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Patterns of Shrinkage in the Iberian Peninsula: Searching Common Planning Practices?

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ABSTRACT

One of the challenges facing spatial planning is the phenomenon of shrinkage in a territory, where transformations and needs have created a complex urbanised landscape. It is important to understand these transformations and the reasons and ideas that have influenced planning practices in these shrinking territories, especially in relation to concepts that have been developed for specific contexts and that have been reused in other parts of the world. This research presents a comparison between two territorial areas (Spain and Portugal) that show important similarities (they are part of the same geographical enclave, the Iberian Peninsula) and differences (levels of autonomy of local, regional, and national governments). The results allow us to reflect on two questions: Whether these cases share a pattern of degrowth common to other territories; and to what extent the practices applied can be considered a learning territory from which to extract valuable knowledge on risks and opportunities as a strategy for territorial balance.

KEYWORDS

Spatial Planning, Shrinking cities, Shrinkage patterns, Iberian Peninsula, Portugal, Spain

RÉSUMÉ

L'un des défis de l'aménagement du territoire est le phénomène de décroissance dans un territoire où les transformations et les besoins ont créé un paysage urbanisé complexe. Il est important de comprendre ces transformations et de connaître les raisons et les idées qui ont influencé les pratiques de planification dans ces territoires en déclin, notamment par rapport aux concepts qui ont été développés pour des contextes spécifiques et qui ont été réutilisés dans d'autres parties du monde. Cette recherche présente une comparaison entre deux espaces territoriaux (Espagne et Portugal) qui présentent d'importantes similitudes (elles font partie de la même enclave géographique, la péninsule Ibérique) et différences (niveaux d'autonomie des gouvernements locaux, régionaux et nationaux). Les résultats permettent d'étudier si ces cas partagent un modèle de décroissance commun à d'autres territoires et dans quelle mesure les pratiques appliquées peuvent être considérées comme un territoire d'apprentissage.

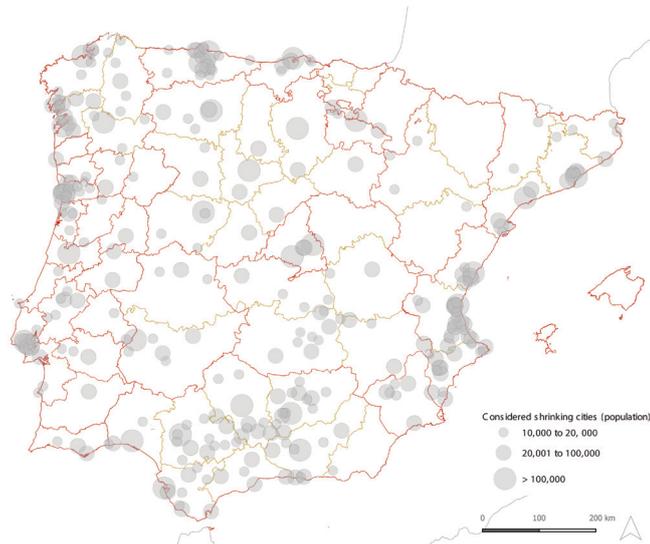
MOTS CLÉS

aménagement du territoire, villes en décroissance, modèles de décroissance, péninsule Ibérique, Portugal, Espagne

TRAJECTORIES OF SHRINKAGE IN THE IBERIAN PENINSULA

Trajectories of shrinkage in the Iberian Peninsula as an integrated territory reveal an urbanised landscape where visible and common effects in Spain and Portugal are observed. In general, throughout history, cities have experienced a loss of population of varying intensity, sometimes linked with strong dependence on migratory phenomena, demographic transition, changes of lifestyle and economic transformations (Pallagst *et al.*, 2017).

