

VILLAGES AND SMALLS CITIES OF GALICIA (SPAIN) AS THE CENTRE OF SUSTAINABLE RURAL MARKETS

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Abstract

In this work, we will analyse the role played by Galician villages, county towns or small cities as coordinating centers of the rural environment. These places are regarded as a necessary connection between rural and urban life. They are urban nuclei which provide an urban base, as well as services, to the entire territory. In a territorial system such as the one in Galicia, with a bipolarity between an urban-industrial coastal subsystem and an agrarian-traditional inland one -with lower densities, negative demographic growth and an increasingly aging population-, these settlements are of great relevance. At an economic level, primary sector activities are still important, and secondary and tertiary sector activities tend to be concentrated in large cities and in the network of small cities that make up the urban system.

For these reasons, this work will seek to study: 1) the role of villages and small cities as regional market places, which are now revived with new ecological produce or with geographical denominations of origin from nearby areas. This function represents a modern continuity of the old fairs and periodic markets that were studied fifty years ago; 2) The location of small and medium-sized processing and packaging companies of high quality agricultural produce as

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well as their leading role in the Galician agri-food sector; 3) Finally, the image of an agrarian-based region that these villages or small cities project, which serve as the link between the rural areas of the region and their urban systems.

The study starts with a definition of the general framework, which is then completed with case studies. It is based on the hypothesis that supporting these small towns and regional centers is useful as a strategy for the revaluation of rural areas. This favours the polynuclear nature of the urban network. A possible conclusion will turn on the affirmation of the importance of small cities today, with a very transformed rural world. In addition, there is its attraction of new central economic activities for the regions centralized by them, as is the case of modern commercial distribution or agro-industrial companies [Bul. Soc. Géog. d'Égypte, Special issue, 2022, PP. 159 - 177].

Key Words: Rural markets; Small cities; Rural counties; Centrality; Food products and industries.

1) Introduction: SMALL TOWNS AND THEIR ROLE IN ORGANISING RURAL AREAS.

Since the celebration in 1925 of the first IGC outside Europe in Cairo, the issue of displacement, local shopping and the economic-spatial strategies of the rural population, of farmers, has been a central issue for Geography. The inhabitants of small towns and villages, over time, have had the need to go to the nearest main town market centre to sell their surplus produce in addition to going shopping, accessing personal services, doing business and socialising (Berry, 1967; Irwin, Isserman, Kilkenny and Partidge, 2010). For this reason, it is not surprising that theories referring to central places of many small cities that have an area of influence in their rural environment, have become a classic axis of discourse in our discipline (Christaller, 1933; Berry, 1967). Geography has been understood for decades as the study of urban networks and systems that exercise their control over regional and national territories (Haggett, 1977). In this work we return to this long-held traditional theme, but under a current perspective focused on the renewal of rural areas and the profound changes that have occurred both in local economic dynamics and in mobility patterns.

The first question to ask ourselves is how to define a small city. They usually have different sizes according to the regions of the world (from 5,000 to

20,000 inhabitants is the usual in Europe and several tens of thousands in Africa, Latin America or South Asia) (Zoido et al, 2013; Rio Fernandes et al, 2016). However, they are at the lower level of what can be considered a compact urban core, as well as being the intermediate locations between the city system and the rural space (Barreiro, López-Rodríguez and Lois-González, 2019). On the one hand, the adjective small indicates that they are not considered cities with all their attributes (well respected population, first level administrative centre, etc.). On the other hand, by having the noun city it denotes that commerce, services and industry are important activities within it, with a morphology characterised by high levels of construction and demographic density. Small cities are central places of trade and job creation in predominantly rural areas (Laborie, 1979).

In the present study we will analyse the autonomous region of Galicia, in the Spanish Northwest, with its Atlantic influence and dispersed population settlements. The structure of its urban network resembles many territories of Western Europe, especially Northern Spain, France and Portugal. Therefore, many of the ideas and conclusions obtained from this analysis can be applied to the entire northern half of the Iberian Peninsula, as well as France, and will show certain similarities with other Mediterranean countries (Lois-González and Pino, 2015; Lois-González and Piñeira, 2017). In fact, from the French geographic literature, it is considered that small cities and county capitals must have a minimum of several thousand residents, although their total demographic populations do not exceed 20,000 or 30,000 (Laborie, 1979; Jousseune, 1996; Demazière, Serrano and Vye, 2012). In addition, these urban nuclei concentrate some basic administrative functions (employment offices, county courts, small tax offices, twenty-four hour health centres, etc.), a good offer of private services, shops with supra-local influence and land available to accommodate local companies or industries (Rodríguez-González, 1997; Cebrián and Panadero, 2013). This is the first level of the urban system, which nevertheless plays an increasing role in the endogenous development processes of the regions of Western and Central Europe (Zoido et al, 2013; Torre, 2015).

