

# The comeback of the central city in Southern Europe: population growth and sociodemographic change in the Spanish urban cores

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## ABSTRACT

A new period of population growth has recently started in most of the main central cities in Southern Europe. After more than two decades of population decrease, the urban cores of Madrid, Rome, Barcelona, Milan, Turin, and Marseille have experienced a significant demographic growth. This trend has come to share the reurbanization processes that many other cities in Europe and in the United States underwent during the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Less intense trends, but in the same direction, have been noticed in other Spanish cities like Valencia, Seville and Bilbao. In Spain, the arrival and settlement of foreign born population in the urban cores have played a key role in the total population gains. Moreover, a growing appeal of central areas for metropolitan residents has also been stated. In this context, inner cities have experienced a remarkable transformation of the sociodemographic profile of their population. In most of the Spanish central cities, young people, single, professional and the highly educated people are more willing to move into and within the central city. However, the family dimension is linked to most of the leaving the inner city movements.

This paper aims at analyzing reurbanization processes and back to the city movements that are occurring in the Spanish major cities as well as explaining the sociodemographic renewal experienced by these spaces. The excellent temporal and geographic coverage of the Spanish Register of Residential Movements — a 100% microdata dataset including each residential movement occurred in Spain and the migrant's demographic characteristics — enables us to explore the first goal from a geodemographic approach. Census 2001 microdata allow us to explain the sociodemographic characteristics involved in the different types of movements.

**Keywords:** Urban demography, reurbanization, residential mobility, central cities, Southern Europe.

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## **Extended abstract:**

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### **Temporal and geographical context**

After the industrial and urban explosion of the two major cities in Spain (Barcelona and Madrid), known during the second third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both inner cities experienced a continuous population growth based on the incessant inflow of migration. The two central cities reached one million inhabitants by 1930.

In the late 1970s, clashing with the saturation of the urban cores, the volume of population living in the central municipality reached its peak, and migration stopped being the main factor to explain changes in the sociodemographic structure of the population in the metropolitan areas. It was followed by a period of uninterrupted loss of population in the inner cities, in a process related with the intensification of the urban sprawl and the development of new functionalities among the metropolitan territory, the arrival of the baby boomers to the age of leaving home, and the consequent reduction of the household size in the urban cores — areas where few new dwelling units were added to the existing urban fabric. In absolute terms, the population of the central municipality of Madrid fell from 3.2 million in 1981 to 2.9 in 2001. Barcelona's central city decrease was more intense in relative terms, from 1.8 to 1.5 million during the same period. On the contrary, the population increased from 1.5 to 2.5 million outside the limits of the central city in Madrid's metropolitan area and from 2.5 to 2.9 million in Barcelona's metro area.

### **Demographic growth of central cities and reurbanization**

The central city's episode of population decrease has ended recently, not only as a consequence of the increase of international migratory flows, but also because of the relative increase of residential movements towards the central city. This whole process has been widely followed with some delay by the rest of the major cities in Spain. The central municipality of Madrid has added almost 400,000 inhabitants since 1996, while in Barcelona the overall population has increased in more than 125,000 inhabitants since 2000. Positive growth in Valencia has started again after a remarkable decrease of population during the 90s. In Seville the demographic growth has become more intense and in Bilbao the population decrease known since 1981 has recently arrived to an end.

Other Southern cities in Europe have experienced similar processes in the recent past. Rome's central municipality lost more than 200,000 inhabitants between 1981 and 2001, and it has already recovered almost the same amount during the last decade. Milan and Florence inner cities have never reached the population counted in 1971, but the population increase experienced during the last years stops 3 decades of negative growth. Marseille also shows a similar pattern, while in Athens it is expected to see a population increase in

the next census round. On the other hand, the population decrease continues in the main Portuguese inner areas.

This trend has come to share the processes that many other cities in Europe and in the United States knew during the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Recent studies on this field fall in a highly accepted literature of reurbanization, the return of inhabitants to central city areas combined with a new economic scenario in the urban cores. This process mainly deals with a new functional specialization of the inner city (Musterd, 2006) and to its new emergence and resurgence (Cheshire, 2006; Storper and Manville, 2006). In the U.S., the majority of the urban cores have experienced population growth since 1990 (Frey, 2006), and the same has occurred in London and Paris, where a long period of dramatic shortfall came to an end during the 80s.

### **Selective migration in inner cities**

In the context of reurbanization, inner cities have experienced a remarkable transformation of the sociodemographic profile of their population. In most of the Spanish central cities, young people, single, professional and the highly educated people are more willing to move into and within the central city. Meanwhile, family dimension is linked with most of the leaving the inner city movements. Likewise, manual workers and the medium educated are more likely to leave central areas. Individuals moving out of central cities satisfy their preferences in terms of ownership and size of the new dwelling. Center to metro movements are characterized by the absolute preponderance of ownership and dwellings considerable bigger, while metropolitan movers into the central city adopt other residential strategies to face the competitive housing market.