Figure 1. Considered municipalities in the study, according to size and functional areas
Source: A.P.C. Barreira & A. Ruiz-Varona



An analysis of the shrinkage severity (time-span) and factors affecting population decline reveal that reality is complex, and it is necessary to obtain accurate information to give evidence to what extent the development capacity of a territory is associated with population growth (Ruiz-Varona *et al.*, 2020). To characterise this phenomenon, this study analyses the population trajectory of cities in the Iberian Peninsula, considering the following timeframes: 1991-2001, 2001-2011 and 2011-2021. This study considers continental Portuguese and Spanish municipalities with at least 10,000 inhabitants or those with fewer residents that are being part of functional areas (López-Trigal, 2014). As a boundary of the research, this study only considers inland municipalities, because there are patterns of behaviour specific to the islands, such as the life-cycle population trend (fig. 1).

The comparison of data for three decades allows us to identify growing and shrinking cities. Following an approach close to Turok and Mykhnenko (2007), shrinking cities are categorised into recent shrinkage, mid-term shrinkage and long-term shrinkage, respectively if they lose population from 2011 to 2021, from 2001 to 2021, and from 1991 to 2021. Data for population are retrieved from Census, provided by Portuguese and Spanish National Statistics (INE). These trajectories of shrinkage severity allow to identify factors for population decline (Barreira *et al.*, 2017; Ruiz-Varona *et al.*, 2022).

CHARACTERISATION OF CITIES: SIMILAR PLANNING PRACTICES?

Literature have identified some of these patterns linked to specific territories (Alves *et al.*, 2016; Salerno & Russo, 2020; Panagopoulos *et al.*, 2015): Exodus from rural areas into cities (economic transformation), urban sprawl (change in the lifestyle), deindustrialisation (economic transformation), political changes (economic and lifestyle constraints), and lack of amenities supplied (unmet required lifestyles). To these processes others can be added such as the effect of a magnet city (satellite cities become increasingly less appealing), the demographic transition (decreasing fertility rate), and touristification (cities increasingly occupied by second homes while former inhabitants are push out due the price effect on houses). This research evaluates to what extent the definition of common patterns that characterise shrinking territories may be reused and applied to the Iberian Peninsula territory. The following is a series of case studies that have been analysed.

Demographic Transition

Moura is a city in the interior of the Alentejo region that has lost population in the last 40 years. During this period, the number of inhabitants dropped by 11%, with approximately 7.7 thousand inhabitants residing in the city in 2021. In addition to its peripheral location in the country and the lack of amenities that help settle the population, such as schools or health centres, Moura faces a sharp loss of young people and a strong ageing population. The loss of young couples is reflected in a reduced fertility rate. The municipality has been investing in a policy to support the settlement of immigrants with a view to countering the process of population loss.

Suburbanisation

With a population of 300,000 inhabitants, Valladolid is currently the thirteenth most populated Spanish municipality. It is also the capital of the autonomous region (NUTS 2) of Castile and Leon. As one of the main industrial centres in the region, it enjoys a strategic position as a communication and infrastructure hub for the northwest of Spain. Valladolid is a remarkable example of a medium-size Spanish city. At the same time, it is a shrinking city due to suburbanisation. In the last three decades, it has lost population, more than 30,000 inhabitants, while the neighbouring municipalities have gained residents. This is an example that shows how population flows have shifted from the capital city to the surrounding municipalities, where home ownership is not as expensive as in Valladolid. Similarly, Salamanca and Granada, both important medium-size cities, are experiencing a population loss up to 10% of its inhabitants since 1991, while surrounding municipalities are gaining or, at least, retaining population, and its proximity to the capital city has led them to their consolidation as eminently residential areas.

Porto is the second largest Portuguese city that has been losing population for several decades while some municipalities on its border are gaining inhabitants. The main reason for the non-settlement of residents in the city is the price of housing. In addition, urban rehabilitation has been slow and housing in the central and historic area of the city is small-size, which does not allow families to settle. Porto has lost more than 23% of its inhabitants since 1991, currently having 231.8 thousand inhabitants. To counteract the loss of population, the Mayor proposes to build new dwellings at affordable price on municipal land, the rehabilitation for affordable rental of municipal properties, and the construction of new dwellings in deactivated military installations or in other vacant plots of the Municipality.

