

Vulnerable urban areas and marginal establishments in the seven main Galician cities: the case of the vulnerable district of the Portiño (A Coruña)

1 - Introduction

The city is the most typical and complex appliance that the human being has been able to create. This great system for the human life, by its complexity and vulnerability, must be object of attention and study not only of the professionals of the urbanism but of the public authorities, the economic actors, the artists and, of course, of the citizens.

An approximation in depth to the city must, not only show us its virtues and attractions, but also reveal us its problems and deficiencies, and is there where we have the greater responsibility: to make city is not to build city, is to urbanize city.

Thus, the right to the city is the right to the dignity, understood as the right of all the citizens to accede to the services that all city must provide: health, education, culture, work, relation, accessibility and participation. Those who inhabit in vulnerable and marginal urban areas remain excluded, out of all possibility of developing as citizens. This results in the disability to take part actively in the processes of the city. Not to be able to participate also is to be not able to contribute. Hardening the dependency of these populations and the permanence of these urban areas only displaced when the real-estate pressure determines it: processes of gentrification and degradation, gated communities, peripheries colonized by commercial centers, opening of new superinfrastructures, etc.

The case of Galicia is significant. Its urban structure has the particularity of constituting an only great diffuse city of more than 2.000.000 inhabitants, where all the nodes communicate to each other in less than 100 minutes, although the distances among them should be of the order of 60 km. Accepting this superstructure, it becomes imperative to equip the region with instruments of planning to global scale, up to the moment too weak and permissive with the strictly local directives marked by each of the cities that conform it.

2 – Galician urban system

Galicia is historically a territory very humanized, generated by superposition of stages and consecutive or simultaneous processes (old system of “castros”¹; romanization; system of hamlets; medieval villages; changes in the administrative structure; belated revolution industrial; etc.) that turn into the current territorial, extremely dense and complex structure. This strong humanization of the territory is supported by the favorable geographic characteristics. Atlantic climate; fertile territory of soft orography; extensive coast with the singularity of its estuaries, that provided a wealth able to support numerous establishments of population. Galicia has more than 32,000 registered establishments of population which represent half of the existing ones in Spain².

In the last fifty years, Galicia has experienced a strong urban growth; without intermediate stages, from a structure of small cities and villages it turns into a complex system of interconnected urban areas whose potential has not developed fully due to its limited planning on regional scale.

The Galician urban system - compound, complex, complementary, in strong expansion - is formed by a polycentral system of seven main cities: Ferrol, A Coruña, Santiago de Compostela, Pontevedra, Vigo, Lugo and Ourense, and a complementary system of towns, forming the called diffuse city, but not disperse or extensive city since the average density of Galicia is 93.4 inhabitant /km² (the Spanish average density is 87,2 inhabitant /km²) overcoming widely the 100 inhabitant /km² in the coastal zones³. This urban system is vertebrate by means of a complex road structure formed by a road network of distribution, evolution of the traditional road network, and the delta formed by the corridors of the Atlantic axis - Highway of Atlantico AP-9 towards Portugal (Oporto), and Highway of Rías Baixas A-52 and Highway of Noroeste A-6 towards the plateau (Madrid).

From second half of the XXth century, the socioeconomic reality of the region undergoes a deep transformation with the arrival of great industrial complexes impelled by the development plans of the 50s and 60s, which favored to the secondary sector and bet for the Galician ports as growth motor. Then, the Galician cities and villages experience a strong growth, though unequal depending on the location and received influences, tilting the population towards the urban areas (mainly towards those of the littoral) in damage of the rural one. These processes turn into the creation of interconnected metropolitan areas, specially the three that conform the Atlantic Axis: A Coruña, Santiago de Compostela and Vigo, reinforced and extended on the complementary peripheral system; and in the consolidation and compaction of the internal urban systems of Lugo and Ourense.

The strong dynamism that experimented this complex, multipolar and interconnected urban system in its entirety, was not entirely planned, using a growth model that tensed the territory and generated frictions between the urban processes and the clearly rural ones. Although in other contexts, we could find self-corrected mechanism, in the case of Galicia the consequences were specially negative, causing the appearance of vulnerable urban areas in diverse degrees (from the vulnerability to the marginalization) and typologies (from infrahousing in historical centers to self-constructed peripheries and marginal establishments).

