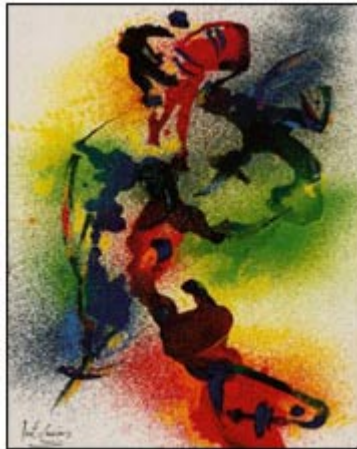


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*Dwelling the sprawling city: the metropolitan area of
Pamplona as an expression of a concrete utopia*

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Title

**DWELLING THE SPRAWLING CITY: THE METROPOLITAN AREA OF
PAMPLONA AS AN EXPRESSION OF A CONCRETE UTOPIA**

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Abstract: This paper analyses the process of increasing urban sprawl observed in the last decades. The analysis is focused not just in the spatial transformation it implies but also in the ideological and cultural configuration that supports it. Sprawling city is no longer the simple reflection of territorial planning but it becomes an object of reflection for the inhabitants whose residential strategies convey an existential venture of importance; a venture frequently linked to an imagery characteristic of suburban utopias. Considering as a starting point the diverse residential strategies coming together in the process of residential sprawl that happened in the Metropolitan Area of Pamplona during the last twenty years, this paper explores the ways that a sprawling city is dwelled and the diverse meanings it has for its dwellers. There are three ways this transformation has been analysed. Firstly, the demographic change that occurs in these spatial interstices is considered. Secondly, the social representations held by the protagonists of residential sprawl in several in-depth interviews it is explored. Finally, the way that the new socio-spatial configuration is (re)created in advertising imagery is investigated throughout the analysis of adverts of residential promotions.

Introduction

In recent decades, a profound transformation can be observed in the social and spatial configuration of named post-industrial societies, which implies a social change in both, its material and symbolic reality. As a result, sprawling city emerges as the generalised pattern of urban planning. In this paper this phenomenon is explored by focusing our research in the socio-spatial restructuring coming about in and around Pamplona, the capital of Navarre (in the north of Spain), which had 186.245 inhabitants at the beginning of 2001.

This transformation may be characterised as the passage from a concentrated, to a decentralised and dispersed society. These two contexts, socially and historically differentiated, convey spatial structures which are also different. The first period was based on an economic and social development scale model that promoted the development of great industrial cities, which were conceived as the focal points for the structuring and organisation of individuals and society life. This development pattern required a productive and demographic concentration around large industrial cities that made a clear distinction between central and peripheral societies. Residential concentration taken place in this period was the consequence of a large scale escape from the country to the town by those looking for new and better labour opportunities, as well as better services, which were much more limited in rural areas. In this context of socio-economic modernisation, the city became not just a reference for material development -insofar it was the place where labour opportunities and socio-cultural infrastructures were located- but also a paramount symbolic reference of what was understood as modernity, comfort and liberating technology. It was the epoch of large cities; the time of a vertical development of buildings as metaphor of new social aspirations; a time in which the population desired socio-cultural development; a new space for the implicit intense social life of a city. In other words, a city meant the suitable economic and social space helping achieve a human being's desire for endless development. As a result, a city became an ideological reference, a great symbolic image of a particular way of life linked to modernity (Oliva, 1999). However, some decades afterwards, this polarised socio-economical development model became untenable and went into crisis, bringing about a productive and service decentralisation. At the same time, the city's social image was seriously deteriorated because of its inability to engage the whole labour demand and, also, because of the appearance of unplanned effects: overcrowded settlements, pollution, isolation, urban congestion and so on became a daily experience for urban dwellers. In contrast, rural areas began to be promoted and thereby abandoned their previous peripheral role.