Deindustrialisation (Economic Transformation)

Avilés is a medium-sized city located in Asturias, one of the regions most affected by the industrial crisis in Spain, which began in the 1970s. The reconversion of its large public steel complex led to heavy job losses, demographic decline and great social tensions. At the beginning of the 20th century, a city project was defined (based on the various actions of the central and regional governments and the European Commission, as well as a group of local public and private actors) that has managed to strengthen some strategic axes for local development, with star projects such as the Oscar Niemeyer International Cultural Centre (Sánchez-Moral *et al.*, 2012).

Barreiro is a Portuguese city located on the south bank of the Tagus River which had its population peak in the 1980s, but since then has been losing population. The city was an important industrial centre that was decommissioned. As a result of deindustrialisation process, from 1991 to 2021 the city lost around 22% of its inhabitants. Nowadays the city has almost 37.4 thousand

inhabitants. The municipality of Barreiro has been working in terms of rehabilitation of industrial structures and social sustainability, as well as the tax incentive plan for attracting companies.

Magnet Cities as Absorbers of Satellite Cities

Peso da Régua is a satellite city of the city of Vila Real, both located in the North of Portugal, which has been losing inhabitants due to the attractiveness of Vila Real, which offers certain amenities that Peso da Régua does not have, namely a university. Since 1991, Peso da Régua has lost 13% of its inhabitants, counting in 2021 with around 8.9 thousand inhabitants. The city even lost 4% of its families in that period. The strong weight of the wine sector in the region guarantees employment in the primary sector, which is not very attractive for young people compared to the tertiary sector. The classification of the Alto Douro Vinhateiro (Wine Producer Region) as an evolving and living cultural landscape by Unesco and the building of the Douro Museum in Peso da Régua aimed to contribute to counteract the loss of population, did not reach their objective.

Touristification and Second Homes

Laredo is a city on the Cantabrian coast that has seen its population reduced by more than 15% over the last three decades, with almost 11,000 inhabitants in 2021. It has one of the highest percentages of second home on the north coast, and during the summer its population can triple. The city has gone from maintaining a productive sector dependent on fishing to focusing on the service sector, especially the hotel industry.

Santiago do Cacém is a city on the Alentejo coast that has lost 17.7% of its inhabitants since 1991, but on the other hand, the number of second home has increased by 120% in the same period. In 2021, there were 7,1 thousand inhabitants in the city, but 3,8 thousand second homes. The municipality is committed to a policy of promoting second homes as a way of economically boosting the city. The integration of the city into the Rota Vicentina publicises the city, attracting visitors, mainly from the north and centre of Europe, which has promoted a significant increase in tourist overnight stays.

LEARNING TERRITORIES?

The analysis of these case studies give support to the idea that shrinkage acceptance is not the same for all the territories, even, there is not an awareness of this reality. This fact is linked to the learning processes and knowledge we extract from them, which can be summarized as follows:

- Firstly, in some cases there is a strategy based on the shrinkage acceptance, as in the case of Moura, where the population has become segregated, increasing problems of social inclusion, or Barreiro, where the municipality aims to increase the environmental quality of the city specifically with the restoration of the riverfront, which would enhance the city's port-logistic-industrial potential, and as a metropolitan cultural and creative centre.
- Secondly, in some other cases there is a trivialisation of contraction, as in the case of Peso a Régua, where the municipality recognises that housing supply exceeds demand. However, the number of family units with serious housing shortages, together with the need for housing rehabilitation, have put pressure on the municipalities to offer a qualified urban environment with affordable housing in an urban rehabilitation and rental program.
- Thirdly, there is a growth-oriented strategy, as in the case of Valladolid, where there is an interest in improving the city's environmental conditions by participating in nationally or internationally funded innovation projects, with the aim of designing a carbon reduction strategy and becoming climate neutral; or Porto, where there is a promotion of the basic conditions for the consolidation of the city as digital international reference hub, development of the city for business and investment, and promotion of an urban development programme to enhance the attractiveness of the city for different business.
- Fourthly and finally, there is a strategy focused on the third sector economic revival to counteract the effect of population loss, as in the case of Laredo or Santiago do Cacém.

These results will be presented at the conference and will allow us to reflect on the possible definition of common patterns that characterise these shrinking territories, as well as the risks and opportunities of using these planning practices as a source of knowledge for the design of territorial projects and strategies.

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