balances, produce specific maps of the real incidence of population loss on human settlements, and introduce qualitative techniques based on surveys of the local population that allow the extent of depopulation processes to be judged in their true measure.