Usually, the existence of a small city or main urban nuclei is associated with that of a space or territory perfectly defined by contemporary Geography, the county (Brunet, Ferras and Thèry, 2005; López Trigal et al., 2015). A county is a small region (intermediate space); in this case, between local and regional. It usually groups several municipalities or different villages, in rural or semi-rural areas. The counties were used on numerous occasions to establish maps of

farmers markets and fairs, to rationalise the administration of the territory in situations dominated by the fragmentation of municipal administrative entities or to promote economic development policies based on the creation of industrial poles. In this sense, the counties are the territorial translation of both the beloved pays of early twentieth-century French Geography and the functionalist interpretations that emerged from the theory of W. Christaller (Christaller, 1933; Berry, 1967). Nowadays, these types of areas serve to better understand both the dynamics of economic, social and behavioural functioning of rural or peri-urban spaces in most parts of the world.

In this initial review of the small cities and their relationship with the agricultural world, some theoretical contributions on their role in the connection between the rural world and urban services, their specialisations and relative functional qualifications have been mentioned. In the following sections we will focus on the sources and methods used in this research. The study will focus on Galicia, the Spanish region where small cities play a more important role in the organisation of the territory. Next, an analysis will be carried out on how recent agricultural and rural transformations have not altered the essence of the traditional position of small cities and main urban nuclei as centres of secular markets and fairs. Finally, we will analyse how this type of urban nuclei has acquired an important role as new centres of the local food industry and the commercial distribution of agricultural companies. All these sections will end in a final conclusion, where the relevance of a classic theme of Geography during this last century will be affirmed.

The central objective of this study will be to demonstrate how the small towns of Galicia maintain their leading role as link nuclei between the urban system and profoundly renovated rural spaces. In addition, as a specific objective, it is about understanding the unequal specialization and sociodemographic importance of the main towns and small cities, depending on the area of the region in which we find ourselves. It will also seek to characterize these centers, based on their differences as places of implantation of agroindustries. Finally, an obvious specific objective is to characterize the changes that have occurred in the map of agricultural fairs and markets in the last thirty years. In short, the subject of study is the elementary urban nuclei, the small cities, which act as economic centers of rural regions. Some regions that were initially agrarian and now economically diversified, which despite having

changed profoundly, continue to be organized by these central places. Some central rural places that have been reinforced in recent times, maintaining interest in a topic that was already addressed at the IGC in Cairo almost a century ago.

2) SOURCES and METHODOLOGY

Similar to the theoretical framework, the sources of study of small cities in Galicia and their role in the organisation of rural territory are similar to those employed since the 1960s and 1970s. During this period, a method of analysis was established consisting of an extensive bibliographic review, the use of quantitative data, qualitative interviews and the cartographic representation of results, and has continued to the present day (Miralbés and Casas-Torres, 1974; Torres and Lois-González, 1993). However, the quality of the information provided by the main urban nuclei, particularly those relating to industrial activities and enterprises linked to the agricultural sector, has improved considerably. Therefore, a classic study has been carried out, but in a context of remarkable advances in the quality and availability of sources.

The first set of sources to be handled in this work are bibliographical. The Galician urban system, like that of all Western Europe and the Mediterranean, was built on the proliferation of small urban nuclei that had always operated as market centres in nearby rural environments. Consequently, the study of urban history is also that of the cities and main urban nuclei where fairs and periodic markets were held to sell the surplus of agricultural produce, and to supply artisan and manufactured goods to the farmers. These main urban nuclei were consolidated throughout the Middle Ages, to grow and diversify in later centuries (Mumford, 1966; Palliser, Clark and Daunton, 2000). As a result, bibliographic sources have contained a strong historical bias, as well as an economic, geographical and urban one since the twentieth century, when the beginning of profound transformations in rural areas reinforced the role of small cities as effective mediators between the urban and rural world in numerous territories, such as Galicia (Laborie, 1979; Souto, 1988).

To carry out an analysis into the centrality of urban nuclei in agricultural areas, the quantitative data handled are quite basic. There are records of fairs and rural markets in various reports and official statistics from the last century. In most cases, the place and days of the events are included in a series of statistics that have been official since the creation of the autonomous region of Galicia. Specifically, the department of rural affairs and the Galician Institute of Statistics (IGE) regularly publish data on fairs and periodic markets, and occasionally on

the number of attendees or on the best represented commercial activities (IGE, 1990-2022). At the end of the twentieth century, the published data also contained the approximate number of livestock subject to transaction and number of attendees. However, livestock markets have now disappeared, both for health reasons and because of the computerisation of the trade of live cattle, pigs, sheep and poultry, which is centralised in the city of Santiago de Compostela (in the Amio market once a week, for cows and calves) and in the Agricultural Market of Silleda (for smaller livestock, which is only moved when it finds a buyer). Therefore, fairs and markets have continued as special days for shopping and travel to a small city or main urban nucleus, but without the space for the sale of livestock of yesteryear.

The quantitative information is supplemented by high quality regional statistics on the number of agricultural companies per municipality or agri-food industries at a local level (IGE, 1990-2022). With this data we obtain a detailed record both of the distribution of agricultural and livestock farms throughout the territory and the new role of small cities in rural areas, attracting primary processing activities of farmed food produce or raw materials.