In relation to the past, human being's increasing independence on territory marks a relevant difference in this process of socio-spatial transformation as it is going to highly affect the way people are connected to space. Space friction is increasingly lower and individuals feel themselves liberated from many restrictions imposed by territory. Thus, spatial mobility becomes a daily experience for an ongoing number of people, playing a paramount role in the emergence of new residential strategies. You no longer have to attach residential environment to place of

work or its surroundings. Therefore, besides the traditional elements put into the study of residential mobility, the possibility of greater spatial freedom introduces a variable central in the analysis of residential preferences that take place in the context of metropolitan societies. When the distance between residential environment and the place we carry out our working lives in, is due to a personal choice, the settling in a particular place is relevant as it is the access to a lifestyle that has been socially and culturally defined as good and desirable. Because of this, metropolitan society is not just a geographical or functional reality but a social and cultural one; it is the lifestyle that sometimes we are compelled to adopt and sometimes we freely choose according to our social desires and expectations.

The content of this paper is structured into five sections. Firstly, we explain the main conceptual premises guiding our research. Secondly, we briefly expound the methodological set of tools it has been used. Thirdly, the process of urban sprawl is described from the point of view of its territorial dimension. Fourthly, we direct our attention towards the transformation that occurred in the social imagery helping the socio-spatial restructuring; this is, towards the way new urban sprawl is *dwelled* by its protagonists. In order to do that, both the social representations held by informants during the interviews and, the advertising imagery related to residential promotions are integrated. Finally, some conclusions and discussion topics that arise throughout the research are remarked.

1. 'Dwelling' as a social construct

The concept of *dwelling* has been used by several social disciplines in order to account for the most intimate relationship that can be found between the individual and residential environment. Despite the emphasis on distinct aspects pinpointed by different fields of study, such as environmental psychology, anthropology, geography or philosophy, all of them are interested in this kind of relationship and in its influence on people's lives. Nevertheless, the majority of the sociological studies concerning the residential changes have omitted this concept from the variables they analysed. However, studies increasingly suggest the need to take into account this qualitative approach to understand residential behaviour and to analyse home as a whole complex system (Cortés, 1995). As Lefebvre suggested (1967), *dwelling* is a human being's anthropological dimension in the context of remaining attached to a particular place. Hence, phenomena such as settling, uprooting or migration must be understood as inherent facts in the human being's social condition. According to its social nature, *dwelling* does not mean to live in a particular place, but the way the place is lived, experienced and perceived. Although it is a difficult concept to define, using the following outline as a reference point it is easier to deduce relationship between *dwelling* and the process of urban sprawl analysed here.

- The intricate relationship between individual, society and territory is not static. On the contrary, it is a historically produced relationship, reflection of the socio-historical context it emerges from (Lefebvre, op. cit.).

- *Dwelling* is a structured and structuring bond, insofar as it is given and imposed to us at the same time as it determines the socio-spatial structure we move in.
- Through the experience of *dwelling*, we are capable of developing a sense of belonging to place that transforms neutral space into culturally significant places that are existentially experienced (whether they refer to towns, villages, neighbourhoods or homes¹¹).
- This highly emotional link plays a paramount role in the formation of individual and group identities which are important not just in relation to the formation, but also in the expression of identities; becoming a sign of our identity in the same way as language, clothing and hobbies (Rapoport, 1981).

The relevance of the study of *dwelling* in relation to residential strategies is based on the fact that it allows us to analyse not just individuals but society. This passage from individual to society is possible due to its social nature. Moreover, as Bourdieu expounded, taste is neither neutral nor the show of an individual choice process but a set of preferences product of our class position (Bourdieu, 1979). As for preferences in relation to residential strategies is concerned, the predisposition towards a particular environment as the ideal one is generated throughout the family members' residential experience (Roderick, 1985). In this particular environment customs and habits become domestic and residential elements that are finally taken for granted. Therefore, in every residential strategy there is an attempt to approach each individual's ideal environment by means of organising and reorganising space until it mirrors the different lifestyles defined as ideal by every society (Rapoport, 1969). In fact, residential strategies unite the past, present and future, as well as previous experiences and expectations (Boyle and Halfacree, 1993).