This fact was agravated by the limited economic resources and the undervaluing of the social and territorial reality, as well as the lack of integral policies not limiting to punctual actions. These new policies should have into account ampler processes of regional scale, planning and ordering correctly, taking advantage of the existing synergies and keep in mind sustainability and efficiency parameters.

3 - Deterioration and destruction of the city: study of the vulnerable urban areas in the seven main Galician cities

The fracture of the society that represents the social exclusion declares in the urban areas with a concrete spacial configuration, location and characteristics, as well as in the development of social guidelines that reinforce the exclusion and the tensions between the citizens.

We understand as vulnerable urban area that piece of city, easily delimitable, whose socioeconomic and urban indicators are below the indispensable standards of habitability in the current societies. The indicators relative to the level of income, unemployment, education, access to the basic services, criminality, drug addiction, dotacional index, quality of the constructions and degradation of public space are specially determining at the time of identifying these areas.

In Galicia, the absence of planning, resources and effective integral policies; the imbalances generated by the friction between urban and rural processes; and the not solved social fracture between reliable and nonreliable population had in consequence the appearance of numerous vulnerable urban areas, specially in the seven main cities. The urban complexity and the lack of integral, updated and referenced data, have made difficult to the decision making, take apart any initiative and generating non-integral policies that prevented the correct urban and social development, contributing to consolidate these situations; the sectorial policies of investment on the territory, the urban planning and the executed programs of local development have not been able to resolve these problems and, in any case, some measures are agravated these social and urban situations. In view of this situation, "infraDOMUS" considers the elaboration of the study "Vulnerable urban areas and marginal establishments in the seven main Galician cities". The study is strictly necessary to know the problems in depth and to implement the policies adapted facing one complete urban and social recovery.

This project has as primary objective to resolve the deficiency of integral information through the elaboration of a study on the vulnerable urban areas and the marginal establishments in the Galician cities, analyzing the problem from a multidisciplinary perspective, and referring to urban, legal, economic, architectonic and sociological data. By means of the location, study and analysis of this type of urban areas the work will be facilitated of understanding how these pieces of city behave as opposed to the urban growth, how the presence of these zones affects to the value of the ground, how the social services adapt to the management of poverty concentrations, etc. to be able to propose lines of action confronting solutions to each concrete situation.

The general mission of the project is to locate, to inventory and to analyze the vulnerable urban areas and the marginal establishments in the Galician main cities: A Coruña, Lugo, Ourense, Pontevedra, Vigo, Ferrol and Santiago de Compostela, going beyond the simple count of establishments and lodgings.

We considered to produce a document that is a real and useful tool, with the following objectives:

- 1 - To serve as instrument for the figures of urban planning in all and sundry of its levels of development, from those of coordination to those of performance, happening through those of general character.
- 2 - To serve as instrument for the elaboration of plans and active policies for the eradication of the shacks, plans of urban recovery, plans of Local Development and their figures of action, from the Local Initiatives of Employment, up to the Occupational Workshops.
- 3 - Finally, to serve as instrument for the planning of the Social Services, detecting the existing necessities and covers at communitarian, familiar and personal level of the resident population.

The city-planning information usually is a phase habitually little operated as much in the planning as in the designs of sectorial policies. Nevertheless, it is the detailed study of the reality which allows to take the suitable decisions and to optimize the resources available to the maximum. The scientific analysis of the data using the new technologies of the geographic information allows to elaborate an interrelated set of indicators that make possible the integral and detailed analysis of these situations of urban vulnerability. This information will have to be accessible to all the technicians, administrations and competent organisations as well as bring up to date permanently.

A exhaustive fieldwork and the use of SWOT analysis ⁴ guarantee an objective diagnosis. The use of GIS ⁵, that is to say, space data bases that allow the treatment of georeferenced information, to get better data and a correct scientific analysis of the studied object. A GIS based on the specifications defined by the Open Geospatial Consortium will be elaborated with the purpose of being able. Not only to analyze in depth these subjects, but to facilitate the possibility of sharing the data obtained.

