

## The needs and effects of housing renewal policies in Spain: Implications for sustainability and accessibility



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### ABSTRACT

In Spain recent changes in regulations concerning the renewal of residential buildings have marked a turning point in the way in which the renewal work on condominium housing is approached. However, the financial crisis of 2008 has depleted public administration coffers and family pockets alike, giving rise to a set of problem related to housing renewal, such as lack of accessibility and difficulties in adapting to sustainability requirements. Nevertheless, this issue has not attracted much attention in the scholarly literature. In order to fill this gap this article aims to shed light on the housing renewal policies implemented in Spain, on their outcomes and on their implications for sustainability and accessibility. The article includes a case-study focused on the Basque Country Autonomous Community which shows a favourable evolution of the need, demand and execution of the rehabilitation tasks, in an adverse context of economic crisis. The implications for stakeholders, including policy-makers, are discussed.

### 1. Introduction

About 1960 a period of economic expansion began in Spain which was accompanied by large-scale internal migration. The demographic impact of this period was enormous, and continues to be highly significant even today. Most of the homes built between the late 50s and the mid-70s were privately owned condominium-type residential developments.<sup>1</sup> More than the 50% of the houses in Spain were built more than 35 years ago, without modern technical knowledge, using the materials of that time and in a context of economic and social development when nobody was certain how their municipalities would develop in the future. It is precisely these homes that are now suffering from the greatest shortcomings and deterioration and a clear need for renewal.

Deterioration in the housing stock is accompanied by the ageing of the population born in the boom years following the Spanish Civil War. For a number of socio-economic reasons, population growth has slowed and the dependency rate (the ratio of non-working-age to working-age individuals) has risen substantially. The needs of this population are steadily increasing in terms of being able to go about their day-to-day tasks in an urban setting that has also undergone conspicuous changes over the years (SIIS & Heras, 2007). As well as addressing accessibility problems, a rather new approach to sustainability requirements has

been adopted in Spanish housing regulations. The changes have been driven, in part, by the directives of the European Union. As a result, there is a growing social demand for housing renewal in Spain in a context of deep recession in the building trade due to the burst of the Spanish housing bubble. This issue has been under-researched in the scholarly literature. Only a few, scattered and mainly technical contributions have analyzed the set of detailed technical specifications that make up the Spanish housing renewal initiatives (e.g. Kurtz, Monzón, & López-Mesa, 2015; Rubio del Val, 2011) and some of their implications for sustainability (e.g. Cordente-Rodríguez, Mondéjar-Jiménez, Meseguer-Santamaría, Mondéjar-Jiménez, & Vargas-Vargas, 2010; Pombo, Allacker, Rivela, & Neila, 2016). To fill this gap, this article aims to shed light on the housing renewal policies implemented in Spain, their outcomes and their implications for sustainability and accessibility.

The remainder of this paper is arranged as follows. Following this introduction, a short review of the population development and sociodemographic pressure in Spain, as one of the main factors that define the demand for residential dwellings, is presented. In the next section the changes over time in Spain's housing stock are described. In the fourth section the impact of the European requirements for sustainability (e.g. energy efficiency) and universal accessibility are summarized. In the fifth, the effects of the housing renewal policy in Spain are

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<sup>1</sup> More than the 80% of the Spanish housing stock is privately owned; Spain is a country of homeowners (Hoekstra, Heras Saizarbitoria, & Etxezarreta Etxarri, 2010)

analyzed with a focus on the case of the Basque Country Autonomous Community. Lastly, the findings are discussed, and conclusions presented.

## 2. Population development and sociodemographic pressure in Spain

After the immediate post-Civil War years, a time of economic expansion began in Spain from 1960 onwards that became known as the ‘developmentalist period’ or ‘the Spanish economic miracle’. It was an expansion that hid several deep cultural, political and socio-economical flaws left over from the painful period of Franco’s dictatorship. Against a background of economic backwardness in which there was little investment in innovation, it was decided that imitation and importing foreign technology were Spain’s best options for ensuring growth and catching up with the more advanced countries around it (Cubel, Esteve, Sanchis, & Sanchis, 2012). This economic growth was characterised by a growing domestic market, an abundant supply of labour, low wages, favourable state policies and low energy costs.

The Spanish population increased from 30,582,936 in 1960 to 37,742,561 in 1981 (INE – Spanish Statistics Office). This increase and the demographic drop during the subsequent period of industrial crisis are shown in Fig. 1, in which the population pyramids for 2001 and 2011 are superimposed. This clearly shows the wave of “baby boomers”, the ageing of the population and the increase in dependency rates towards which the country is headed. The baby boom generation will reach retirement age in around 2025, and this will have significant consequences for the social protection system and for demand for services associated with the dysfunctions and disabilities that come with old age (Yenilmez, 2015; Zubiri Oria, 2016).

