

Andalusia, from Peripheral Urbanism to Real-State Bubble. Hiperdevelopment of Real-State Sector as Sign of Underdevelopment

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Andalusia fits in the typical case of a peripheral agricultural region within Europe, commodity exporter and cheap labor force provider for industrial regions, in a similar way to the Italian mezzogiorno or to Ireland. In the last decades, mainly since the integration of Spain to the European Union, there have been radical changes in that status. There has been a huge development of physical and social infrastructures along with a profound transformation in order to turn the region into a platform for European tourism. However, the effects of the economic crisis that began in 2008 have been especially devastating in the European periphery; Andalusia is paradigmatic in this sense because of the significant increase of unemployment and poverty accumulated in the last years.

The discussion in this paper departs from the assumption that, even though the evident changes that happened during the last decades, Andalusia is still in a peripheral condition, dependent and subordinate to post-industrial capitalist cores, presenting serious continuities with its previous circumstance. The current situation enables us to address Andalusia's problem from an unusual viewpoint. Most of the studies about the geo-economic condition of the region have focused in its rural condition and in its underdevelopment in comparison with industrial areas. Instead, we propose to analyze the case from the perspective of the urbanization processes. This enables us to consider how the apparent development and modernization of the region is in fact hiding the opposite situation: the underdevelopment and subordination of this regional economy; situation that takes place within one of the core regions of global capitalism, the European Union. The failure of the "modernization" of Andalusia, as an example of the problems of the European Mediterranean region, invites us to think about how the current development of the capitalist economy –especially since the last economic crisis– sets up a space that



enable conditions of subordination and dependency get closer to the core of the system.

The paper analyzes Andalusia's current situation adjustment to a theoretical model of geo-economic periphery. In the first place, we take a classic and well known model, the dependent urbanism theory, considering its relevance for this case and identifying concrete aspects that could be significant to explain it. Special attention has been devoted to some topics which are essential for understanding the situation of Andalusia: the cleavage between urban growing and the demand of industrial employment, the growth of cities through the expulsion of people from rural areas, and the accumulation of unemployed workforce. This discussion is updated by considering the role played by financial capitalism nowadays, understood from the viewpoint of the theory of the secondary circuit of accumulation introduced by Henri Lefebvre and further developed by David Harvey. From their viewpoint, the hyper-development of the secondary circuit of accumulation of capital, a non-productive circuit, enables what Lefebvre calls an "urban neocolonialism". The real-estate and construction sectors play a subordinated role in the reactivation of the economy in the context of cyclical crisis in the industrial and core regions, fighting against the tendency to the fall of profit rate. On the contrary, in subaltern regions, the secondary circuit of accumulation would acquire a main role. Thus, the highly speculative economies of regions that have been refurbished as spaces for leisure are the result of their function as a refuge for surplus capital from the productive core economies.

Finally, the case of Andalusia is presented to show its historical development, based on secondary sources and also taking into account data provided by public statistics of the Spanish Government. This data gives information about the social and economic structure, role of construction and real-estate sector and its effect on social issues, bearing in mind its impact during the last economic crisis. In a second stage, the paper focuses on the social and economic effects of the collapse of the model of development. In Andalusia, the moments of high growth had led to a strong dependency on the construction sector, several millions of empty houses and highly over valued real-estate assets. The percentage of workforce provided by this sector tended to reach 15%, more than half a million workers, with an annual business volume above fifty million euros. After the crisis, employment in the construction sector was halved in two years and keeps going down. The most affected areas have been the cities with high dependence on construction and tourism, with temporary and low qualification workforce. As a result, the unemployment rate in Andalusia has been over 30% from 2011 on.

The article concludes that several notions associated with peripheral urbanism could contribute to interpret the current geo-economic role of Andalusia. In the first place, the social structure of the region could not be understood without taking into account

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unemployment as a structural element. Since the modernization processes started in the Sixties, the volume of manual workforce went down as the volume of professionals and technicians grew. However, the main labor category today in Andalusia is the unemployed workforce. The social structure of Andalusia cannot be understood without considering unemployment, and unemployment cannot be understood without considering the growth of informal low-skilled employment. In this sense, the ideas of relative surplus population and marginalized population are helpful to understand this case.

Regarding the connection between real-estate speculation and the peripheral urbanization process, it is asserted that the economic model based on tourism and real-estate speculation lead to an almost total subordination of some regions to other core urban regions which manage the flux of capital. From the position of those urban cores, regions as Andalusia are fields for speculation. The result is an economy extremely sensitive to international economic changes. The constructed environment turns into the destiny of unproductive investment, following the tradition of urban free riding. The investments in construction are never directly productive and in this case they cannot be productive in an indirect way either. The apparent wealth materialized in roads, high velocity trains and the apartments in the beach has (from productivity criteria) the same value as the investment made by the rentier nobility in palaces and the typical Andalusian agrovillas. It is a free riding urbanism that hides a situation of underdevelopment which emerges occasionally in an economy subjected to intense cycles of destruction of capital.

Nevertheless, as development does not follow a strictly staged model, even less does underdevelopment. The subordinated roles within the world economy can produce different models of periphery in different territories. Our interpretation is that the European Mediterranean region, in the crucial context of its integration to the European Union and considering its absolute subordination to the core economies of the North, has adopted this concrete peripheral position. This role combines the transformation of the region in a center for recreation and tourism becoming a perfect field for the investment of the surplus capitals from the main centers of accumulation. Based on this assertion, we propose that this tourism-real-estate model, which we can also find in other geographical areas in different scales, is unavoidably associated to a subordinated and geographically dependent urban development. This is a model with speculative and contradictory foundations which sooner or later operates to the detriment of the population who lives in those areas.

