

Extended abstract

*Depopulation in Castilla y León (Spain):
Institutional Design, Territorial
Structure and Centralities since 1983*



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Highlights:

1. The configuration of Castilla y León has generated a resource capture effect.
2. Castilla y León is characterized by a loss of consensus in the autonomic process.
3. The regional presidents focus most of their political career to the national level.
4. The institutional design of Castilla y León has not managed to reverse the demographic dynamics.

Abstract: This study analyses the causes and consequences of the phenomenon of depopulation in the Autonomous Community of Castilla y León, taking as an initial reference the development of its institutions of self-government. To carry out the study, the years between 1983, the year in which the Autonomous Community was formed, until 2023, have been taken as a time period. In the analysis, a study of the institutional, demographic, economic, cultural and social centralities is carried out; the identity of the Castilian-Leonese; the configuration of regional political elites and as well as the party model. For all this, the reading of articles, books and regulations about the subject.

Keywords: Demographic challenge, institutionalism, identity, political actors, rural exodus.

Extended Abstract

1 Introduction and justification

The main theme of this work is depopulation in Castilla y León, analysing it from the point of view of its access to self-government within the framework of the current political system. The research addresses the role played by autonomous development since 1983 in the internal territorial organisation of the community, studying key institutional factors. In order to offer a complementary perspective to existing studies on depopulation, dimensions such as centralities and sense of identity are analysed, with an emphasis on institutional design and the organisation of power.

The study begins by asking whether the institutional design of Castilla y León has influenced its territorial structuring and whether it has provoked centralising effects that affect its demographic evolution. It investigates how institutional deployment has impacted on population distribution, taking into account the importance of the territory's identity and culture.

This approach seeks to shed light on the relationship between political structure and demography in Castilla y León, providing an institutional analysis of its depopulation. To this end, it is based on three main ideas: depopulation - understood as a multidisciplinary phenomenon affecting different areas of society -, the birth of Castilla y León in the context of the Autonomous State - whose decentralisation was intended to strengthen territorial identity and development - and, finally, the institutions of self-government and their geographical location, highlighting their importance in the territorial organisation of the community.

2. Objectives, methodology and sources, areas of study

Depopulation is usually studied through economic, historical or demographic studies, in which institutions are not usually taken into account. In the Spanish socio-economic context, where the public sector is key to economic growth, this study focuses on the relationship between institutional design and territorial structuring. In this way, the analysis focuses on how the Autonomous Communities exercise their

organisational power, selecting Castilla y León as a case study, a territory historically affected by depopulation.

The main hypothesis of the research is that the process of autonomic construction in Castilla y León has generated a centralising effect around Valladolid which has not managed to reverse regional depopulation. The years of study start in 1983, when the Autonomous Community was established, and end in 2023. They analyse the role of the institutions of self-government and their influence on the model of internal territorial structuring as part of the effort to combat depopulation.

The research focuses on two key elements: the study of centralities and the region's sense of identity. Firstly, with regard to the study of centralities, it begins with political-institutional centrality, assessing the concentration of institutions in the territory. Then, demographic centrality is examined (population concentration between 1980 and 2023), and economic centrality (GDP of each province), normalising the results between 0 and 1. Cultural centrality is also studied, focusing on universities, museums and academies, as well as social centrality, which includes the distribution of political parties, trade unions and associations. Finally, identity sentiment is analysed using CIS barometers since 1992. The aim is to understand the impact that the autonomous model has had on the territorial configuration and how it has influenced the distribution of the population.

Ultimately, the aim is to assess whether the political and administrative structures implemented in Castilla y León have been effective in tackling the demographic challenge facing the region, thus providing a new perspective on the role of institutional power in depopulation.

3. Results

The results of the research are divided into two parts: centralities and sense of identity.