Provided that the complexity of the project and the object of study, the works consider in four phases:

- Phase 1: Establishment of a methodology of study that allows to systematize the study of the vulnerable urban areas and marginal establishments, adapting it to the reality of the Galician cities.
- Phase 2: Location of marginal establishments and urban areas very vulnerable in the seven main Galician cities, and elaboration of one files with key datas that allow to characterize it and to determine its proportions.
- phase 3: Cataloguing and analysis of marginal establishments and urban areas very vulnerable, and elaboration of a classification and diagnosis of each one of them.
- Phase 4: Spreading of the study and coming into service like useful tool for technicians and administrations.

GT infraDOMUS was started in A Coruña, from Architecture and Engineering Schools and Law and Sociology Faculties of A Coruña University. The first work os infraDOMUS was made in this city as pilot experience of the study of the vulnerable urban areas in the seven Galician cities.

Similar dynamics and problems exist in all the Galician cities. Through analysis of the urban areas of A Coruña (chief town of one metropolitan area of the Atlantic axis in the Galician urban system) we will be able to establish characteristic locations of vulnerability indicators and a classification of urban areas.

A Coruña is in the Ártabro bay. The bays a territory formed by four estuaries with a common river mouth: estuaries of A Coruña, Betanzos, Ares and Ferrol. It conforms, with Ferrol, the denominated metropolitan area "ciudad de las rías" ⁶, in the North end of the Atlantic Axis.

In the last 30 years, an insufficient coordination of the different administrations and a deficient planning haven't been able to correct the disordered growth, the deterioration of several urban areas and the generation of characteristic vulnerable urban area:

1 – Processes of gentrification and degradation in the historical center. The actual western cities are undergoing a great pressure on the historical center. We observed two interrelated processes: process of social, constructive and services degradation, that entail the aging, pauperization and abandonment of the population; and the gentrification, which consists of the displacement of the resident population and its substitution by high class. The result is the sentence to the uprooting of the resident population and the irreparable loss of the cultural, social and architectonic patrimony of the city. At A Coruña we observed these processes in the "Ciudad Vieja" ⁷ and "Pescadería" ⁸ district, that conform the oldest urban area of the city.

During years, urban improvements haven't taken place in these areas which caused an abandonment of the most solvent classes staying only those weaker social groups. This

progressive abandonment and depopulation, accompanied by the architectonic ruin of the constructed elements, produced a loss of the economic value that, added the urban attractive and space quality of the historical centre, it attracted the investors, beginning the gentrification process. In different degrees, we observed analogous processes in all the Galician cities: A Madalena (Ferrol), Santiago, etc.

The situation of the most modern districts of the city worsens furthermore the problem, demonstrating once again how the dynamic ones of urban desgradación in the city cannot be studied in an isolated way. The new spaces of city, often in the peripheries, are not attractive for the young populations of high acquisitive level or for the new high class linked to the prosperity of the Galician companies. This reality generates a demand of quality housing, in zones as attractive as the historical city. This situation is, perhaps, the one that makes the problem more singular forehead other European cities, that diponen of great attractive residential zones outside the historical center, as low density districts or cities garden.

2 - Historical hamlets in residual and vulnerable situation. The advance of the present compact city takes place in Galicia on a strongly humanized territory, with numerous and scattered establishments of population. Generally, some rural hamlets stay inside the urban continuum but not integrated, and therefore condemned to the collapse. Many of these traditional establishments (Nostián, Vio), in origin peripheral ones to the city, are surrounded by industrial installations (refinery, industrial estates, rubbish dumps, etc.) being in a residual situation. Others remain immersed in the urban continuum but without joining, undergoing a very strong real estate pressure (Bens, Maceiras, San Roque de afuera, Palavea, Loureiro, San Pedro de Visma, Cances, Eirís, Elviña, Castro de Elviña, Mesoiro, Feans). Other population displaced of other dismantled pieces of the city adds to the resident one in these hamlets, increasing the risks of social exclusion.

