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Elderly population homes in the municipality of Malaga: characterization, numerical evolution and spatial distribution

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The Spanish population has been experiencing a significant aging process, both at the base and at the top of the population pyramid. When older people remain healthy, with functional independence, they can live alone in their homes without major inconvenience; however, as their age increases, and especially after 75, their health suffers, and they find it difficult to carry out tasks of daily life, needing someone to help them carry them out. That is why this age subgroup is of special interest, a subgroup that has also experienced a significant numerical increase. The municipality of Malaga has not escaped this general evolution, and has also experienced an aging process, which has been accelerated since 2008, and which has meant that in 2021, 8.55% of its population is 75 years old or older.

This elderly population resides in households of various types. In our case, we are interested in identifying single-person households, those made up of two elderly people, and the rest of the households in which one or more elderly people live with non-elderly population. This composition implies a decreasing degree of vulnerability: those elderly people who live alone would be the most vulnerable, followed by households made up exclusively of two elderly people, and, lastly, those multi-person households in which the elderly who comprise them live with younger population. Therefore, it is important to know not only where the elderly population is located, but also where the elderly population living alone is located, either alone or sharing a home with another elderly person.

This is the context in wich the objectives of the contribution that we present must be inserted. We will quantify, from the Municipal Register of Inhabitants, the households in which the elderly population resides in the municipality of Malaga, focusing on two types of household: single-person households and those made up of only two the elderly, the most vulnerable. And, next, we will show its intra-municipal spatial distribution, at the neighborhood scale, together with its temporal evolution between 2008 and 2020, also taking as a source the Municipal Register of Inhabitants of Malaga.

The information about households has been obtained from the Municipal Register of Inhabitants provided by the Malaga City Council. The variable we have used is age, differentiating between two population groups: the first, those who are 75 years of age or older; the second, the rest of those registered. And, as a spatial unit of reference, we have used the neighbourhood, a spatial unit with sociological significance and in which most of the social relations of the elderly take place. And that, in addition, it is free from the MAUP problem.

Finally, we will indicate that when inquiring about the intra-municipal spatial distribution we have used the Location Quotient; It is a simple indicator, whose statistical information needs are perfectly adjusted to those that can be obtained from the Register. In addition, it has the ability to differentiate between spatial units –neighborhoods– in which situations of overrepresentation and underrepresentation are recorded, a quality that, together with the previous ones, makes it a very useful statistical instrument for our research.

The most numerous type of household in which an elderly person resides is one in which they share the dwelling with a population under 75 years of age; and it is the sole proprietorships that are in second place. And, although it is true that the three types of households have experienced increases in absolute numbers, it is the one-person households that have seen their weight increase in relative terms, gains that have been obtained at the expense of the other two types of households.

The spatial distribution of households composed of two elderly people in 2008 is very similar to that of 2020. It´s basic elements are the presence of overrepresentation in the center and the neighborhoods adjoining it to the west and east, extending in the latter direction along the coastline. There are also two groups, disconnected from the previous one: the first, to the north, on both banks of the Gualdalmedina; it is physically separated from the center by a border of underrepresented neighborhoods that have undergone a process of urban regeneration. This meant the arrival of younger population, and the consequent weight loss of households made up of two elderly people. The second grouping is located on Carretera de Cádiz, and is drawn on a set of residential actions, mostly high-rise, built during the seventies of the last century. Given the relative youth of the urban fabric in this area, the levels of overrepresentation are low; and it should not be surprising that the neighborhoods in which the value of the location quotient is somewhat higher are earlier in time. The general picture of overrepresentation of households made up of two elderly people is completed by the oldest neighborhoods in the nuclei of Churriana and Puerto de la Torre, both at the western end of the municipality.

The spatial distribution of the values of the location quotients corresponding to single-person households is simpler than the previous one. Overrepresentation is present in the center and the neighborhoods that once formed the western limit of the built continuum. From the center, and northbound, a group of neighborhoods is drawn, on both banks of the Guadalmedina, which includes a whole set articulated by the old Camino de Colmenar. There is also another extension, in this case to the east, which brings together the coastal neighbourhoods, but with little projection towards the interior. Finally, concentrations of neighborhoods with overrepresentation can also be identified in the oldest sectors of the Churriana and Puerto de la Torre nuclei and the oldest neighborhoods in the Carretera de Cádiz area. A distribution that, fundamentally, has not changed much in the 12 years that go from 2008 to 2020.

As conclusions, we may indicate that the bulk of the population increase that the municipality of Malaga has experienced between 2008 and 2020 is due to the elderly, while two fifths of the increase in households registered in that same period has this population as a protagonist. A population that has seen how its chances of residing "in its usual home" increase; however, the spatial distribution of the elderly is not equivalent to the distribution of households made up exclusively of this type of population. An issue that we believe has repercussions on the work of the planner, who generally does not have specific information on where the most vulnerable households are located based on their age and composition. In this sense, there is a growing current in favor of the so-called "ageing in place"; but in order to facilitate it from the public sphere, first of all it is necessary to be aware not only of where the elderly live, but fundamentally of where households made up exclusively of elderly people are concentrated. This issue is of great importance, since cities must adapt to the model of aging societies, with different needs and demands than younger ones; not only in relation to the adaptation of neighborhoods or public spaces, but also leisure spaces, since this

population has appreciable amounts of free time. The most exact knowledge possible of the intra-municipal distribution of these households allows the specific adaptation of the spaces in which they are over-represented, optimizing public investment.

In this context, the elderly reside in significant proportions in the center of Malaga cities and in many urban sectors of the metropolitan municipalities, urbanized from the fifties; This is a well-known reality, which we can find in a multitude of Spanish cities, with the same chronology: in the Malaga context, the neighborhoods of Carretera de Cádiz would be the Malaga´s equivalent of these metropolitan municipalities. The spatial distribution of elderly households in the municipality of Malaga presents an overrepresentation in the center, and, in general, in the central areas of peripheral nuclei that were once disconnected from the main urban fabric. Their presence in environments that are gradually becoming unfriendly to them is linked to the fact that the elderly are reluctant to move, even when their own homes are no longer useful to them. It remains to be seen whether this is the situation of the elderly from Malaga, which, without doubt, will require qualitative research, of great interest to the planner.

Furthermore, the spatial distribution of households is not static, but it changes over time. The levels of overrepresentation of both types of households have undergone modifications, which we have collected in a set of dynamics. Especially interesting is the increase in overrepresentation on the eastern coast in the case of households made up of two elderly people, to a lesser extent in single-person households. This, in our opinion, is a significant finding, since the situation when the entire elderly population is considered is one of maintenance of the location quotient values, not observing the aforementioned trend. This is another of the contributions of our research: showing how the use of the neighborhood as a spatial unit of reference makes it possible to identify the temporal variations of a variable, with the absolute certainty that said variations are not influenced in any way by changes in the space unit.