POLICY LAB / SEMINARIO

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION IN RURAL AREAS: EUROPEAN EXPERIENCES

OPORTUNIDADES PARA EL DESARROLLO Y LA INNOVACIÓN EN LAS ÁREAS RURALES: EXPERIENCIAS EUROPEAS

PLACE AND DATE

SALÓN DE ACTOS, MINISTERIO DE FOMENTO, PASEO DE LA CASTELLANA 67, MADRID.

(METRO/RENFE: NUEVOS MINISTERIOS)

THURSDAY 12 DECEMBER 2019

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION OF RURAL AREAS: EXPERIENCES FROM EUROPE

1. CONTEXT

According to the United Nations (UN), within 20 years, two thirds of the global population will be urban, mostly living in cities. As recognised by the Spanish Urban Agenda (February 2019)\(^1\), Spain has already reached this percentage. In fact, as of 1\(^{st}\) January 2018, the 80% of the 46,659,302 inhabitants of the national territory is concentrated in urban areas, representing only 20% of the total territory. This makes Spain one of the countries with the highest percentage of urban population within the entire European Union (EU). Of these, 25% live in urban agglomerations of over one million inhabitants and 17% in the largest cities, while rural areas, which occupy more than 2/3 of the territory, present a notable demographic gap.

According to a 2017 report by the Depopulation Commission of the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (FEMP), the demographic gap between the rural and urban areas widened again in 2015. Population loss affected the entire country between 2015 and 2016, but it was mainly concentrated in smaller municipalities vis-à-vis more populated cities, where the demographic decline was better withstood.

Despite the fact that both small-sized and larger urban areas experienced good growth rates between 2001 and 2016, of 18.8% and 16.2% respectively, approximately half of the Spanish municipalities are at risk of extinction. According to official data from the National Statistics Institute (INE), of the 8,125 villages that exist, 4,955 have less than 1,000 inhabitants.

Among the main causes of depopulation are demographic aging, reduced generational succession, low birth rates, and reduced livelihood and employment opportunities. This reality creates important territorial imbalances. According to INE, this issue affects more than 22 out of the 50 provinces, with 14 of in a critical situation, and with more than 80% of their municipalities facing the risk of depopulation. However, severe aging does not solely affect rural areas. This is today one of the defining characteristics of Spanish demography. The population aged 65 and over has not stopped growing since 1998, currently representing 18.7% of the total population and expected reach 25.6% within 15 years. The number of people over 80 years old is also on the increase, a phenomenon also known as the “aging of aging.” By 2050, it is estimated that the working-age (16-64) and children (0-15) populations will shrink while the elder population will triple the number of children.

In recent years, the phenomenon of depopulation has accelerated and has come to determine what is now known as “Empty Spain” or “Emptied Spain”.

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\(^1\) www.aue.gob.es
In order to address the imbalance in the territorial and demographic map of the recent decades, some measures have been put in place to promote the revitalisation of rural Spain. An example was the creation of the **Commissioner of the Government for the Demographic Challenge** in 2017. Recognising the challenges posed by the imbalances in the population pyramid, the Commissioner has the objective of achieving a National Strategy against the Demographic Challenge in the medium and long term. This Strategy defines transversal objectives that are aligned with the strategic framework of the Spanish Urban Agenda and directly affect the territory; these are:

1. To ensure full territorial connectivity, with adequate coverage of broadband internet and mobile telephony throughout the territory, in line with the European Digital Agenda 2020;
2. To ensure adequate provision of basic services to the entire population in conditions of equity, and adapted to the characteristics of each territory;
3. To incorporate the demographic impact and perspective within the development of investment laws, plans and programs, favouring territorial redistribution in favour of greater social cohesion;
4. To enhance regulatory and administrative simplification for small municipalities in order to facilitate the management of town halls;
5. To eliminate stereotypes and to enhance the image and reputation of the territories being worst affected by demographic risk;
6. To improve mechanisms for greater public-private collaboration, promoting the incorporation of demographic factors in the private sector’s social responsibility, and to convert all territories, without exclusions, into scenarios of opportunities;
7. To align action plans and the purposes of the Strategy with the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This also represents a critical opportunity for the scope of the Spanish Urban Agenda, in line with the objective of promoting an integrated, systemic and holistic perspective for sustainable urban development and the well-being of citizens.

### Some data:

- Around 37.3 million inhabitants are concentrated in 20% of the total area of the country. Another 9.3 million are distributed over 80% of the territory;
- From 2001 to 2018, 63% of Spanish municipalities have lost population. The intensity of the 2018-2001 rates of population change by municipality show that 48.1% of the municipalities have lost between 10% and 50% inhabitants. If we focus on the last decade, since 2011, 6,516 municipalities are losing population, that is, 80.2% of total municipalities. In small municipalities, losses affect almost 90% of those under 1,000 inhabitants;
- 60% of the municipalities (about 4,800 of more than 8,100) have a proportion of 2 people over 65 for each child under 15. In almost 3,000 municipalities, in one every three, there are 4 people over 65 for each child of 15. And in 1,039 Spanish municipalities the ratio already exceeds 12 over 65 for each child under 15. This happens where there are still children, since in more than 1,000 municipalities there are no children under 5, and in almost 400 there are no youngsters under 15 years old.