3 - Working-class residential areas: districts in vulnerable and very vulnerable situation. Between 15% and 20% of the population of the municipalities of more than 20,000 inhabitants live in underprivileged districts. Between 4 and 5 million people of the 25 million inhabitants who reside in these municipalities live in underprivileged districts. An accumulation of problems characterize these districts: high index of unemployment, criminality, drug addiction, etc. - and, therefore, a progressive degradation,. Unfortunately, frequently this situation takes place by a lack of attention on the part of the Administrations, which don't stop this process with integral policies, remaining, at best, in operations of "make-up" on the urban space, forgetting the necessary social support. Districts with worrying indexes of vulnerability are located in A Coruña: Labañou, Agra del Orzán, Ventorrillo and Polígono de Elvira. The neighborhood of Campanario is A special case: a neighborhood of municipal houses in very vulnerable situation (we will see it in detail).

4 - Marginal establishments. Besides isolated infrahouses or in small groups, we can locate in the Galician cities a series of marginal establishments, that is to say, that have a structure with relevance in the territory. In the case of A Coruña, the administration was able to dismantle, with greater or smaller degree of satisfaction, several marginal establishments: A Silva, El Bosque, Oleoducto, Orillamar (double marginal establishment). But those of greater size are still active: Casablanca, As Rañas, Pasaje (double marginal establishment).Peñamoa (triple marginal establishment). To observe how several of these establishments have a municipal origin, like temporary formula of reaccommodation is worrisome; the lack of integral policies abandon them to his fate.

4 - Practical case: the neighborhood of municipal houses of the Portiño

As result of the study of the study of the vulnerable urban areas in the city of A Coruña, infraDOMUS made a proposal of urban recovery for the neighborhood of municipal houses of the Portiño, understood this neighborhood as characteristic example of urban area in specially vulnerable situation not solved in the last 45 years.

GT infraDOMUS made a proposal of inner reform, result and conclusion of a deep and systematic study of the urban and social reality of the neighborhood, where bet by the integration of the piece in the urban continuum, promoting synergies with the surroundings.

The objective of this work is to be a useful tool to obtain a viable alternative to the present situation of the neighborhood of Campanario, the Portiño (A Coruña), improving the quality of life of the neighbors and promoting the surroundings for a suitable incorporation of this area to the growth of the city, but that, simultaneously, serves as document and reflection before an unfortunately frequent reality in our cities.

The work "Campanario: study for the reform of the Municipal Houses of the Portiño" was written up by infraDOMUS in collaboration with Campanario Neighbors Association and presented by this one to the competent Administrations.

The work is structured in three parts, from an exhaustive fieldwork:

1. A theoretic one, in which subjects related to the present situation of the district were valued.
2. A analytical one, in which the district and the surrounding area in where it's located were studied in detail.
3. A proposal one, that consists of a project of social houses and urban improvement of the district, and a proposal of "Plan Parcial" for the development of the sector in which it is inserted.

The neighborhood of municipal houses of Campanario is located in the northwest area of the municipality of A Coruña, in Portiño sector, a small plain in the South slope of the mount of San Pedro in front of the Mount Bens, old garbage dump that has been sealed after the serious loosening of 1996 and reconverted as urban park, the Atlantic Park.

The district was constructed in several phases until arriving at the present state. At the beginning of years 60, the first municipal houses of the Portiño are constructed, very deficient, to lodge families of limited economic resources. The following growth takes place in 1965, when the social work of Padre Villa begins. The second block is completed and other two are constructed, as well as the school. In 1973, Cáritas begins to construct a block of 12 houses besides the school. The last phase of growth appears at the present time, when self-constructed infrahouses, because of the natural growth of the population of the neighborhood and the impossibility of an access adapted to the house, begin to appear.

We observed that Campanario is an urban structure, ordered and orthogonal. It is a unitary piece constituted by constructed municipal houses with rational alignments. Therefore, it's a neighborhood. This is organized in five blocks ready orthogonally, providing a certain protection in front of the wind. The element that characterizes to the neighborhood is the old school; two small squares are generated.

The natural growth of the population of the neighborhood has motivated the appearance of informal self-constructed infrahouses.

