



HOUSING IN THE EUROPEAN COUNTRYSIDE

Rural Pressure and Policy in Western Europe

Edited by

Nick Gallent, Mark Shucksmith and Mark Tewdwr-Jones

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Introduction

In policy and planning circles at least, the issue of rural housing in Spain occupies a marginal position. Past neglect perhaps reflects a lack of private sector interest in the rural housing market: there are extremely few national construction industry players working on rural schemes and housebuilding in the countryside is, instead, dominated by small local promoters and developers. In some areas, even self-build adds more units to the local housing stock than formal sector constructors.

A lack of general awareness of rural issues is compounded by the fact that information on rural housing is difficult to get hold of. National Housing Plans, for instance, rarely differentiate between rural and non-rural concerns and there are no specific policy regulations relating to housing in the countryside. The characteristics of dwellings (and issues of housing quality) are, however, examined within specifically rural settings, though quality is judged against standard parameters that are applied irrespective of the (urban or rural) location of homes. But despite this dearth of information, it is generally acknowledged that housing outside the urban centres is subject to a particular set of processes and changes. First, the way in which the stock is used has changed drastically in recent years, reflecting a reduction in agrarian activity. Second, demographic changes are driving other processes (and creating new demands) such as the increase in new residents or seasonal visitors (including second home users) who do not establish a permanent relationship with the countryside.

The latest data (gathered in the 1991 Spanish Population and Housing Census) shows that Spain's rural areas are dominated by owner-occupied housing, typically of between 61 to 90 square metres in size (three bedrooms). Rural housing quality is usually judged to be between 'regular' and 'good'. But perhaps the most significant fact revealed in official statistics is that the cost of housing in the countryside is generally very low. This is a result – at least in part – of the reduced cost of labour, construction materials and land away from Spain's cities. And so, with low prices, reasonable quality levels and no apparent shortfall in

supply, it might appear that there is very little else to be said on the issue of rural housing in Spain. But this is far from the truth, as this chapter will demonstrate (MOPU, 1983).

Defining rural Spain

Spanish local government is organised into municipalities: a municipality is considered 'rural' if it meets the criteria set out by the Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE). Rural areas are defined as those having fewer than 2,000 inhabitants. Municipalities with between 2,000 and 10,000 inhabitants are regarded as being 'semi-urban' while those with more than 10,000 residents are deemed to be 'urban'. This strictly quantitative measure sometimes suggests that areas with otherwise 'rural' characteristics are in fact semi-urban or completely urban. For instance, in parts of southern Spain, some municipalities with more than 20,000 inhabitants have economies almost entirely based on agriculture. On the other hand, there are also low-density (under 2,000 inhabitants) municipalities, which have 'urban' type economies based on industrial production or the tertiary sector. It is difficult to pigeonhole areas purely on the basis on population size. A better indicator of rurality might involve the combination of population data with information on the position of agrarian activities within the local economy and labour structure. For instance, rural areas might have 25 per cent of their economic activity defined as being agricultural. This alternative view of what constitutes a rural area is mentioned here because agriculture has a critical link with the demand for rural housing. Technological innovation, for example, has made agriculture less labour-intensive and a lower proportion of the population work in farming today than did so in the past: therefore demand from those engaged in farming is reduced.

So the definition used in this discussion is based on the notion that a municipality's relative rurality will be determined by the size of settlements, economic dependency on the agricultural sector and – additionally – the degree of concentration or dispersal of people and buildings.

Patterns of change in rural Spain

The economic decline and depopulation of Spain's rural areas have brought profound impacts to the housing market. The process of depopulation reached its zenith in the 1960s and 1970s (although it is still apparent today) and resulted in absolute losses of population in a number of regions – including inner Aragón, the mountainous areas of Castilla and Leon, Extremadura and La Gomera Island. The extent of depopulation has varied from one place to another, though the

agricultural zones (cereal areas in the inner regions of Spain), mountainous regions and the less accessible areas (bordering Portugal and inner Aragón) have been hit especially hard. However, rural areas dominated by intensive agricultural production (coastal orchards and the inner fertile plains) have fared a great deal better. There has been a kind of ‘natural selection’ at play leading to the eradication of small settlements and landscapes dominated by dispersed farmsteads: Castilla and Leon, and Pirineos have been subject to unprecedented levels of depopulation. History has shown that this process is commonly followed by the wholesale collapse of public facilities and services, which further heightens the ongoing crisis and reduces the likelihood of future recovery.

