

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE URBAN GROWTH IN THE VALENCIAN COAST THROUGH LAND USE EVOLUTION. THE CASE OF OLIVA

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1. INTRODUCTION

Oliva is a municipality of Comunitat Valenciana (Spain). It has an area of 59,8 Km² and a population of approximately 25.000 inhabitants. Oliva is a coastal municipality located between two big tourist resorts such as Gandia and Dénia. Traditionally its economic activity was based on agriculture due to its good land for crops. However, from 1960 on, there has been a change in its economic model, now based on services, tourism and construction. This change of economic model has meant a large growth of urban surfaces. In Oliva, as in most coastal towns with a great tourism potential, economic agents, local and state administrations, and individuals have obtained a great economic profit following an intense policy of urbanization and tourist attraction.

Since the second half of the 20th century, as a result of the economic and social changes produced after Second World War (Arrighi, 1994; Harvey 1985; 2000; 2005), there has been a big urban development in many North American and European cities. This urban growth has been especially intense in coastal areas and in the outskirts of the larger cities.

In Spain, this urban growth has particularly taken place along three real estate booms, separated by three periods of real estate crisis. In fact, in the last fifty years, the moments of more intense economic growth in Spain have been a consequence of construction booms and they have abruptly ended with long periods of crisis and serious consequences for the population (Rodríguez, 2006; Góngoras 2017).

Before the first real estate boom, Spain underwent the first step of Franco's Dictatorship: the so called *Francoist autarky* (1939-1950). This period was characterized by a closed economy, refusing all trade with the outside world activities, economic depression, and shortage of all kind of goods. The end of this period took place by 1959, with the

opening to the outside economy. It was then that the first real estate boom began, and it lasted until the arrival of the oil crisis started in 1973.

The second real estate boom occurred between 1985 and 1992. After the transition to democracy period, Spanish government opted for construction to lead the economic recovery. During this period, the demand for second residences in coastal areas and peripheral areas of large cities was noteworthy. At this time was when urban sprawl began to develop in Spain and many tourist areas began to develop.

The next crisis is related to the expenses derived from 1992 major events (Universal Exhibition in Seville, Summer Olympics in Barcelona, European Cultural Capital in Madrid). Around 1997 the third real estate boom began. This was the moment of bigger real estate expansion ever known in Spain. During 1997-2007 there was an unprecedented growth of urban areas, what had major economic, social and environmental impacts. The lack of an adequate legislation meant that private developers could build as much as they wished. In Comunitat Valenciana the *Ley Reguladora de la Actividad Urbanística* (LRAU) passed in 1994. This law meant a change in the ground rules and it favored private promoters. The third real estate boom ended in 2007 with the global financial crisis.

2. METHODOLOGY AND AIM

In this paper we have carried out a diachronic analysis about land uses evolution in Olive through a mixed method of research, based on photo-interpretation of aerial images (years 1956, 1991, 2015) using GIS techniques, on the one hand, and by means of a comprehensive bibliographic and field work, on the other hand (Membrado-Tena, 2017). For photo-interpretation analysis we have used a land use classification based on CORINE Land Cover, but modified *Ad hoc* by us in order to adapt it to the particular traits of the Mediterranean area. From this multimethod analysis, urban development and territorial dynamics are studied in a coastal paradigmatic municipality to explain the urbanistic development of the Valencian Mediterranean coast in the last decades.

The aim of this work is, therefore, to quantify the changes in land use in Oliva during the referred period, in order to characterize and analyze the processes and effects that have taken place in the municipality due to anthropic actions.

3. RESULTS

The results show two key points. First is the historical significance of agriculture in Oliva and its progressive abandonment due to the growth of artificial surfaces and to the structural agricultural changes in the citrus sector. In 1956, Oliva was an agricultural area and the anthropic action on the territory derived only from crops. In 1956 the agricultural surfaces were more than 80% of the surface. During the Francoist Autarky, the inhabitants of Oliva worked all the available crop surface in order to obtain food or in order to get money from crops.

The predominant crop was orange trees and reached its peak in the mid-eighties. In 1991, orange crop occupied almost 60% of the municipal land. In this time Oliva was one of the economic powers of citrus economy in all of Europe. Although at present this

crop still holds 49% of the surface, it has lost its former economic power. The reasons for this abandonment are: the appearance of more cost-effective (artificial) uses and the characteristics of the sector that do not allow its competitiveness.

The second highlighted point is the big growth of mainly urban artificial surfaces during the second and third real estate booms. Artificial surfaces have grown 800% since 1956, but the population has not even multiplied by two. This growth has occurred mainly in the coastal area and has involved a change in the territorial model towards a sprawl, multi-nuclear and low-density city. The uses that have grown are *Discontinuous Urban Fabric* (sprawl developing areas) and *Continuous Urban Fabric* (compact city), respectively.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The excessive urban development over the last decades, together with a lack of a territorial planning, have had severe economic, social and environmental consequences for Oliva.

The main cause of this disordered and excessive urban growth is that land planning has been carried out from a municipal scale, without considering the rules of regional planning and, even more, with the consent of regional authorities (Burriel, 2009). This situation has created oversized municipal urban plans all around the Valencian coast. It was not until 2011 that, thanks to the *Estrategia Territorial de la Comunitat Valenciana*, a global development guideline for the Valencian territory were seriously implemented.

The absence of a territorial strategy, the municipal vision of spatial planning, the lack of planning in recent decades and the growth policies at any cost have had serious consequences. In the case of Oliva, the territorial impacts are: problems of internal and external mobility, enormous environmental and landscape impact on the coast, ecological and territorial fragmentation, consumption and pollution of scarce resources such as water and land, increase in public spending and inability of the administration to provide infrastructure and public services.

Although this growth trend was common in all the coastal municipalities of the Spanish Mediterranean, the case of Oliva is exceptional. In fact, Oliva is the Spanish Mediterranean municipality with the highest growth of artificial surfaces between 1987 and 2013.

Currently the region of Valencia has a territorial strategy (*Estrategia Territorial de la Comunitat Valenciana*) with some sectoral territorial plans. These strategic tools should limit urban development and be useful for environment protection. For future analysis, it would be interesting to study the effectiveness of these growth-limiting and environment-protective tools.