### 2. OBJECTIVES

The Policy Lab will focus on the challenges of and opportunities for national policy to revitalise rural areas and small- and medium-sized municipalities in the face of the depopulation phenomenon. The **key objectives** are:

1. To understand the drivers of depopulation in rural centres at the European level according to experiences of countries (ES, FR, DE, etc.) and how

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2 Report from the Commissioner for the Demographic Challenge accessible here:


3 Ibid.
these are affecting the “well-being” of the inhabitants of such areas;

2. To promote the exchange of knowledge, identifying cases of governance success as well as governance failure in rural revitalisation;

3. To analyse innovative solutions for revitalisation in rural nuclei as a strategic objective for achieving territorial balance.

3. **MAIN POLICY QUESTIONS**

1. **Governance reform**: what is not working? Are there institutional gaps? (E.g. in Spain there is a recurring debate on the reform of the Provincial Councils as a result of their inadequate functionality, especially in rural provinces)

2. **Links between the Spanish Urban Agenda and the Urban Agenda for the EU**: how can the instruments of these strategic frameworks support the revitalisation of rural areas?

3. **Relationship with global urbanisation and de-ruralisation trends**: how do efforts fit into the discussion of “systemic” and “integrated” sustainable development? What is the role of governments in confronting vis-à-vis incorporating these inevitable processes in their sustainable development strategies?
4. PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME

9:30 – 10:00  Reception and registration
Experts and moderators

10:00 – 10:30  Welcome introduction (5 min)
Javier Martín Ramiro, General Director for Architecture, Housing and Land. Ministry of Public Works (ES)

Introduction of the programme for the day (5 min)
Mart Grisel, EUKN Director

The challenges of depopulation in Spain (20 min)
Ignacio Molina de la Torre, Director of the Commissioner of the Government for the Demographic Challenge (ES)

10:30 – 11:00  Other EU experiences. Findings from Germany, France, and Latvia
Mart Grisel, EUKN Director

11:00 – 11:30  Slovenia. The challenges rural depopulation poses for spatial planning at the national level
Boštjan Cotič, EU Project Manager, Urban Planning Institute (SI)

11:30 – 12:00  Coffee Break

12:00 – 12:30  URBACT. Enhancing the Vitality of Small Cities
Mireia Sanabria, Internalisation and Local Development, URBACT Lead Expert (ES)

12:30 – 13:00  Spain. Opportunities to face depopulation from the perspective of development and innovation in agriculture
D. José Luis Palma, Lawyer of the State Council and associate lawyer at Gómez-Acebo Pombo (ES)

13:00 – 14:00  Panel Discussion (Q&As)
Moderated by Mart Grisel, EUKN Director

14:00 – 15:00  Lunch

15:00 – 17:00  Five working groups (speedboat method)
Moderators (see point 5. Programme Outline)

17:00 – 17:30  Presentation of the findings from the WGs. Plenary Discussion and conclusions
Moderators (see point 5. Programme Outline)

17:30 – 17:40  Closing remarks
Ángela de la Cruz Mera, Deputy Director General of Urban Policies, Ministry of Public Works (ES)
5. PROGRAMME OUTLINE

First part (before lunch) During the morning sessions, there will be simultaneous translation from Spanish to English.

1st presentation: An expert from Spain will discuss, from an institutional point of view, the urgent challenges of depopulation as well as the incentives for multi-level governance to present innovative solutions for Spain. Links will be established with the theme of the rural-urban continuum, with the issue of reduced services and access to infrastructure (physical and social; for example, sanitation, transport, education, employment, etc.), with the role of the agricultural sector, as well as with the possibilities for revitalisation.

Following presentations: Four introductions from other countries will follow, contextualising their experience in the subject. The countries proposed are:

- European experiences (studies from Germany, France, and Latvia)
- Slovenia (exploring the challenges rural depopulation poses for spatial planning);
- URBACT (vitality of small towns - URBACT project);
- Spain (addressing opportunities to face depopulation from the perspective of development and innovation in agriculture).

The Moderator of the day will be Mr. Mart Grisel, EUKN Director, who will introduce the speakers and participants and moderate the plenary discussions. To end the morning session, a joint panel discussion will offer the opportunity to have an interactive exchange between the experts present and the audience.

Second part (after lunch)

To take full advantage of the knowledge and experience of the participants and invited speakers, the afternoon session has been set up as a workshop with "brainstorming.” The experts will participate in the afternoon session to carry out an interactive discussion by dividing into several thematic groups, each coordinated by a moderator. The following themes are proposed for the groups:

1. Relationship between physical and social infrastructure/services and the economic-productive sector;
2. The rural-urban continuum and agriculture;
3. Opportunities for the digitalisation of rural areas;
4. Tourism and tradition for the revitalisation of rural territory;
5. Climate change and the urban-rural environment.

Moderators: Eulalia Elena Moreno de Acevedo Yagüe, D.G. Urban Planning and Territorial Planning of Extremadura/ Luis Ángel Collado Cueto, Professor at the Autonomous University of Madrid, Faculty of Economic and Business Studies/ Amanda del Rio, Technical Director of Global Nature Foundation/ Antonio Alcolea, S.G. for the Promotion of the Information Society, Ministry of Economy and Business.

Moderators will lead the discussion and provide necessary support. The main objective of the afternoon session will be to develop this interactive discussion among all participants and generate ideas and proposals based on the experiences raised in the day to fight against depopulation.