A rather different story has emerged in Spain’s less remote, medium-sized rural settlements. With better accessibility and services, these have tended to draw in people from the smaller, and often more remote, communities. Those rural households avoiding the temptation to gravitate towards the centre (Madrid) or the affluent periphery (Catalonia, Basque and the Balearic Islands) tend to remain in these middle tier settlements, which become ‘semi-rural/urban’ holding points, better served in terms of housing quality and other infrastructure. They also display a lower dependency on agriculture and might be described as rural service-centres, typically with between 2,000 and 5,000 inhabitants.

But perhaps the key point to note on the issue of depopulation is that it has been demographically selective and biased towards younger people, particularly women. This means that declining areas have a greater abundance of men and an ageing population – resulting in a number of side effects. For instance, there are fewer marriages and births, a higher mortality rate, less ‘innovative capacity’ and a rejection of new technology. And this final side effect has been particularly unhelpful at a time when farming has needed to become more competitive in order to survive: areas such as Galicia and Andalucía, heavily dependent on traditional methods, have been badly hit by the combination of population and agricultural change.

Demographic changes have not all been negative, however. Some rural areas – especially those close to the larger urban centres – are experiencing notable population reinforcement as a result of the expansion of second homes, the in-migration of new residents and increasing development of tourism industry. Tourism, in particular, can generate new employment opportunities, broaden the local economic base, and lead to spin-offs in the form of new craft industries, and the restoration of historical heritage (Valenzuela, 1997). These developments can all be viewed in a positive light, leading to material improvements in quality of life. However, the introduction of new activities into rural areas can be accompanied by conflicts. Some conflicts are the result of poor integration between new economic opportunities and the old agrarian activities. Others may relate to

competition for housing, but only where the supply of such housing is limited. Despite the patterns of depopulation described above, in some parts of the Spanish countryside, such housing conflicts do arise and often as a result of the desire amongst the urban population to seek homes in the country.

Housing pressure and housing conflicts

Housing pressure commonly arises when there are no, few or restricted opportunities for households to gain access to a desired place to live. This situation might be a result of supply restrictions, or changes in the demand for housing that do not coincide with current levels or patterns of supply. In the Spanish countryside, pressure points often emerge where there is a coincidence of agricultural revival or economic diversification (and consequent prosperity) and a simultaneous increase in urban or tourism-based housing demand. Pressure will also stem from the inadequacy of existing housing stock to meet the needs of an ageing population and an increase in the number of single person households in some areas.

A key pressure – and source of conflict – in some locations has resulted from the purchase, by either domestic or foreign buyers, of retirement or second homes. Extraneous demand – in the form of commuters seeking the perceived benefits of a rural lifestyle – may also contribute to the pressure experienced within the rural housing market. Although some areas are facing a deepening rural crisis, others are experiencing both expansion and prosperity. In the latter, the balance between housing supply and demand may become unsettled: those workers locked into the agrarian sector may not be able to compete against higher earning workers in the newer more prosperous sectors. In other words, the benefits of collective economic opportunity may not flow to all individuals.

It was noted above that house prices in rural areas are generally lower than in the cities. However, the resale prices of rural homes are not uniform across the country. In some regions (for example, across northern Spain) prices achieved for rehabilitated traditional houses can be exceptionally high as a result of strong external demand pressure. At a lesser scale, different social preferences as well as issues of landscape value, image, architectural attributes, etc., impact on house prices causing local variations. One consequence of depopulation, economic restructuring and local price variations has been the creation of clear divisions between the types of households competing for property in Spain's housing market. These divisions run along the following lines:

- Residents with incomes derived from the rural economy (not necessarily agrarian) and consequently with *low* purchase capacity. This purchase

capacity becomes weaker in areas of greater housing demand. Access chances are dependent on subsidies and on their capacity to build up savings over a period of time. Such households may seek to improve existing homes rather than compete for newer (and perhaps better) property with other higher earning households.

- Former out-migrants who have returned to their place of origin (in the countryside) and now have the means (having engaged in urban employment activities) to purchase property for future retirement or investment. This is a very common practice in Spain's northern regions (especially Galicia) where housing for ex-rural dwellers is considered a long-term investment (Abellán, 1993).
- Urban buyers originating from the nearby cities (mostly the larger centres) and looking for a second residence or a permanent home in the country. These are usually middle-aged professionals, with high saving and purchase capacity.
- Foreign investors in rural properties who seek second or retirement homes. They frequently gravitate towards rural areas close to the main tourist hot-spots (e.g. the Mediterranean coast or Mallorca).
- Owners of large rural estates (more than 1,000 hectares) comprising luxury houses. These do not occupy a common housing group in rural Spain but it is the case that wealthy businessmen will sometimes purchase 'status-symbol' estates. This practice has been particularly commonplace in the agrarian regions of central Spain (Castilla La Mancha, Extremadura, etc.). Buyers often seek the aristocratic lifestyle associated with hunting, fishing, socialising and, above all, wealth.
- Immigrants who endure substandard housing conditions. These sometimes originate from the developing countries of north and sub-Saharan Africa. They are drawn to the employment opportunities found in the intensive agricultural areas of Andalucía, Comunidad Valenciana, Catalonia, but are then unable to afford decent or appropriate housing.