However, the study of *dwelling* raises the problem of its greatly abstract essence as it expresses itself through a poetic and symbolic language (Lefebvre, opus cit.). Thus, the character of *dwelling* makes itself impossible to apply any objective means of measurement in its study. Hence, in the study of the emergent sprawling city, the analysis of *dwelling* as a significant experience needs to pay attention to both the social practices linked to residential strategies, and the social discourse adopted by actors themselves. The importance of abode as a starting point for the study of *dwelling* relies on its evocative power; on the fact that it represents the most intimate and close residential environment experienced by individuals. Consequently, home generates many images and memories that will be present at the intimate construction of one's own *oneiric home* (Bachelard, 1957).

"Home is the foundation of our identity as individuals and as members of a community, the dwelling-place of being. Home is not just the house you happen to live in, it is not something that can be anywhere, that can be exchanged, but an irreplaceable centre of significance." (Relph, 1976:39)

¹¹ As Saegert explains, the semantic difference between house and home is based on the appropriation of residential environment throughout the experience of dwelling (Saegert, 1985).

2. Methodology

In order to analyse the spatial and social transformation that goes with the studied urban sprawl process, we have focused on a threefold approach. First, the exploration of census and official lists of inhabitants has been used to determinate whether there is or not the emergence of a new pattern of population sprawl through territory. These official statistics have allowed us to clearly see the demographic transformation that happened in Navarre during the last decades as well as the growing relevance that the Metropolitan Area of Pamplona has acquired as a residential space within the autonomous region. However, the map drawn by statistical data gave no information about the significance each individual attribute to the places they *dwell*. In fact, this significance is understandable solely by the analysis of discourse and social practices held by the protagonists of the new residential strategies shown by statistics. Therefore, sixteen in-depth interviews have been made to new rural residents in order to illuminate this subjective information. These interviews have allowed us to explore the social representations about the country and the city, as well as the role they play in the new residential configuration¹². These two approaches illustrate both demographic data and the meaning people give to their residential strategy. Bearing in mind that meaning is not individually created but socially constructed, we have focused on the quantitative and qualitative analysis of adverts of residential promotions with the aim of capturing the ambience reflected by publicity. The goal of advertisements in today's society -that is, its power to capture, construct and represent dreams (Morin, 1984; Ibáñez 1986)- turns itself into an interesting object of study to understand an important part of the social milieu where the residential preferences take place. Throughout a random sampling, 270 adverts were obtained from the 1985-1995 period, when Navarre was living a process of counterurbanisation feeding the population growing of the Metropolitan Area of Pamplona.

3. Urban sprawl: the case of the Metropolitan Area of Pamplona

The analysis of census and official population data shows the great transformation experienced during the last century by both Pamplona and its metropolitan area in relation to

¹² The analysis of social representations allows us to investigate how the residential environment is perceived and understood by individuals. One might say that social representations involve particular ways of thinking and decoding daily reality. They are spontaneous and practical knowledge, socially produced and shared, that play a relevant role in our understanding and control of our physical, social and ideal environment (Jodelet, 1984). They are not static but inherently dynamic as they are constantly being remade. From the fact that social representations are socially produced, the comprehension scheme they bring to us is socially shared. Because of it, bearing in mind the socio-historical context social representations come from, their analysis allows us to move from an individual level to a collective one.

population distribution (table 1). If at the beginning of XX century population living in Pamplona and its surrounding areas -an area covering just the 3'7 per cent of the whole territory of Navarre- about 14 per cent of Navarre population, in 2001 represents 51 per cent¹³. However, this increasing growth of the relative weight of Pamplona and its metropolitan area as residential environment takes place in an unequal way. In the first half of the century there was a slow increase resulting from the population growth of the capital, although it was a weak increase. Nevertheless, the increasing population of Pamplona accelerated during the sixties and seventies, when the late but rapid industrialisation process was on top. Despite the rapid process of urbanisation accompanying industrialisation, in a very short period of time Pamplona could not cope with the great amount of people arriving to town seeking for an industrial job and escape from the poor life conditions existing in the countryside. Then, the first spreading of the county town towards bordering municipalities took place giving rise to an incipient metropolitan area of suburban character, where high density, cheap and many storey buildings were the main features of housing.