Alongside quantitative sources, this analysis has been complemented by participant observation in these markets and fairs with semi-structured qualitative interviews carried out with the attendees, in particular, to the actors who contribute to their continuity and dynamism. The questions focused on the frequency, symbolic value, and practices that are taking place on those days. Touring the fairs and market places also helped to understand the internal organisation of the stalls, their zoning and, more importantly, the presence or not of local agricultural products together with others provided by conventional distribution chains. In fact, the periodic markets of the small towns and villages maintain a historical tradition of directly channelling part of the surplus generated in the nearby rural area and, at the same time, selling goods and products coming from abroad.

Finally, in this methodology section, it should be noted that all the values obtained were mapped to facilitate the understanding of various realities through the use of maps. The first is the continuity of an elementary urban network throughout the territory. A network that is based on the existence of several dozen small cities and main urban nuclei, and seven main cities, with areas ranging from 120,000 to 500,000 inhabitants, including the central city and its metropolitan area (Lois-González and Pino, 2015). The second is the coast-inland opposition by which the main urban nuclei are greater and more frequent near the

coast (and the main cities) and respond to Christallerian logic of central place amongst extensive inland rural areas. The third refers to the different and sometimes very regressive dynamism of small cities and their areas of influence, although the main urban nuclei remain stagnant or grow.

3) GALICIA: THE SPANISH TERRITORY WITH A GREATER ROLE FOR SMALL CITIES

As previously mentioned, Galicia is a historic autonomous region, a nation according to the Spanish Constitution of 1978, perfectly identifiable on a map. It is the north western corner of the Iberian Peninsula, open to the influences of the Atlantic Ocean and the only territory of the Iberian western coast belonging to Spain and not to Portugal. For this reason, and due to its relative historical isolation, it has a series of unique elements such as a very autonomous urban system in the context of the country (Lois-González and Piñeira, 2011; Lois-González and Pino, 2015). The most inhabited cities are two ports of industrial tradition, one located in the North of the region (A Coruña) and the other in the South (Vigo), with an estimated population of 250,000 to 300,000 inhabitants, and metropolitan areas of 450,000 to 500,000 residents. In the middle of these two cities, Santiago de Compostela (almost 100,000 inhabitants and more than 160,000 in its urban area) is the political capital of Galicia and acts as the third great city of reference. To the north, Ferrol, and between Vigo and Santiago de Compostela, Pontevedra, complete a dense network of main coastal urban nuclei. A coastline organised from an extensive axis of growth that in a meridian direction concentrates more than 70% of the population and regional economic activity. Outside this axis, the cities of Lugo (about 100,000 inhabitants) and Ourense (105,000 and an urban area of almost 140,000 residents), are the undisputed inland urban centres.

Between these seven cities and a small group of localities of 20,000 to 25,000 inhabitants (Carballo, Vilagarcía de Arousa, Cangas do Morrazo, etc.) there is no intermediate urban centre. This fact corroborates two main ideas about Galicia: the existence of a polycentric system of main urban nuclei and the relevant role that small cities have in the planning of the territory. In addition, due to its Atlantic character, the abundance of water and the existence of soft landforms, the region has medium or high rural population densities, and a high number of villages and small localities (more than 20,000 that account for almost half of the Spanish total). Thus, the spatial dynamics have always been characterised by the proliferation of population and economic flows between

small rural localities that extend throughout the territory and the main urban nuclei, in particular small cities and market centres (Piñeira and Santos, 2011)

In the systematic studies on the importance of small cities and main urban nuclei in Galicia, two historical periods are usually differentiated, one until the 1960s and 1970s, and another period following the urbanisation process of the territory (Souto, 1988; Rodríguez González, 1997; Barreiro, López-Rodríguez and Lois-González, 2019). Consequently, for centuries a network of elementary urban centres was created, increasingly numerous and better distributed, which built more or less clear areas of influence over their dependent rural counties. The commercial and service facilities of the urban nuclei, in addition to the fairs and periodic markets explained the reticular organisation of the territory, with a markedly Christallerian cut. In this context, the majority of main urban nuclei comprised of between 3,000 and 8,000 inhabitants, at an undisputed historical time of domination of the old regional agrarian system (Bouhier, 1979).

Since the 1970s, the urbanisation process in Galicia has consolidated, with a concentration of the population and economic activity around the main urban nuclei; also, the region has had more land built and artificialised, and the urban way of life has spread throughout society (Lois-González and Pino, 2015). In this context, the entire western coast has recorded an accelerated urbanisation, with continuous building areas between cities (such as between Vigo and Pontevedra or A Coruña and Ferrol), and the development of peri-urban areas. In this way, the position of the main urban nuclei and small cities has been altered. They continue to function as reference centres for their surrounding areas (Vilagarcía in the region of Salnés, Carballo in Bergantiños, Cangas in O Morrazo, etc.), but belong to and depend on the metropolitan areas of Vigo, A Coruña or other areas of intense urbanisation such as the RíasBaixas. Their functions have been maintained, but within a very densified space defined by the rise of rururban areas (Barreiro, López-Rodríguez and Lois-González, 2019). However, in the Galician interior, the situation has changed much less. Small cities and main urban nuclei have grown, have reinforced their importance in a scenario of depopulation and aging in agricultural areas, and have retained their role as central places, according to the classic models of Geography. This happens in Sarria, Chantada, Lalín, O Carballiño and O Barco, among others, that have reinforced their demographic and economic weight in their regions, since they function as poles of increasing concentration of both population and companies (Rodríguez-González, 1997; Barreiro, López-Rodríguez and Lois-González, 2019) (Figure 1).

