

Ethnic diversity in the Historic Centres of Spanish cities (1991-2001)

Juan José Pons Izquierdo - Dolores López - Carolina Montoro Gurich
Departamento de Geografía y Ordenación del Territorio
UNIVERSIDAD DE NAVARRA

This paper is set within the context of the research project on “The Historic Centres of Spanish Cities: a comparative analysis of their characteristics and present day situation”. The primary objective of this interdisciplinary project is to make a comparative study of 141 cities in order to obtain an extensive knowledge base of the Spanish historic centres, their present day reality and their most important problems. The aspects studied cover a wide range of characteristics (morphological, historical, demographical, functional, etc) depicted from the different scientific disciplines included in the project.

BACKGROUND

Over the last few years, the arrival of considerable contingents of foreign immigrants is leading to profound transformations within Spanish society. In contrast to the relative uniformity presented by the population up to now, this process is now responsible for bringing considerable social variety into the cities, where it is possible to encounter people of many different races, nationalities, cultures, languages and religions.

This population composition change is taking place very quickly indeed, since it must not be forgotten that, until a short time ago, migratory flows in Spain were essentially external. The arrival of such sizeable and varied contingents of immigrants to Spain is having an impact on certain demographic trends (for example, an increase in the birth rate or a reduction in ageing) and on spatial location (for example, the revitalization of certain urban areas).

These transformations, which are clearly perceptible in the Spanish population as a whole, are particularly evident in urban areas and even more so in the historic centres. This is due to the fact that, the majority of recently arrived foreigners tend to concentrate in these central areas of the city. For this reason, the situation in many historic centres (or in specific areas of the same) has changed so considerably and so quickly that the former minorities of just a few years' ago have now become the dominant groups. It is therefore not surprising that we should consider the historic centres to be privileged areas for the study of the presence of immigrant ethnic minorities in Spain and the evolution of these groups.

APPROACH

This paper analyses the changes taking place in the population of the historic centres in Spain, brought about by the arrival of immigrants from abroad during the inter-census period from 1991-2001.

To achieve this primary objective, we first proceeded to quantify and spatially locate the minority groups by origin, studying the considerable quantitative and qualitative changes experienced during the decade covered by our research. In this respect, it is particularly relevant to determine the evolution experienced by the different contingents of foreigners in both absolute and relative terms.

On the other hand, we analyse the specialisation of the different historic centres based on the immigrants' source continent. The indicator used – degree of specialisation – takes into account the general distribution of each nationality as well as the actual distribution for each city and is therefore not influenced by the volume of immigrants in each city.

We also study some of the principal demographic and social consequences derived from the new situation, such as the change in the population growth trend, the rejuvenation of the age structure and the spatial concentration characteristic to immigrant minorities.

The combined analysis of all these factors enables us, on the one hand, to characterise the diversity of situations encountered in the historic centres of Spanish cities, based on the varying impact created by the arrival of the immigrant population. On the other hand, it allows us to create a typology of the ethnic minority groups based on the variety of immigrant-related changes in the cities.

CONTACT:

Juan José Pons Izquierdo
Departamento de Geografía y Ordenación del Territorio
Universidad de Navarra
E-31080 PAMPLONA (ESPAÑA)
Tfno: + 34 948 425600 ext. 2312
Fax: + 34 948 425636
E-mail: jpons@unav.es
Web: <http://www.unav.es/geografia/jpi>