Table 1. Population distribution (%)

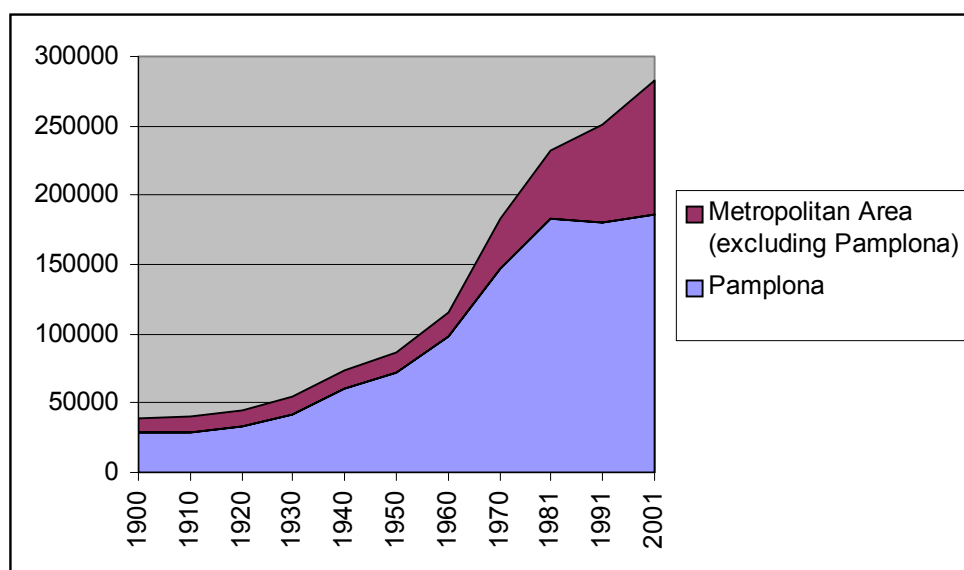
	Pamplona	Metropolitan Area (Excluding Pamplona)	The Rest of Navarre
1900	10	4	86
1920	10	5	85
1940	14	4	82
1960	23	5	72
1981	35	12	53
2001	33	18	49

Source: Population Census. Servicio Navarro de Estadística

13 Although it has been redefined according to its present situation, the metropolitan area analysed here nearly coincides with the area traditionally known as the Valley of Pamplona; an area whose traditional habitat is compounded by many small and disseminated autonomous villages.

As shown on the graph 1, from 1985 onwards, a change in residential tendencies is observed, which will become evident during the last decade of the past century. Under this new residential pattern, the relative demographic increase of Pamplona shows a deceleration whereas the rural municipalities of the most remote metropolitan area reflect a huge demographic growth; a process that has been related to counterurbanisation phenomenon (Camarero and Oliva, 1999; Camarero, Oliva and Sampedro, 1998). These villages, which had been kept apart from the first period of urban sprawl of Pamplona, are going to become the residential destiny for an ongoing population (mainly urban people) in a second process of urban sprawl. Because of that, and in the same way as it has been observed in other contexts, counterurbanisation can not be understood without looking towards the role played by nature as symbolic reference (Halfacree, 1994). In fact, the process of counterurbanisation is promoted by the present postproductivist reassessment of countryside and the failure of city as the utopian project for endless development. Also, the new housing model is going to vary in order to give priority to few storeys buildings, attached maisonettes and cottages; being the later a kind of housing and settlement whose growing importance and symbolism has often been linked to the reproduction of middle classes.

Graph 1. Urbanisation and Counterurbanisation around Pamplona



Source: Servicio Navarro de Estadística

The difference of urban sprawl is not solely in terms of demographic and spatial data but it also affects the migrants' profiles of each period. If the previous process of urban and suburban growth affected mainly a single profile (that migration originated by labour reasons and the

proximity of work and residential spaces), the current residential restructuring is the product of several motives for residential migrations and different profiles of migrants. Firstly, individuals who find in peripheral suburbs a residential environment cheaper than in town. Secondly, young couples migrating to rural areas closed to Pamplona in order to get better equipment and a purchase price of the house lower than in Pamplona. And thirdly, people on high income who also have high social status looking for environmental top quality and privacy, without taking into account the distance between residence and town (Camarero and Oliva, 1999). Undoubtedly, in the three different strategies, the new relationship with space and the growing spatial mobility increase the aspects to be taken into account in the process of residential choice. Hence, the role previously played by labour reasons is nowadays replaced by a greater range of motives underlying the residential election; most of the time structured by the search of life-quality and well-being.