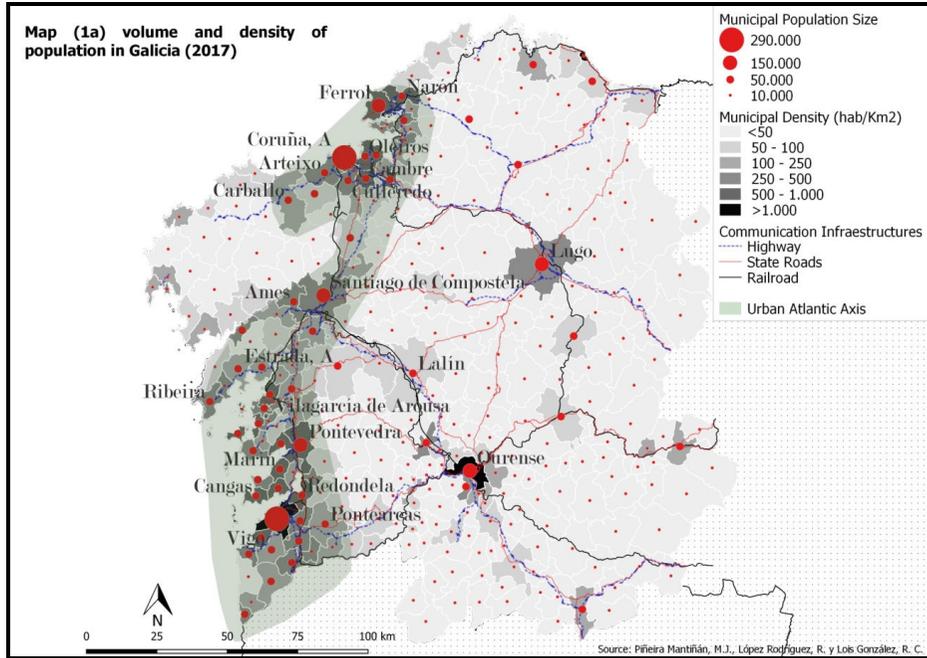


Figure 1A. TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION OF GALICIA IN THE 21st CENTURY

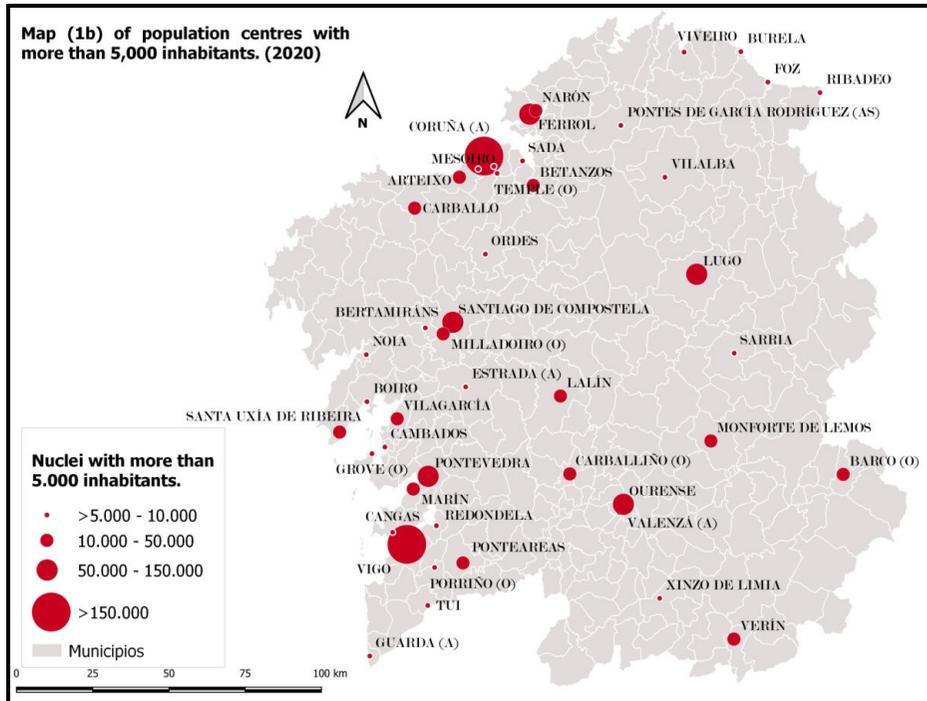


Figure 1B. POPULATION CENTERS WITH MORE THAN 5,000 INHABITANTS. LOCATION AND POPULATION IMPORTANCE

In this regard, Galicia has been characterised as a late industrial region, with a large increase in the number of companies and an ability to generate employment and wealth, in particular since the 1980s (Alonso and Lois-González, 1997). Industrialisation has taken place in a number of cutting-edge sectors such as mechanics and metallurgy, biochemistry, wood, textiles and agri-food. Although a large part of the main industries has concentrated around the most prominent cities, in the urbanised coastal areas, most small cities and main urban nuclei have usually been the location of supply industries of the mechanical or chemical sectors, while they have become significant poles of the agri-food and sometimes textile industry, metallurgical processing and wood industries. Throughout the depopulated and rural interior, the role of the business sector in the main urban nuclei has been reinforced, since that is where the large majority of industrial establishments are located. However, in these regressive spaces not all the manufacturing sectors are represented and there is a predominance of food and wood plants, and some textile work.