Similar results have been stated in other cities in Europe and the United States. Rossi (1955) and Abu-Lughod and Foley (1960) introduced the life-cycle approach to explain selective migration in residential movements, just when leaving the city movements were modifying the urban structure of major metropolitan areas in the U.S. Beginning in the 70's, when the back to the city movements emerged, new research was developed introducing the sociodemographic characteristics of individuals moving to the urban core, considering as well, as a remarkable flow, those who were moving into the city center from the suburbs. Sanchez and Dawkins (2001) point out that the classic life-cycle approach is less relevant to explain the profile of those individuals moving into the urban core.

In Europe, many efforts have been made to understand the sociodemographic changes in the inner city of Paris and London. Bonvalet and Lelièvre (1991; 1994) defined the demographic filter of the urban core of Paris and underlined its feature as a privileged space for social success. Recent studies of Ogden, Hall and Schnoebelen (Ogden and Hall, 1998; 2000; 2004; Ogden and Schnoebelen, 2005) analyze the transformations in the typology of households living in the central city. Selective migration and residential mobility play a major role in the decrease of the size of households in Paris, and in the increase of the

number of one member households. In the Greater London, Ford and Champion (2000) reveal differences in the sociodemographic profiles of the three residential flows involving the city (moving into, out of and within). The family dimension involved in the decision of living in suburban locations is identified by Kulu; Boyle and Andersson (2009) when observe spaces of higher fertility in the suburbs of the Northern European countries.

Gale (1979) examines the first cases of back to the urban core movements in North-American cities. The author concludes that those who move to the inner areas tend to be white, younger, highly educated, and professionals with no children and a higher income. These conclusions are quite similar to those of Spain (1989), who found that unmarried people and households with no children and high income are more willing to move to the urban core. Furthermore, LeGates and Hartman (1986) reach the same conclusions in their attempt to define the profile of individuals moving to the city center: since, usually, the housing market is smaller and more expensive in the urban core than in the suburban areas, the number of households with higher incomes and no children arriving to the urban core is likely to be higher. Long and Glick (1976) underline the attraction of non-traditional households to the urban cores. In a case study of Cincinnati, Varady (1990) deals with a migrant who is characterized by a high level of education, with no children and clearly willing to have better access to job opportunities and to live in a cosmopolitan environment. Frey and Kobrin (1982) emphasize the existence of a different composition in the typology of households participating in the flows moving into and moving out of the central city. South and Crowder (1997) and Sanchez and Dawkins (2001) introduced the importance of movements within the cities. More recently, Frey (2002, 2005, 2006) and Birch (2005) confirm the population growth of most of the USA central cities as well as a change in the composition of the population living in the urban core of these cities.

### **Data and methods**

The small size of Spanish municipalities is an essential attribute for the development of the current research, since it allow us to clearly distinguish the urban core from the rest of the metropolitan area. Central municipalities of each province are understood as the central city and the metropolitan area is frequently divided in various rings depending on the distance of each municipality's centroid to the one in the central city. However, there are some differences in the extension of these units among the major metropolitan areas in Spain, which have to be taken under consideration in the analysis of the results.

Five major cities have been included in the study: Barcelona, Bilbao, Madrid, Sevilla and Valencia. Barcelona and Madrid are the biggest metropolitan areas in the country, with a remarkable difference compared to the rest of the major cities.

The study mainly relies on two data sources: the Spanish Register of Residential Movements and the Population Census. Both of them disseminate the information at a municipal level.

The Spanish Register of Residential Movements is probably one of the world's most reliable sources of information tracking residential changes. It registers all the residential movements crossing municipal borders in the entire territory of Spain. Besides the municipalities of origin and destination, the microdata dataset provides the migrant's demographic information. The wide coverage of this source allows the research to analyze the territorial relationships of the urban cores in the context of reurbanization, its temporal variations, and the demographic structure of individuals participating in residential flows with the central city involved.

Census 2001 microdata permit to explore the sociodemographic characteristics of each person who has arrived, left and moved within major Spanish inner cities. A fourth dimension of the residential flow is also significant to study: those who moved within the metropolitan area but didn't include the central municipality in their residential itineraries. Techniques of logistic regression analysis are used aiming at identifying the sociodemographic characteristics of individuals and families which make them more or less likely to move in any of the four directions involved. Spanish Census 2001 recollects residential and migratory itineraries in a municipal level. To analyze residential movements crossing the municipal borders, census data provides origin-destination information of the last movement done, as well as the year of that residential change. The 2001 Census also provides information about the last change of dwelling within the municipality.

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