4. New residential strategies looking for Utopia

Up until now, the residential restructuring process that happened around Pamplona has been briefly described from the perspective of territorial transformation. From now, some of the senses that sprawling city has in contemporary society will be explored¹⁴. If new material conditions brought the possibility for a residential sprawl, the cultural fragmentation and the new postmodern imagery are going to be of great relevance in the emergence of the new residential strategies. The hegemonic cultural and ideological matrix of the new epoch, ruled by a hedonistic and naturalistic discourse, promotes the relevance of concepts such as leisure, life quality, privacy or style. In this context, residential strategies spread around Pamplona show the seeking for a residential environment where would be possible to take refuge from the problems urban growth conveys and, also, to live according to the new social values.

The utopian image inspiring new residential preferences is basically structured around two central ideas: the rural habitat as physical space and the community as significant space. As long as nature constitutes a symbolic reference of a new ideological discourse, the postproductivist assessment of nature transforms rural space into the ideal space to live in for an increasing number of individuals, in detriment to urban space (Halfacree, 1994). At the same time, the idea of community refers to the lost paradise; a warm, comfortable and friendly place (Bauman, 2001). Thus, going to live in the countryside becomes a residential alternative that acquires two important meanings. On one hand, it is easier to establish a distance from problems originated in the city, despite the fact that it is a more imagined than real distance. On the other hand, the personal involvement in the residential choice helps to recover the perception of having

14 The significance of the sprawling city and the way it is dwelled by its inhabitants has been explored throughout the analysis of the interviews and advertisements. Although they were difficult to reproduce here, this paper is illustrated with some of the adverts that have been analysed.

again the control of our destiny; the perception of recovering the ontological security lost in the progress of modernity. Nevertheless, social practices deployed by subjects in everyday life turn nature and community into realities which are again more imagined than real. As their social practices show, individuals become involved in both realities, although they do it in a way differing from the traditional one. On one hand, participation in the community is, in most of the cases, limited to concrete socio-cultural activities, keeping in Pamplona their relational network. On the other hand, subjects erect representations about *nature* and *community* from a postmodern imagery that assesses both concepts in basically aesthetic terms and turns them into new consumer goods. So, despite the possibility that new residential strategies restructuring the metropolitan area may be understood as the seeking for utopian community, they may only be *concrete utopias* (Morin, 1984). Spaces where you can experience an *existential lapse* from which you will be later on compelled to go back to the hustle and bustle of city life.

At the same time, residential utopias are (re)created by advertising imagery from the point of view of both, nature and community. Residential pattern shown by publicity refers mainly to cottages, sited in places of the metropolitan area, but still not affected by the process of urban sprawl at its harshest level. Thus, cottages are recreated within small communities, where it is possible to live the dream of a small postmodern village; a housing development including sports and recreational places such as golf clubs, tennis, gardens, and so forth. These residential developments emphasise a kind of communal spirit via two projections. Firstly, the idea of community as the medium for developing a set of activities that will allow us to embrace a social network restricted to neighbourhood. Secondly, the image of a hedonistic lifestyle with no space for problems; a life full of happiness as it was presented by old communal utopias. Nonetheless, these residential developments have an ideological undercurrent that fills a more prosaic function concerning the residential exclusiveness that new residential promotions imply. They convey a process of social exclusivity that isolates their dwellers from the rest of society, at least at an imaginary level. By doing so, a socially homogenous space is created; a space where our status is protected. >From the perspective of *nature*, publicity shows these housing developments as green oasis separated from the city and its maelstrom. Nevertheless, in order to be successful, this residential proposal must be symbolically separated from town at the same time that the latter must be easily accessible to *green oasis'* dwellers. Consequently, the resulted town must make the permanent transit between its parts easy and fluid: shopping centres, hypermarkets, communication links, services and emergent residential developments (Oliva and Rivera, 2003); a city image in harmony with the continuous spatial mobility that characterised contemporary individual (Augé, 1992; Bericat, 1994).