These different groups obviously have markedly different needs: few conflicts arise between very rich and very poor households, who remain socially and physically separate. However, at the fringes of wealth and poverty, some ex-urban and rural households seek homes in the same sections of the market and in these instances, it is local households who may find themselves priced out of the market. In the following series of sections, some of the different ways and vehicles for managing such pressures and conflicts are briefly examined.

Managing the pressure – the agencies

Across Europe, a hierarchy of agencies is commonly involved in rural development concerns. Table 8.1 lists the *public sector* agencies working in rural Spain.

Spanish central government provides support for rural housing initiatives through its general economic policy: it has also sponsored direct measures to assist sectors of the rural economy. Between the 1960s and 1980s, for example, the ‘Agrarian Amelioration Agencies’ played a significant role in taking forward ‘Agrarian Development Plans’; plans that aimed to increase the quality of basic amenities (water, electricity, sewerage etc.) delivered to farming communities. Political reorganisation in the 1980s shifted responsibility for housing issues to the Regional Governments who would henceforth deal with such matters, though central government retains overall control of fiscal policy.

More recently – since the 1990s – the Ministry of Agriculture, Fishing and Food has started to exercise new powers, which have brought indirect benefits to the rural housing stock. Mechanisms, for example, were established to support the agrarian labour force and these included grants for young farmers and farm workers for the purchase and improvement of housing. Other tools appeared to tackle housing problems more generally, with some benefits for the countryside. The National Housing Plans for instance (the most recent running between 1998 and 2001) appear at first glance to ignore rural areas: though additional grants are targeted at municipalities with an abundance of small settlements. The stated rationale is that decline in smaller communities, affects the well-being of the entire municipality. Hence the complementarity of rural and adjacent urban areas is recognised in these Plans. It is the Regional administrations (see Table 8.1) however that wield the real power to design specific programmes and strategies for dealing with rural housing concerns. While this allows for flexibility, it also accounts for the lack of homogeneity in Spanish housing policy. This issue is discussed further in the next section.

At the widest scale, Structural Funds provided by the European Union offer an important source of money for dealing with housing problems. A number of different funds have been tapped into. For instance, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) has been used to support programmes focusing on difficulties relating to poor infrastructure provision; the funds assist with economic development strategies that will hopefully bring about a better quality of life (measured in terms of improved infrastructure) for many rural areas. Other money comes in the form of *Fonds Européen d’Orientation et de Garantie Agricole* (FEOGA). This is intended to support farms as individual production units, assisting in farm modernisation, rationalisation and – indirectly – investment in housing. And finally the LEADER (*Liaisons Entre Actions de*

Table 8.1 Agencies involved in rural housing in Spain

<i>Agency</i>	<i>Description</i>
The European Union	Offices dedicated to co-ordinating European initiatives and then monitoring the results of these initiatives
Spanish Central Government	Various ministries (e.g. General Directorate of Housing, Architecture and Planning and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fishing and Food)
The Regional Governments (Autonomous Communities)	Housing Departments and Institutes of Land, Housing, and Architecture
The Provincial Governments	Provincial infrastructure plans through the 'Housing Patronages'
The Counties (' <i>Comarca</i> ')	Loosely defined except in the case of Cataluña, where they have political status and their own budgets
The Union of Municipalities (' <i>Mancomunidad</i> ')	Municipalities coming together to co-operate on key strategic issues – though they rarely co-operate on housing issues
The Municipality	Rarely possessing sufficient administrative (or resource) capacity with which to address local housing problems, or design and implement effective housing policy. They are reliant on the integrity and co-operation of town councillors (' <i>Concejales</i> ') who are charged with construction licensing and the supervision of projects

Source: Author

Développement de l'Economie Rurale, or 'Links Between Actions for the Development of the Rural Economy') programme – conceived as an integrated programme for rural development – assists smaller communities through a range of initiatives and strategies. Recently in Spain, there has been an emphasis on the provision of subsidies for the refurbishment of traditional housing that can then serve as tourist accommodation. The LEADER (and more recent LEADER II) programme has been directed at economic diversification rather than the support of agrarian activities and therefore has the potential to help those communities suffering the consequences of agricultural decline (Beltrán, 1994; Blanco and Benayas, 1994).