The period of expansion saw a consolidation of industry in certain regions, including some in which there was little previous tradition of industry. Industrial firms operated in the north of the country (the Basque Country, Cantabria, Asturias and along the coastline of Galicia), on the Mediterranean seaboard, in western Andalusia and in cities such as Madrid, Barcelona, Valladolid and Zaragoza. At the same time Spain’s eastern seaboard was opened up to tourism on a huge scale, resulting in a rapid expansion in infrastructure there. The oil crisis of 1973 and the subsequent increase in energy prices pushed production costs up. This led to an industrial crisis and a forced restructuring of

industry, ushering in a new era of industrial redevelopment and re-industrialisation that began in 1980.

The demographic impact of these changes was enormous, and indeed continues to be highly significant even today. This can be seen in Fig. 2, which shows Spain’s population density province by province. In the regions blessed with industrial hubs and large-scale tourism there were extraordinary increases in both employment and per capita income. The cumulative population increase from 1950 to 1981 was over 80% (INE). Great waves of internal immigrants moved there from rural areas in the rest of Spain, changing the population density of those areas too. There were both major decreases and increases in population in different provinces, which resulted in a demographic imbalance.

The areas with low population densities include regions which are very poor and underdeveloped, and land that can almost be described as desert. By contrast, those with high population densities enjoy better economic and social conditions, though just below the surface there is evidence of economic, social and urban degeneration resulting from the developmentalist period, and of irreparable environmental damage.

Together with the demographic pressure, another important social change is the structure of Spanish households. In Spain over the last five decades there has been a marked growth in the number of single-person and single-parent households. The number of households is growing at a faster rate than the population, and each household becomes smaller on average. This process has occurred in most countries of the European Union but with a quite different intensity, and there is a greater need for housing than would be the case if family structure remained stable (SIIS and Heras, 2007).

Socio-demographic pressure, characterised by an ageing population and rising dependency rates, together with changes in the structure of Spanish households pose a major challenge for social service provision. Measures are needed to deal with this situation, about which there is not sufficient awareness. One of the current priorities of social services in Spain, as in the rest of Europe, is to provide care in the home for elderly persons, to avoid having to remove them from of their own homes. As a result, policy-makers have developed housing renewal policies (Costa-Font, Elvira, & Mascarilla-Miro, 2009; Hillcoat-Nalletamby, Ogg, Renaut, & Bonvalet, 2010; Houben, 2001; Swartz, 2013).

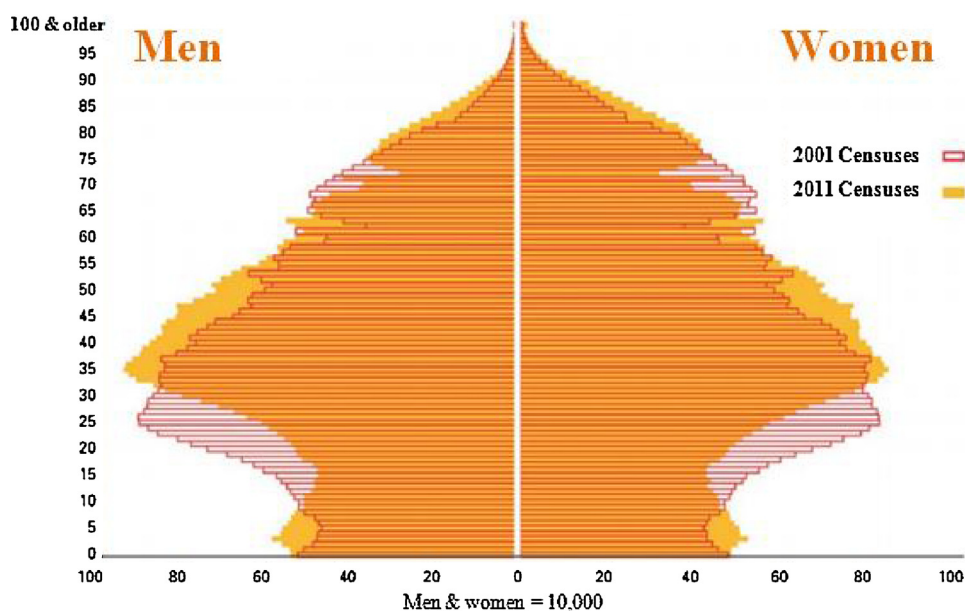


Fig. 1. Population pyramid for Spain. Source INE. Population & housing censuses for 2011

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