In the context of a society ruled by consumer capitalism (Ibáñez, op. cit.; Lash and Urry, 1994), the residence loses its role as a reference point for taking root and it becomes a good that can be bought and sold via market. Under the new socio-spatial configuration, you may find in many metropolitan places an increase of mass production of houses, which gives these places a high level of homogeneity. As a result, a lack of spatial references is generated; a lack of significant and anthropological places (Augé, op. cit.). Nevertheless, the productive system itself

has provoked the need for differentiation and personalization of consumed goods -houses included- as a relevant element for social distinction; a differentiation based more on nuances than in the essential nature of the objects (Baudrillard, 1964). Closely linked, the current society's imagery has made a return to an origin. So, qualities of the objects we relate to, such as authenticity, naturalness or aesthetic become an almost vital necessity. House has not escaped from this logic and it has, progressively, become an aesthetic object we use to differentiate ourselves from the rest of the households. It is a matter of nuances, a difference over the personal style we embody in our dwelling-place. Despite the symbolic role that home has always had, its expressive dimension is amplified in post-industrial societies, where the role played becomes of paramount relevance as a demonstration of lifestyle.

5. Conclusion

You may observe in post-industrial societies a profound process of social change that greatly affects socio-spatial configuration. This configuration lives a productive and population restructuring process that give to society a highly metropolitan character. In relation to population restructuring, the emergence of new residential strategies looking in rural space for an environment of private reproduction has to be emphasised. This new use of countryside is closely related to a change occurred at the ideological level. Indeed, the new socio-historical context is linked to the hegemony of a new social discourse connected to postmodern imagery. Accordingly, the emergence of new residential preferences must be analysed not just in relation to its spatial shape, but also in relation to the new ideological discourse. By introducing the construct of *dwelling* in the analysis of residential transformation, we are compelled to attend to the social representations that individuals hold up about space, about the ideal place for setting up home and about home itself. Its analysis gives us important information about the desired lifestyle and about the way *dwelling* discourse becomes a reference for our social practices. Nevertheless, *dwelling* is not an individual experience but it is socially produced and shared. It is a constitutive element of one's *habitus*; a predisposition that orientates residential practices.

The carried out research shows how the sprawling city is not limited to a spatial phenomenon produced by the confluence of many town and country planning politics: productive, infrastructures, communication networks, housing developments and so on. Besides, the new residential model acquires a paramount meaningful reality for dwellers; mainly for those who, being capable of choosing, take the decision of leaving town and installing in the municipalities of the metropolitan area that are further away from the county town. In spite of the close relationship they still have with Pamplona, new rural dwellers' residential choice conveys an important affective investment as it responds to a personal venture seeking for a certain lifestyle. It is a decision coherent with their philosophy of life and their social values characteristics of a postmaterial culture. Due to this symbolic component, protagonists of new residential preferences integrate them in a whole social discourse as an element that helps the restructuring of identities

>From the representational point of view, sprawling city arisen from the counterurbanisation process emerges as the space along which inhabitants freely move about on a physical and imaginary level. This greater spatial mobility is going to allow their simultaneous participation in both, *rural* and *urban worlds* (spaces traditionally conceptualised as different spheres, in terms of opposition or continuum). Generic city is imagined as a space for tension and conflicts though, Pamplona is evoked as a pleasant space for work, relationships, leisure and services, having a great symbolic and affective role (mainly the old centre of the town). In contrast with the role given to county town, metropolitan rural space is conceived as the residential environment that keeps us apart from the negative aspects involved in cities. Moreover, besides this role of refuge, new residential developments are also represented by adverts as the ideal environment from which the lost utopian community may be reconstructed. Reconstruction based on the reinterpretation of concepts such as nature, privacy, family or quality of life. In this redefinition of concepts, advertising plays a key role as it sells us residential promotions whose value is rooted not as much in their use-value as it is in their *semantic change-value* (Ibáñez, opus cit.).

To sum up, one might conclude that Pamplona and its metropolitan area bring about a sprawling city resulted not solely from a particular urban planning but also from a new conception of society and the ideal residential environment, as well as from new preferences, values and existential ventures.

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