This endogenous-based industrial development is very significant today. However, the strengthening of the centrality of small cities is best seen in the growth and diversification of commercial activity. With respect to retail trade, this increase can be uneven according to the urban nuclei, the region in which they are located and the distance to main cities (Rodríguez-González, 1997). According to our observations, the importance of the main urban nuclei has been considerably strengthened as wholesale distribution centres, centres for shopping and hospitality services, and as centres for the redistribution of goods. The polycentric urban system of Galicia uses the network of large cities and small cities to design a logistical model of trade where the frequency and intensity of economic flows, the accessibility and financialisation of the system have not ignored the elementary main urban nuclei, but quite the opposite.

4) ANALYSIS: AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL TRANSITION OF THE TERRITORY TOGETHER WITH THE CONTINUITY OF TRADITIONAL MARKETS AND FAIRS

In Galicia farming was largely hegemonic until the 1950s and 1960s (García-Fernández, 1975; Piñeira and Santos, 2011). It was a territory with high rural densities, highly dependent on agricultural activity, and insufficiently integrated into the modern market economy. On average, the size of farms was

small (mainly between 5 to 10 hectares) and were managed under a strong productive pressure by the farmers that above all sought self-subsistence, which was achieved through polyculture. Thus, the best land was reserved for cereal which, together with domestic pig farming, constituted the basis for feeding thousands of families of small landowners (García-Fernández, 1975; Bouhier, 1979; Lois-González, 1988). Only a few plots with an abundance of water or relatively far away were reserved for meadows and pastures mainly for cattle, and vines were cultivated in hillside territories with better insolation. Along with the communal exploitation of the mountains to obtain wood, pastures or cropland, the effort was concentrated on survival and only secondary lands on family property were dedicated to sellable produce. This was common practice in the 1940s to 1960s, where only some products such as livestock (especially calves and mules), cheeses, wine and some textile raw material were prevalent in fairs and periodic markets spread throughout the territory (Colino and Pérez-Touriño, 1983; Lois-González, 1988) (Figure 2).