The conclusions at which the work arrived are the following ones:

1. Campanario is a Neighborhood of Municipal Houses as record in public municipal documents.
2. These houses were constructed on two property - Campanario and Lebracheira or As Arruelas - donated to the City council by two individuals, affecting them "to the construction by the Municipality of Ultracheap Houses destined to the disappearance of the marginal establishments, whose breach will determine its revocation".
3. The houses were occupied for renting. From the year 1992, the City council let receive the rent. Later, some were left and occupied by other people who show the quality of "precaristas". Really, these occupations have legal nature, because they obey to the figures of precarious renting.
4. The occupation of the houses of the denominated "block of Cáritas" on the property Lebracheira or As Arruelas is, like in the previous cases, completely legal.
5. The general characteristics of the families of Campanario aims at a situation who we must describe as vulnerability and not as marginality. They are poor, nonmarginal families.
6. They are complete families, that is to say, nuclear with children; also, sometimes legally numerous. But they are not "over-populated" homes. The situation responds more to the characteristics of the houses where they live that to the number of members that compose each home.
7. The greater economic difficulties send to a situation of structural unemployment that, however, affects a population of high productive potential
8. Campanario is a ordered structure that counts on urban services and a recognized legal situation; this is a district, not an establishment as inexactly we heard that it is denominated in different means.
9. Without entering conflict with other alternatives of reaccommodation, always within the sector, which the planning development can propose, we considered that the current location of the neighborhood does not enter in conflict with the future development of the area, and facilitates and cheapens the costs of the improvement of the neighborhood. Possible alternative locations to the present one could be the parcels next to Campanario and Arruela or in the zone of the sector next to San Pedro de Visma.
10. The original construction of the municipal houses is inadequate, without isolation, ventilation and space (the houses of around 40 m² must be meticulously projected).
11. In order to the characteristics of the population, it seems that the suitable tipologies of house would be those more concordant with the present structure of local relations, that is to say, those that consider the importance of the spaces of neighborhood that allow reducing the vulnerability.

5 – Conclusions

The investigations around the city and the vulnerable urban areas realized by the team infraDOMUS and the practical experience in the land management and in the elaboration of

offers of urban recovery accumulated during these years it is summarized in the following conclusions.

The Galician urban system is a resulting complex structure of the history of the establishments of population in this territory. It's conformed by a system of seven main cities and a complementary system of urban areas, vertebrates by a very dense road system reinforced by a delta of corridors (AP-9, A-6, A-52).

The strong growth and the lack of urban planning in the last fifty years have generated tensions nonsolved in the cities, causing the appearance of urban areas with different types and degrees from vulnerability: processes of gentrification and degradation in the historical center, historical hamlets in residual and vulnerable situation, self-constructed peripheries, districts in vulnerable and very vulnerable situation, marginal establishments, etc.

During many years, the public policies of development had as objective a maintained increase of the economic activity betting by the industrial ground appearance and providing with suitable infrastructures of transport, from which all the citizenship benefits. Although it is demonstrated that the policies of public infrastructure investment are necessary for the economic development, must be accompanied by social, educative and cultural policies to generate wealth and development in the long term.

The Galician local administrations don't have detailed information of which it happens in his municipalities, as it demonstrates the case of the municipal neighborhood of Portiño. The first step to guarantee that the policies can impel ambitious performances of urban recovery is to make sure that they know in depth the problems and that they are near the population beneficiary. It is important to stress this point, because frequently the politician and the citizen do not have direct communication, which entails the "invisibility" of the population affected before his representatives, an inadmissible fracture in the modern democracies.

The recovery of pieces of city must undertake jointly provided that the vulnerable urban area dismantling and resolution in a city do not derive in the formation of new vulnerable urban area by displacement of population, making previously a study through a methodology of systematic study for the elaboration of suitable and sustainable policies of urban integration.

