

SUMMARY OF ARTICLE: doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12795/rea.2019.i38.04>

Delimitation of the Rural Population Sets of the Region of Altiplano in the Region of Murcia

Miguel Ángel Sánchez-Sánchez

miguelangel.sanchez2@um.es  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0774-2560>

Universidad de Murcia. Departamento de Geografía. Campus de La Merced. Calle Santo Cristo, 1, 30001

KEYWORDS

Rural environment
Human settlements
Population center
Yecla
Jumilla
Altiplano
Region of Murcia

The topic to be treated in this investigation revolves around the population settlements, excluding the archaeological sites, of the Altiplano region in the Region of Murcia, which may be affected by the actions included in the Territorial Ordinance Guidelines of the region. Such actions are directed towards rural settlements of a rural nature. Therefore, it is interesting to know what the Guidelines could affect. Hence, we have as objective to determine that human settlements in the Altiplano region of the Region of Murcia can be classified as rural population groups, and therefore receive future actions included in the Guidelines.

On the other hand, to try to fulfill the marked objective, an algorithm was devised, represented by three flow diagrams, by means of which it is determined if the settlement, in question, is: population nucleus, if it is in a rural environment and finally if it is a rural population nucleus.

The general procedure to follow, the method, was initially to locate the human settlements, through the use of diverse cartography and field trips. To these the flow chart was applied, by means of which it is possible to determine if these are, or not, population centers. The first step, of this diagram, was to determine the existence or not of ten or more buildings, if the answer was affirmative it was passed to the following indicators: existence of streets and squares. For the first case, it was taken as a reference the definition of the same as: public road that runs between buildings or rows of houses that usually has sidewalks and roads, serving for the movement of people through the population center, being a closed and delimited system. In the case of the square, it was considered that part of the territory that "results from the grouping of houses around a free zone, establishing itself as a closed space". But, that, unlike the street is characterized, in addition, by a space, place or place, by its breadth and be spacious. This space is located in the interior of the population center, and, sometimes, several streets tend to flow.

So, if all the steps were affirmative, we were facing a human settlement that constituted a population nucleus. If in the indicator of buildings, the answer was negative, the existence of fifty or more inhabitants



was confirmed; in the affirmative case, progress was made towards the following indicators (streets and squares). If not, the possibility of constituting a population nucleus was discarded. The same fate befell those settlements that did not have streets or squares.

In parallel, to the flow diagram for the determination of the different settlements as possible “population centers”, an attempt was made to determine the degree of rurality of the environment where the human settlements studied are located. For this, among the different conceptions of rural environment (OECD, EU-European Commission, and Spanish Rural Development Law), the most restrictive indicators were used: Having a number of inhabitants equal to or less than 30,000 and an equal population density or less than 100 inhabitants / km². Also, the concept of a small rural municipality was used, applying to municipalities and inframunicipal units. Two conditions had to be met: being in a rural environment and having a population equal to or less than 5,000 inhabitants.

The last phase of the process, based on flow diagrams, was the one that allowed us to find out if the human settlements studied were a rural population or not. The third diagram basically consists of two items: being a population center and being located in rural areas.

As far as the results are concerned, it should be noted that among the almost one hundred human settlements that make up the universe of study, only forty-nine fulfill the first condition: having a number equal to or greater than ten buildings, including those located within a radius of 200 meters. Of these, 28 are located in the municipality of Jumilla and 21 in the municipality of Yecla. In turn, of those only eleven were considered as population centers. Then, the pertinent actions were carried out to know if the settlements were in a rural environment or not. To do this, the flow diagram designed to determine if the study area was inserted in a rural environment was used. It began at a county level, to go down to the greatest possible detail, passing through the municipal scale previously. The county territory, with a total of 59,764 inhabitants, would not house a rural environment. In the scale of the municipal scope, the obtained data show that the territory of the municipality of Jumilla would have the aspect of a rural environment. On the contrary, it would not be so for the municipal territories of Yecla. When using the indicator referring to the population density variable, both the county and both municipalities would be classified as rural areas: Comarca (37.95), Jumilla (26.49) and Yecla (56.29). Recall that these municipalities have a considerable municipal area: Jumilla (969.00 km²) and Yecla (605.64 km²). Also, by using the data associated with the administrative figure of “minor entity” –of infra-municipal character–, all human settlements, with the exception of Yecla and Jumilla, would be located in a rural environment. It should also be said that assimilating the smaller entity to the concept of a small rural municipality, all the smaller entities –except those corresponding to Yecla and Jumilla– would have a profile of the type of municipality cited. It should be added that the municipal capitals are home to almost all the inhabitants of the municipality, Jumilla 95.5% and Yecla 93.17%.

On the other hand, among the conclusions it should be noted that the method used improves objectivity and speeds up the definition of rural population groups in the study area. Although, it is proposed to move towards a methodology that includes criteria, indices, indicators, etc., with which to make a delimitation of the most accurate rural population sets. This last aspect could be improved by taking into account historical and cultural values. Likewise, the methodology conceived could be extrapolated to other territories, more specifically to the South-East and / La Mancha, for its similarity with the study area.

As far as the study area is concerned, it is worth noting that, in spite of the almost 100 settlements detected and visited, and having passed the first criterion: up to 49; only 9 can be considered as rural villages or nuclei, after the application of the algorithms captured by the different flow diagrams. In this way, it is worth asking: if other criteria had been applied, together with those used, would other results have been obtained? We can only answer: that we do not know. Being able to consider from here other work topics, raised as a hypothesis. Where socio-cultural and historical aspects could greatly modify the results. But, as already said, this could be another hypothesis to contrast, to check. In addition, it is clear from these data the scarce dispersion of the municipal population, which tends to be concentrated in the county capitals, this situation being more significant in the case of the Yeclano municipality.

Back to the human settlements of the region, the rural population groups that were classified as such, are located in the municipality of Jumilla, except Raspay in Yecla. All have in common that they are distributed



towards the south of the axis that would form the cities of Jumilla and Yecla. Several patterns are observed: the rural population groups located next to the most important communication axes –the national highway and the highway–, surroundings close to Jumilla and next to the limits with the province of Alicante –in the neighboring Valencian Community–. All these patterns of territorial distribution have in common to be found in the most socio-economically dynamic areas of the region. Where in addition, in the case of Jumilla –in regards to its immediate surroundings–, it can be influenced by the provision of services by the city of Jumilla, together with the existence of an industrial estate between it and the districts of: The Alquería and Fuente del Pino.