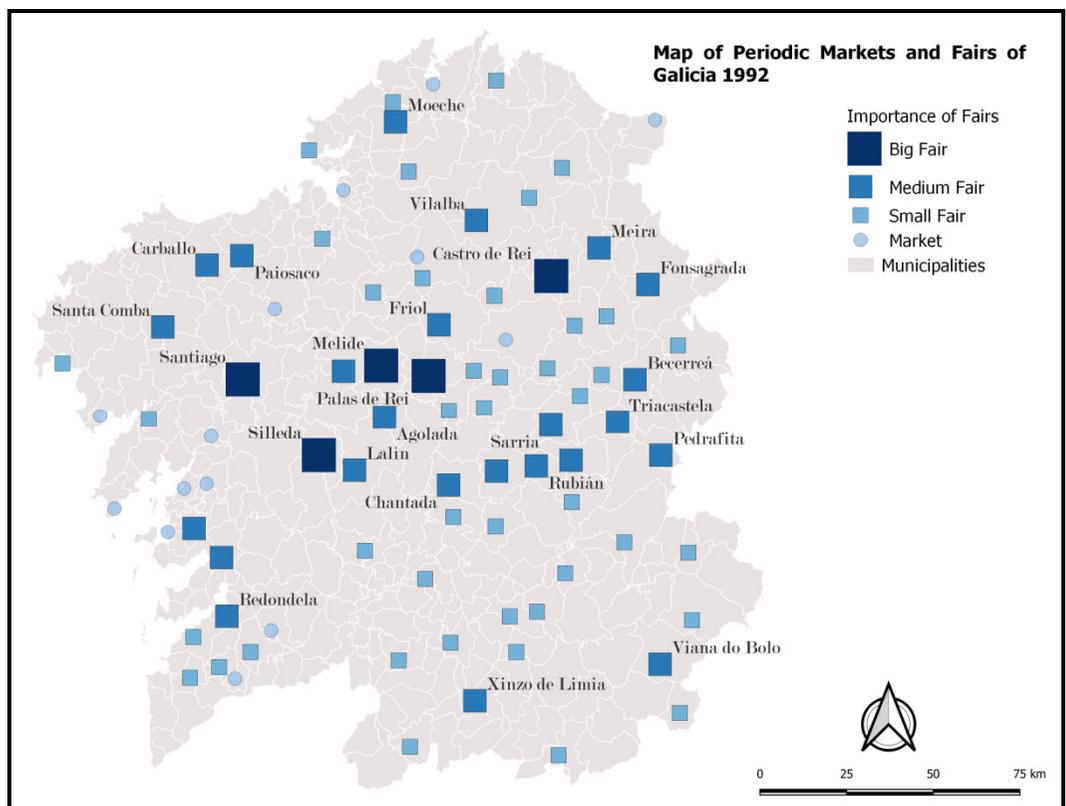


Figure 2. REGULAR FAIRS AND MARKETS IN GALICIA IN 1992,
ACCORDING TO THEIR IMPORTANCE

From a broad perspective, fairs and markets were important at various levels for the traditional farming society of Galicia in the mid-twentieth century. Firstly, they were the only place where monetary transactions took centre stage in a rural world that was extremely withdrawn and deeply autarchic in economic terms. Secondly, they made it possible to channel surplus agricultural produce while providing peasant families with some fundamental products from abroad such as salt (for food preservation), vegetable oil and the possibility of consuming some smoked or salted fish (octopus, sardines, etc.), among others (Colino and Pérez-Touriño, 1983; Lois-González, 1988). Third, they were a festive celebration, breaking with the monotonous everydayness of working the land. Finally, and of great significance for this study, they turned central places where fairs and markets took place into symbolic centres and examples of urbanisation of rural regions throughout the territory. Thus, many of these localities that emerged in high and visible places, at crossroads or close to a bridge to cross a river, were affirmed as undisputed main urban nuclei, also thanks to the generalisation of certain public services and the creation of companies essential to integrating a polycentric urban network.

Although the regional economic structure has changed completely from an undisputed agrarian hegemony to a significant level of industrialisation and a clearly hegemonic activity in the services sector, small cities have been able to adapt to the new context. In fact, capitalist relations of production have resulted in an unprecedented growth of trade, which has continued to resort to the network of main nuclei as prime locations. Small cities also offer a good number of personal services and buildings that host public facilities, many of them supralocal. For this reason, most of the county capitals have grown in recent decades (Rodríguez González, 1997; Barreiro, López-Rodríguez and Lois-González, 2019), to exceed 10,000 inhabitants in at least a dozen examples, and 5,000 in about 30 more, when in the 1980s many of these urban nuclei had no more than 2,000 to 4,000 inhabitants. In this expanding context, the role of these capitals as venues for fairs and periodic markets has been maintained and reinforced in terms of the number of attendees, although direct agricultural or livestock transactions have been replaced by more conventional forms of trade, with the addition of the sale of organic or quality products from nearby farms.

Based on the above, a review of the current map of localities that host fairs and periodic markets in Galicia is not too different from that of thirty years ago (Figure 3). There are still a large number of main urban nuclei that continue to function as periodic trade centres, with regular distribution throughout the territory. However, there is already a notable change with respect to the last decade of the twentieth century, the density of events and their importance is not correlated with the importance of agricultural specialisation, and particularly livestock, in certain regions. Now its greater frequency of periodic markets depends on both the total regional population and the identity of the small city. In fact, while the fairs and markets are more numerous in western, urbanised Galicia, in the interior most fairs are usually monthly or fortnightly, with a much lower relevance. The entire urbanised corridor that goes from A Coruña to Vigo and a significant set of coastal locations, notably in the RíasBaixas area, comprise the populations with the largest number of markets, showing that the process of intense economic transformation in the region has been accompanied by an uneven urbanisation process, which reinforces the centrality of the small cities and main urban nuclei of the coast against a greater stagnation in the inland regions.