Figures

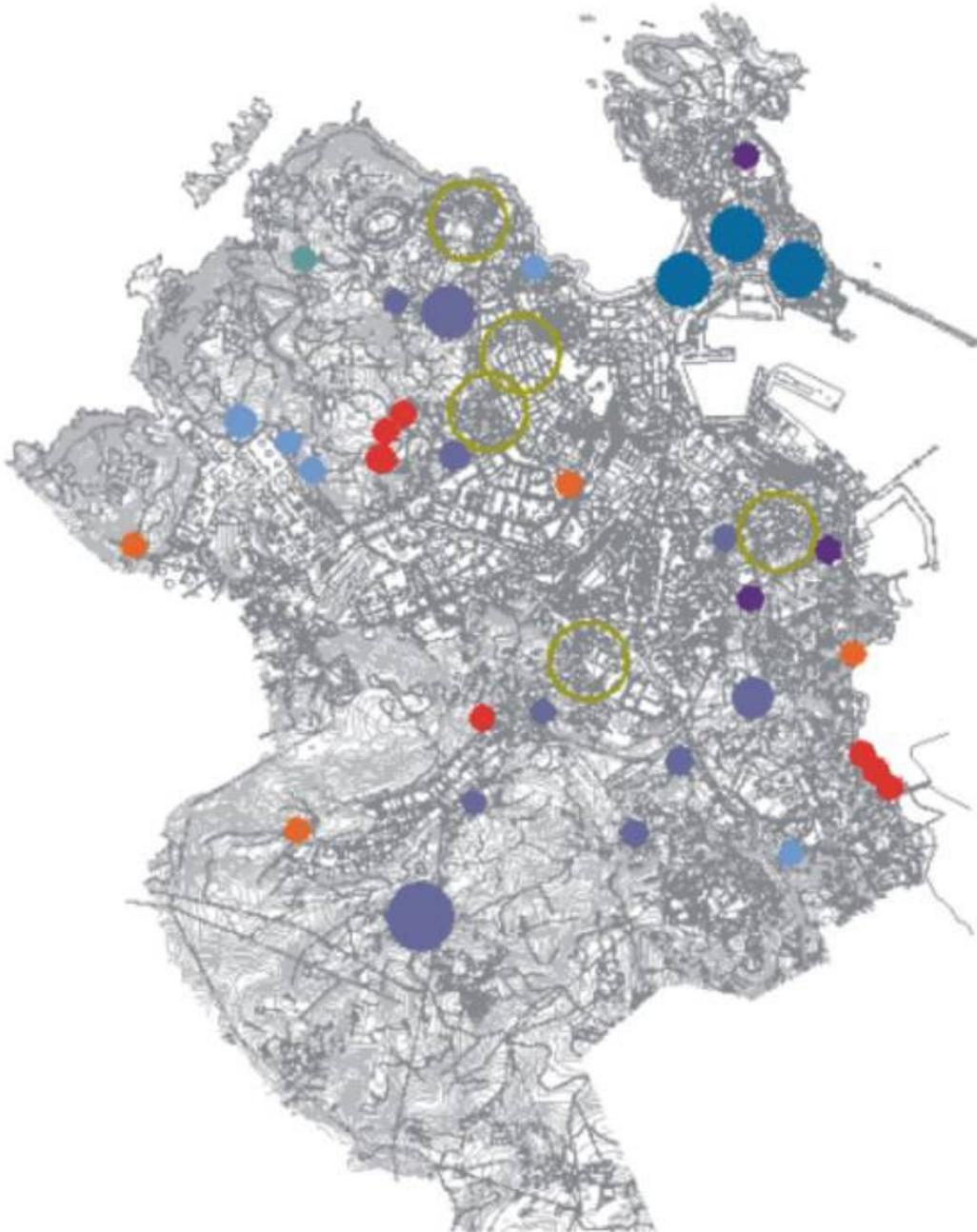


Figure 1: Location of vulnerable urban areas in A Coruña. Own production



Figure 2: Vulnerable urban areas located in the sector of Portiño. Own production



Photo 1: View of Campanario

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Endnotes

¹ "Castro": fortified pre-roman iron age village. The castro economy was based on many different kinds of agriculture.

² Source: 2006 Statistical yearbook of Spain. Instituto Nacional de Estadística.

³ Source: 2006 Statistical yearbook of Spain. Instituto Nacional de Estadística.

⁴ SWOT, also known as TOWS analysis, is a powerful technique for understanding your Strengths and Weaknesses, and for looking at the Opportunities and Threats you face.

⁵ Geographic Information System

⁶ Estuaries city

⁷ Historic old town

⁸ Old fishmonger's district