Finally, and besides the various programmes developed by these governmental agencies, there have also been a number of private and self-help initiatives aimed at improving rural housing conditions. Some private companies, for

instance, have been pro-active in the rehabilitation of rural dwellings, which are then turned into second homes. At the present time, however, there is a lack of enterprises specifically devoted to housing rehabilitation and the private sector tends to concentrate on new-build housing in rural areas.

Managing the pressure – land use planning

There is no overarching land use or housing plan for rural areas in Spain. The Autonomous Communities (Regional Governments – see Table 8.1) have a responsibility for planning and related activities within their own areas of jurisdiction. During the 1980s and 1990s many Autonomous Communities enacted laws and approved special plans to be deployed in their rural areas and other instruments (included in the Spanish Land Laws) were used to regulate development pressures at the local, provincial and regional scales. These instruments were designed to stem the tide of urbanisation and bring land use change under stricter planning control. But the success of these measures has been limited.

While it is often assumed that the effectiveness of planning control has increased – particularly where regions have paid special attention to rural concerns (e.g. in the Balearic Islands and Comunidad Valenciana) – any regulatory gains have been offset by continued problems with planning enforcement. These problems are often rooted in a distinctively Spanish tradition – that of erecting buildings in the countryside without any real concern for official rules or restrictions. This tradition has worked contrary to the interests of local planning and meant that planning itself – resigned to failure – has rarely ventured beyond basic construction rules: and even these are regularly flouted. One cause of this difficulty has been poor resourcing for the planning function: a key outcome has been a lack of leadership in rural housebuilding and general development-anarchy in the rural landscape. And yet, despite these local difficulties, regional government has been more active and successful in intervening in the rural housing market. It has, for instance offered special grants to allow young people, couples or new residents to enter the housing market and subsequently remain in their homes. The programmes set by regional government have also supported dwelling improvement and repairs, ensuring that the condition of rural property reaches an acceptable standard. Though another critical issue affecting housing quality has been the lack of support infrastructure (water and electricity, or services and roads etc.) in some rural areas. The extent of disadvantage is, again, frequently dependent on geography. The remoter and less accessible rural areas suffer disproportionately in terms of poor service provision, while those closer to large urban centres tend to be better served. Programmes to improve rural living conditions are being implemented, though remoteness – and the

additional difficulties this brings – is a significant problem affecting many of Spain’s rural communities.

Managing the pressure – general housing policy

Of the three principal tiers of Spanish Administration – national, regional and local – it is the regional tier that has greatest influence in relation to housing policy, and the policy that has been developed has taken two broad directions. First, it has been concerned with permanently occupied dwellings and the industries that sustain the local population. Second, it has also been concerned – in equal measure – with that rural housing which supports an ‘urban use’; i.e. dwellings used as second homes or those seen as supporting the local tourist industry in some other way. Though these directions may seem to address different sets of needs and issues, they are perceived as complementary, both addressing the problems of depopulation and decline through the following strategies:

- 1 the modernisation of rural enterprises (including the promotion of new economic forms);
- 2 direct housing amelioration, including dealing with issues of supply (of permanent and second homes); and
- 3 infrastructure and services available to rural communities.

Of course, local and regional implementation may differ in a number of important ways: objectives, detail and timescale will all be locally specific. Some examples of such specifics are given in Table 8.2.

It is reported (for the purpose of European Union Structural Fund monitoring) that different Regions have tended to concentrate resources on different areas of action. Aragón, for instance, has used its funding to support the tourist industry, building additional youth hostels. In the Balearic Islands, emphasis has been placed on the rehabilitation of traditional architecture; a similar emphasis can be observed in Galicia (see Table 8.2) (Barreiro and Novoa, undated) In Navarra, however, funding has been used to facilitate much-needed repairs or diverted into new construction. Pais Vasco has been promoting a programme of infrastructural improvement, concentrating on water supply and electricity. Spanish rural housing policy is very much a patchwork of varying concerns and objectives.

Finally, the LEADER programme mentioned earlier has, since its inception in 1991, been a key driver in the modernisation and reactivation of economic activity in rural areas. Although the programme’s influence on rural housing concerns is indirect, its promotion of economic diversification (and support for

Table 8.2 Regional housing policy in Spain: examples

Andalucia: At a regional scale, Andalucia can be held up as an example of a region proactive in the promotion of a consistent rural housing strategy. The *Andalucian Housing Plan* has a range of specific policies for dealing with the needs of isolated dwellings, self-rehabilitation and general housing improvement (including energy efficiency gains and the use of solar power). Since the 1980s, the plan has contained policies for dealing with special categories of housing – such as ‘cave-housing’ or the traditional isolated farms comprising multi-functional buildings (‘*Cortijos*’). The programmes developed by this particular Regional Government have covered almost every aspect of the regional housing stock.