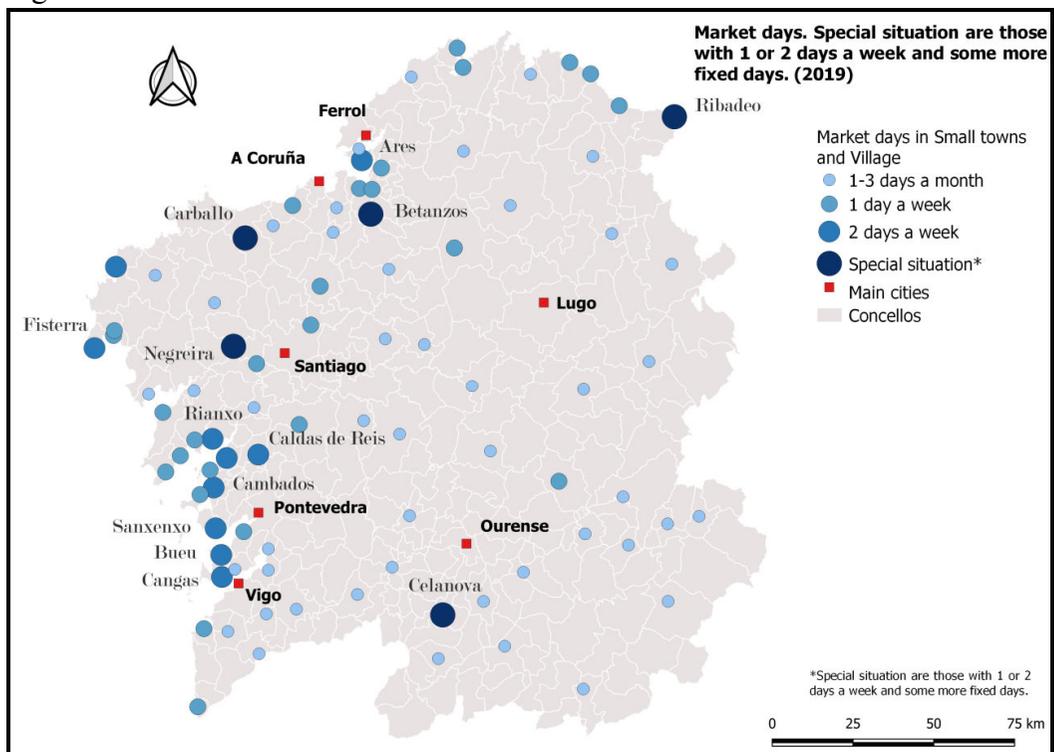


Figure 3. SMALL CITIES AND TOWNS THAT HOST PERIODIC FAIRS AND MARKETS, ACCORDING TO THEIR FRECUENCY OF HOLDING IN 2019

5) RESULTS: FAIRS AND MARKETS AND THEIR LINK TO THE CENTRALITY OF SMALL CITIES IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY AND DISTRIBUTION

As already pointed out, the set of economic and spatial transformations registered in Galicia in recent decades have contributed to the strengthening of small cities and main urban nuclei as important poles in the shaping of the polycentric urban system of the present. At the same time, this consolidation of the central places in peri-urban or rural areas contributes to the survival of fairs and periodic markets, frequent in the most populated areas of the coast. Consequently, a first result of our analysis is the verification that the urbanisation process not only reinforces the relevance of the main cities and adjacent areas, but consolidates the prominence of small cities with classic functions, such as those of the market, and modern ones such as industrial, commercial and more advanced services.

In a previous paper we studied the growth of trade directly linked to agricultural activity in the main urban nuclei (Barreiro, López-Rodríguez and Lois-González, 2019). In fact, agricultural machinery establishments, traders of specialised products (seeds, fertilizers, medicines, etc.) and farming tools are present in large numbers in small towns. These are, in particular, private trading companies that, together with the agricultural cooperatives that have flourished throughout rural areas in municipalities or small counties (López-González, 1999; Montes et al., 2019), are responsible for supporting the entire network of medium-sized, strongly capitalised production units that, specialised in crops and particularly in livestock breeding, extend throughout rural Galicia. The total number of farms has been reduced to less than half since the end of the twentieth century, but agricultural production has increased in value. Therefore, we have moved from a hegemonically farming scenario, where farmers went regularly to the nearest fair to sell their scarce surplus produce, to a completely different framework. A significant number of medium-sized, competitive and market-oriented farms rely almost daily on local agricultural services and trade. This increase in economic flows translates into a clear reinforcement of the centrality of small cities and main urban nuclei for the population and the activity generated in their respective regions of attraction.

Another indicator that allows us to follow the strengthening of these main urban nuclei hosting periodic markets in recent years is the fact that they have recently become centres of agri-food companies, as can be seen in the figure (Figure 4). All the main localities have some of these production units, which can range from simple bakeries, charcuteries or artisanal canneries to large establishments that employ more than a hundred people (dairy plants, industrial slaughterhouses, refrigerated food processors, etc.). No main urban nucleus lacks examples of this type of businesses, although in modest centres located in the less accessible mountains there are less than five in total. In those small cities that exert a wide influence on the nearby rural area and have registered processes of endogenous industrialisation such as Carballo, Chantada, Lalín, Monforte de Lemos, and Ribadavia there are more than 30 agri-food and beverage industries (wine bottling, soft drinks, etc.). This importance of endogenous development processes linked to the countryside is repeated in main urban nuclei with high availability of industrial land in the vicinity of Vigo and A Coruña (O Porriño and Arteixo respectively), and in coastal centres with a highly diversified economy (Ribeira, Vilagarcía de Arousa, Cambados and Sanxenxo). The secular celebration of markets has given way to processes of concentrations of companies linked to the countryside and fishing activity (Figure 4)

