

HOUSEHOLDS IN A DISPERSE HABITAT. RESIDENCE LOCALISATION STRATEGIES AND CHARACTERISTICS. THE CASE OF THE METROPOLITAN REGION OF BARCELONA

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0-. Introduction

Analyses for this paper were developed within the framework of a wider research programme called *Movilidad, solidaridad familiar y ciudadanía en las Regiones Metropolitanas* (mobility, family solidarity and citizenship in metropolitan regions)¹ Its objective is to describe and explain how disperse urbanisation is affecting social relations, both from the positive and negative points of view.

This paper studies people and families living in low density housing estates or in a disperse habitat within the Metropolitan Region of Barcelona. The aim is to find out the reasons that made them abandon the compact city, when did they do it, where did they live before and now, how are their present houses and surroundings. The unit used for the analysis will be households.

Fieldwork was developed throughout the Metropolitan Region of Barcelona (164 municipalities; 4.200.000 inhabitants; 3.236 kms²) The database comes from a survey that was carried out in 600 residential migrant households, presently living in housing estates situated in the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, which means having recollected information on 1,943 people.

1-. Metropolitan Region of Barcelona urban dynamics

Urban dynamics in the last 25 years within the Metropolitan Region of Barcelona shows two trends. On the one hand, dense and compact municipalities have been losing population, while, and on the other, small municipalities have been winning it. This growth has been especially due to an increase in housing estates.

2-. Características de las personas residentes en el hábitat dispersion

Residential mobility has become one of the most important components in demographic and urban present trends. Moreover, analysing people's and household's characteristics it can be said that they tend to be territorially specialised. Urban centres tend to be occupied by small households, one person households, those without nucleus or single parent ones, while the low density periphery tends to be occupied by large ones, that is to say, families with or without children.

¹ This study is being carried out within the framework of a larger research project Mobility, Family Solidarity and Citizenship in the Metropolitan Regions, which has been financed by the Ministry of Science and Technology for the National R+D+I plan for the triennium 2004 – 2006. The work is being carried out as a coordinated project of two teams of researchers from the University of Barcelona, one consisting of members from the field of Sociology while the other is comprised of staff from the Department of Human Geography.

3.-. Households in the disperse habitat

Residential mobility generally involves families. Most of those moving to disperse habitat dwellings are couples with children. Here we present the results obtained from studying household size and structure, and results are compared at different territorial levels.

The mean number of people per household in the disperse habitat is 3.2; number which is clearly higher than the mean number for the Metropolitan Region of Barcelona in general in the year 2001, 2.72 people. These differences are even higher if we compare them with those living in households within the city of Barcelona² (2.53 people).

On the other hand, within disperse habitat, households made up of families are strongly predominant. 51% of all the households are made up of a couple with children, that is to say, the most traditional way of living. 27.3% are couples without children and 7.5% extended households. Moreover, there is only a 5% of one person households, 2% without a nucleus and 3% of single parent ones.

4-. Housing characteristics

Houses in low density housing estates have enormously increased. 89.6% of the dwellings are detached, semidetached, or terraced houses; 77.5% detached and 12.1% semi-detached or terraced. Only 2.6% of the dwellings in the compact city are of this type. This percentage grows to 14.29% if we take the whole Metropolitan Region of Barcelona.

Here, housing is bigger, newer, with fewer neighbours, surrounded by more nature and in a calmer, healthier and more homogenous neighbourhood.

5-. Reasons for living in the disperse city

Residential mobility processes are linked to a series of migration and new dwelling locating *strategies*.

Aspects like dwelling characteristics, or living in calm surroundings, typical of the low density habitat, clearly outshine family reasons corresponding to each stage of the life course. When asked on the reasons for the change of municipality, all types of households except for one person ones gave dwelling reasons first.

6-. Conclusions

Big cities are becoming increasingly less concentrated, while low density housing estates, which are increasingly further away from the city centre, are growing. This phenomenon accelerated throughout Europe at the end of the 1980's and, as you have been able to see, the Metropolitan region of Barcelona, followed the same trend.

Migrants are mostly young adults, aged between 25 and 45, which come from Barcelona and the rest of the Metropolitan Region of Barcelona and settle in the disperse city.

As young adults tend to leave the compact city and establish their homes in low density areas, cities tend to specialise in certain types of households. Central cities seem to specialise in small households and those which do not have a family structure. On the

² It is considered as one of the paradigms of compact cities

other hand, disperse housing estates, in small municipalities, have the opposite profile. Most of the households are made up of families, and specially, of couples with underage children (51.8%). Therefore, their mean number of persons per household is 3.2; higher than the mean number in the whole Metropolitan Region of Barcelona. They have medium level of education (41.7% of the men and 31.6% of the women have a university degree). Both members of the couple work, earning, between them, between 2,000 and 5,000 euros a moth.

Disperse habitat dwellings are characterised by being bigger (a mean of 176 m²) and newer (31% have been built after 1985) houses (not flats). A bigger proportion of residents are owners who still have to pay nearly half of the house (48.2%).

The main arguments given by new residents to change of municipality are dwelling characteristics, very different from those that can be found in the compact city, and the peacefulness that the disperse habitat offers.

These are the main characteristics of the people and the households living in the Metropolitan Region of Barcelona housing estates. However, internal differences should also be taken into account. But as the phenomenon is relatively new, it is difficult to predict the future evolution of certain tendencies and whether they will continue or not.