On the one hand, the results of the centralities are divided into 5 types:

- Institutional centrality. The capital province has a great weight, 3 points, while the rest of the provinces have 1, except for Soria, Segovia, Salamanca and Ávila, whose institutional centrality is nil.

- Demographic centrality: Valladolid has occupied first place since 2000, previously held by León, with constant growth. Meanwhile, most of the other provinces are losing population, with Soria in last place at all times.
- Economic centrality: Valladolid occupies first place from 1980 to 2021, with the exception of 1984 and 1985, when it was occupied by León. The economic centrality of the rest of the provinces hardly grows. In the cases of León, Zamora and Palencia it decreases.
- Social Centrality: 66% of the political parties of the Autonomous Community, 82% of the trade union organisations with representation in the Administration of Castile and Leon, all the professional agricultural organisations in the territory and 10 of the 11 sectoral organisations indicated by the Spanish Confederation of Business Organisations are located in Valladolid.

Finally, three parameters were analysed with regard to the sense of identity:

- Assessment of the management of the regional government: the majority of the population rates the management of the regional government as 'fair'.
- Nationalist sentiment in Castile and León: most of the population said that they felt both Spanish and Castilian. Second place goes to feeling only Spanish. Feeling only Castilian-Leonese, or feeling more Castilian-Leonese than Spanish, occupy the last positions in all the years analysed.
- Desired degree of autonomy: until 2002, most of the population preferred to have greater autonomy; since then, the first place has been occupied by desiring equal autonomy, except in 2012, when preferring less autonomy reached first place.

4. Discussion

The study reveals three key points about Castilla y León. First, since 1983 the region has experienced a concentration of resources in the province of Valladolid that has captured institutional, demographic, economic, cultural and social centralities. Valladolid houses the main institutions of regional power and concentrates political elites, public employees and social actors, which has increased its population weight while other provinces lose inhabitants, a phenomenon aggravated by the lack of services and opportunities that drive emigration. It also leads in economic centrality, increasing its power by 15% since 1983, and has the highest indicators of cultural centrality.

While it is clear that some capitals have achieved a certain degree of centrality and have services associated with their administrative functions, the region as a whole continues to face major deficiencies in basic infrastructure such as public transport, as well as in essential services such as health and education. In addition, the lack of employment and recreational opportunities has maintained the flow of migration to large cities, which has prevented the region's depopulation from slowing down.

Secondly, the study shows a detachment from the regional project. Since 1992, the feeling of Castilian identity has been weak, and the desire for greater autonomy has decreased by 55%, especially during the economic crisis.

Finally, autonomy indicators have remained static, with no aspirations towards a new institutional model. Castilla y León's institutional design has failed to reverse depopulation, and the effect of centralisation in Valladolid seems to have generated a disaffection with identity and a lack of autonomic ambition.

5. Conclusions

The research concludes that institutional design has played a crucial role in the territorial evolution of Castilla y León, centralising power in Valladolid. Since 1983, this province has accumulated demographic, economic and social resources, consolidating itself as a region-capital, while the rest of the territory has lost population and relevance. This centralism of the capital has weakened the economic, cultural and demographic weight of the other provinces.

Despite the development of the autonomous region, it has not been possible to generate a strong sense of identity among the people of Castilla y León, especially during the economic crisis. The study argues that, although the hypothesis about the relationship between institutional design and depopulation is partially confirmed, more indicators are needed for a more complete analysis.

The region, one of the most affected by depopulation in Spain, has not effectively addressed this problem through institutional design.

6. Next steps

This study proposes three key orientations. First, to develop an analytical model that relates autonomous development to territorial structuring, applicable to all Spanish

Autonomous Communities. Second, to extend the analysis with new indicators related to institutional design, such as public policies, economic distribution, fiscal effort and major infrastructures. Third, to explore the role of the regional capitals in the Spanish territorial model, analysing their centrality within their regions. The research suggests that the study can be extended with other indicators such as tax collection and the presence of infrastructures in the different regions.