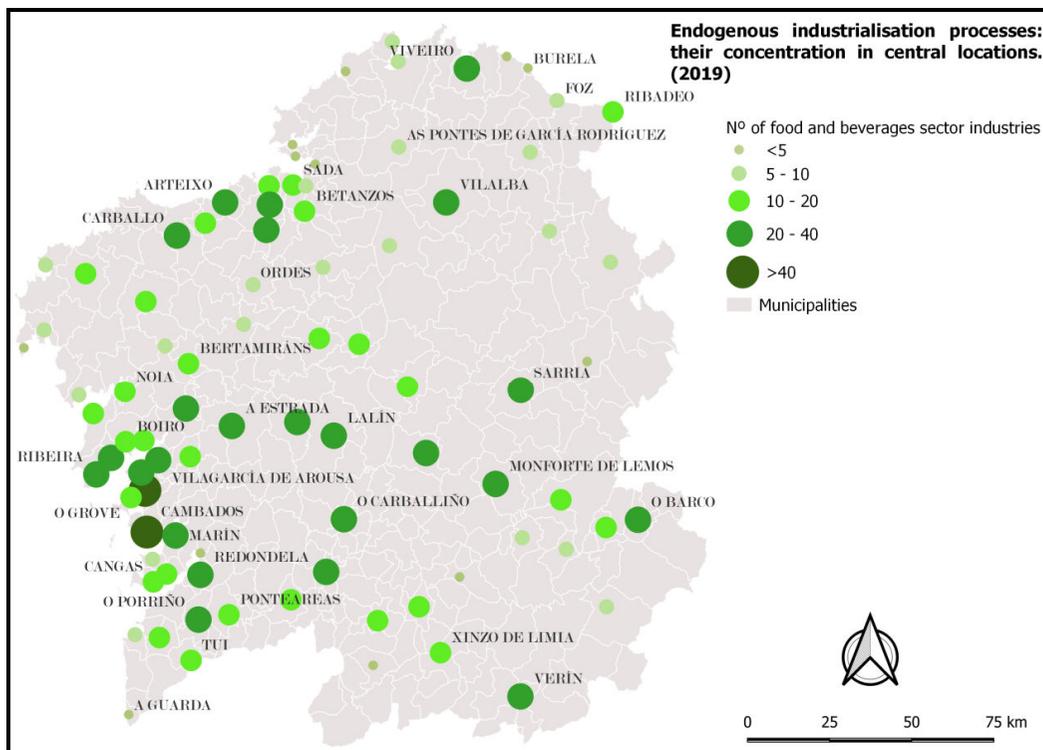


Figure 4. TOTAL NUMBR OF AGRI-FOOD AND BEVERAGE PACKAGING INDUSTRIES IN THE MAIN URBAN CENTERS OF GALICIA

Another indicator of the modernisation and reinforcement of the centrality of small cities and main urban nuclei in recent decades, is their new role as places of concentration of hypermarkets (more than 4,000 m² of sales area) and supermarkets (between 1,000 and 4,000 m²) of a retail nature that serve the county area of influence. They are a standard in all the centres studied, with the exception of three mountain and very peripheral centres (Bande, Castro Caldelas, Pobra de Trives). In most of them, two to five establishments of this type coexist, although in the large centres of the interior and central places of highly populated coastal areas, the number is 5 to 10. In examples of highly-dynamic small cities (Vilagarcía de Arousa and Marín), there are more than ten retail stores larger than a thousand square meters (Barreiro, López-Rodríguez and Lois-González, 2019). Both the recent industrialisation process and the strengthening of the commercial facilities have resulted in an unknown, unprecedented intensification of displacements, flows and economic exchanges between the main urban nuclei and nearby rural areas. Almost daily there is a reason to visit the nearby small

city to buy, have fun or benefit from some service. All this when there is no longer the need to travel from home to a place of work or study.

As a result, the dynamism of the small cities and main urban nuclei that hold periodic markets as a continuation of a long tradition shows us that the growth of the main cities is no longer the only element of the process of urbanisation and economic transformation of the territory. The main cities and their peripheries are growing, and have strengthened their role in the organisation of the territory. However, the regional urban centres of rural and peri-urban areas are positively affirmed, while maintaining their character as central venues for fairs and markets which have given way to a powerful and diversified commercial structure, and to an important location of industrial-based companies.

6) CONCLUSIONS

The study of agrarian and new rural areas requires an in-depth analysis of those more modest urban centres that serve as a link between the farming territories and the dominant urban system, which controls the economic activity. These centres are called small cities or simply main urban nuclei, and have been used since their origin as periodic venues for fairs and markets. These events served as places where farmers could sell their limited surplus produce and source the products that they could not get directly. Today, markets remain transformed, as a ritual that affirms the centrality and attractiveness of small cities. Small cities and villages that have diversified their economies and have become industrialised, continue a model of central places in rural areas sustainable in time and fundamental in the organisation of the territory.

All this evolution of the localities that serve as a link between the rural and urban world, has been alongside a profound transformation of agricultural societies in the last fifty years in Galicia, and by extension in Northern Spain and Portugal. Agricultural and livestock farms have become capitalised and market-oriented production units. A minority of rural families still maintain the artisan tradition of making cheeses or selling their horticultural produce directly, together with others interested in organic production or with a geographical denomination. Although this smaller segment of small-scale farming still use periodic markets to sell some of their produce, most of them supply the processing industry which in some cases can be located far away. However, all farmers and inhabitants of rural areas maintain many of the old cultural patterns of behaviour, which include attending fairs and periodic markets, which are

disconnected from their main function as places of direct purchase and the sale of consumer products.

Finally, we return to the initial idea raised: the organisation of the regional territories, in this case Galicia, is explained from the combination of rural and urban spaces. To link the two, historically, the central venues for fairs and periodic markets emerged. They have evolved towards the formation of authentic urban areas, small cities or main urban nuclei. A set of localities that, despite the profound changes that have occurred in the agricultural exploitation and the urban system, have consolidated their central position in the regional territory, without abandoning their primary market function. Socio-territorial dynamics have completely changed rural-urban geographies, but the continuity of the central places of the county can be verified, regardless of the indicator used to study it.

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