

THE TOURIST DEVELOPMENT OF ORIHUELA (SOUTH EAST OF SPAIN) AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SETTLEMENT (1910-2010)

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Throughout the twentieth century tourism has become a dynamic factor related, on the one hand, with demographic growth and, on the other hand, with a great increase in building land for the creation of residential areas. The analyzed period extends from 1910 to 2010, between them different significant events are gathered in the evolution of the Orihuela municipality (south east of Spain), which are going to involve an important change on settlement and administrative structure. In this interval Orihuela municipal district has gone from representing nearly to 60 per cent of the Vega Baja region, to less than 40 per cent, in other words, from an area of 57.380 to 36.554 hectares. This territorial reduction has supposed the rise in the surface of two previously existing towns, Torreveja and San Miguel de Salinas, which demarcation were limited strictly to the ground that occupied their own town centre, as well as the emergence of another new, Pilar de la Horadada. In the beginning of these segregations two motivations converged, as the implementing of irrigation plan, with the consequent agricultural intensification, and tourism development, with an expansive urban model of residential characteristics. Both aspects will be raised throughout this article.

The community of foreign residents have caused, in studied century, a restructuring on the distribution of Orihuela population, that has evolved from a dispersed settlement located in small hamlets and villages, associated to a scattered throughout the dominant agrarian space where only highlighted the city as a centre of services, to a municipality that currently presents two great urban areas with different features. One of them located in interior lands where the city is placed and other one next to the sea, derived from the new tourist settlements. However, the last one does not offer a compact city centre, but is the result of the aggregation of built-up areas of which subsequent organization has required for its management the establishment of a new administrative unit called Orihuela-costa.

In the article the evolution of the Orihuela population is analyzed on the basis of three registers fulfilled in 1910, 1950 and 2010. In the census of 1910, in the borough lived

35.072 inhabitants that were distributed of uneven way all through the extensive municipal district. It is to be emphasized that nearly a third of the total, 31,7 per cent, lived in the city, while the remaining were distributed all over the territory either in disseminated or assembled into smaller units represented by 19 hamlets and 4 villages. In the mid-20th century the population undergo an appreciable transformation, owing to the fact that these small entities now concentrate the spread people, while the city, in spite of its increase of residents, keeps a similar percentage than the previous record. Thus, the small towns of rural districts were benefited of migratory movements that were already beginning to empty the agricultural space. In the 2010 census the territorial distribution of the Orihuela inhabitants knows new guidelines in its location, given that a generalized depopulation is being produced in the rural habitat, as well as a demographic decrease in small villages. Despite this, the population proportion of the city in relation to the municipality remains with preceding inventories, because of the emergence of the aforementioned new residential area, Orihuela-costa, which brings together both the foreign people and the national which at last decades have been settling in territory.

The change of tourism model has evolved from the summer temporary occupation to a permanent presence in the territory happened by a migratory flow which fixed the residence in the district. This fact shall entail an extraordinary development of urbanization that chooses to locate it the most valued areas environmentally, motivating a rivalry in the exploitation of the soil between tourist and agricultural uses. The latter, were planned in some cases on lands previously devoted to an unirrigated agriculture, that today is residual and uncompetitive, and more recently on pre-littoral surfaces transformed to irrigation or even in great ecological value spaces. These settlements and the establishment of new agrarian activity, encouraged with the arrival of the waters of the Tagus River, break up the landscape and economic duality which formerly characterized this municipality, where irrigated areas —*huerta*—, within Orihuela is located, and dry lands were differenced, that currently has turned into an antagonism between the interior and the coastline territories.

In this coordinates, the intermediate enclaves between the fertile lowlands and the coast have become into coveted spaces aimed to urban and touristic actions where golf courses have contributed to increase the attractive of the offer as a complement. In fact, into the analyses four differentiated areas have been distinguished by their occupation of space and are delimited, three of them by the two great arterial roads which organize the territory in the coastal area, and the fourth one in the interior lands on formerly agricultural spaces. These transformations are reflected in the present structure of the population of Orihuela, in which according to data recorded in December of 2010, only 57.8 per cent of total inhabitants are Spaniards, while the rest are from 101 nationalities distributed in an unequal way. From the foreign group, is important to emphasize the presence of Britain citizens, who deal the 20.4 per cent of the total population, and German residents, with the 3.4 per cent. Previous data highlight the great magnitude that immigration has achieved in the municipality, where the two most significant tendencies in Spain migrations are represented, i.e., in the one hand people who are attracted by residential opportunities and in the other hand those citizens who come in search of work or pursue an improvement in their economic status.

The scarcity of public services provided in Orihuela-costa has caused a certain social unease that has entailed a civic demand and the subsequent creation of a political party, C.L.A.R.O. Among its proposals, as last objective, it is to constitute the new coastal urban area as Minor Local Entity —*Entidad Local Menor*—, to choose their own representatives and to manage their own resources. The said recognitions, in many cases, have been the first step to a territorial and administrative independence.

As a consequence, the change caused in the territory of Orihuela has also involved a new orientation in the distribution of the working population, in which agriculture, the traditional dominant role, has been displaced to the last position, overcome by all other economic sectors in the supply of labour. Currently, service sector of the economy is in the first position, followed by the industry, mainly the construction, which excessive growth has been slowed down by the economic crisis.