Galicia: The case of Galicia illustrates another way rural housing concerns have been addressed in Spain. The Galician administration has developed two complementary lines of housing action. The first focuses on poor condition housing located in settlements with fewer than 1,500 inhabitants, and concentrates on families with particularly low incomes. The second focuses on the issue of preserving traditional architecture, with the aim of attracting new residents and supporting the tourism sector.

Castilla and Leon: A third example of better (or at least unique) practice can be found in Castilla and Leon, the largest region in the European Union. The Region’s ‘Regional Land and Housing Plan’ is interesting in its attention to detail, cataloguing an intricate list of grants available for rural housing projects and schemes. Needs are carefully assessed by the Regional Administration which then budgets for dealing with these needs over the subsequent twelve months.

Source: Author

tourism) has brought huge improvements to the rural housing stock. Indeed, general economic strategies are likely to have as profound an impact on rural housing as any specific housing policy.

Managing the pressure – local initiatives

Local initiatives – and local solutions – remain important and many municipalities have come up with small-scale schemes to address the types of very specific, localised issues described in the last section. Some examples of such schemes are provided below.

A number of rural councils are supporting programmes for the rehabilitation, transformation and general improvement of rural housing stock as a means of curbing the process of depopulation. The UN Habitat Programme has heralded initiatives developed in Navapalos (Soria) and Valdicio (Cantabria) as examples of ‘best practice’. In Navapalos, traditional construction materials and energy-saving techniques have been combined as a means of improving housing quality. Inexpensive materials such as sun-dried bricks and alternative energy

sources (solar or wind power) increase the affordability of schemes. In Valdicio, traditional housing (which combines living space with accommodation for live-stock) has been the focus of a rehabilitation programme aiming to separate people from their animals while improving water supply and other amenities.

Elsewhere, housing co-operatives have been directly involved in house-building as a means of reducing housing costs, and therefore increasing unit affordability. Examples of this kind of activity can be found in El Burgo (Málaga) and to the south of Madrid. The schemes involve the future occupants in the construction of homes, providing them with new skills that add to the wider strategy of economic diversification.

Other local initiatives have sought to address the problem of low housing quality. Spain's *White Book of Housing* (Fundación de Estudios Inmobiliarios, 1999) has recently revealed that 20 per cent of all rural homes are considered to be 'substandard'. Problems appear specific to particular regions (such as Castilla and Leon and Andalucía) where there are a larger number of multi-functional homes or '*Cortijo*'. Special grants for dealing with this issue have been assigned to these affected regions. Some of the traditional housing is viewed as necessarily poor. For instance, in Andalucía and other Mediterranean regions (Jessen, 1955) 'cave-housing' was traditionally reserved for lower income families, even if they could provide comfortable, temperature-balanced living space when all the modern equipment is present. There are presently 35,000 units of this type all over the south-eastern regions (including Almería and Granada) and the regional administrations are actively supporting their enlargement and improvement. Other buildings (military barracks, schools and cereal warehouses) are also being converted for housing use. At the same time, modern construction techniques are being employed in the provision of new 'bio-climatic houses' (in Almería, Sevilla and Cádiz) that combine passive energy saving devices (materials, design etc.) with active technology (solar panelling) to produce lower-impact development.

Finally, some abandoned rural housing has been recovered for alternative use. Entire villages have been completely renovated (by either public or private agencies) and now form summer camps, educational tourist centres, second homes and so forth. This type of use-change has been led by the public sector (at Granadilla in Caceres province), trade unions (at Morilla de Tous in Huesca province), the regional saving banks (at Bubal in Huesca province) and some private investors (at Villalbilla in Soria province).

The point to be made here is that local initiatives have played a critical role in shaping Spain's rural housing agenda. Structural support has been provided by Europe and by the Spanish government and this has defined the larger playing field. But these local initiatives have helped channel wider resources into the most

deprived areas and ensure that money is used to tackle the most pressing and important issues facing particular communities.

Gauging success

Much of the discussion provided above has pointed to a clear dualism in the Spanish rural housing market. On the one hand, traditional housing occupied by agricultural workers, farmers and other settled rural inhabitants may fail to meet modern quality standards, while on the other, purpose-built dwellings intended to serve the tourist industry or an urban market offer a good level of comfort and amenity. The current thrust of Spanish housing policy is to ensure greater parity in housing quality across these two distinct markets irrespective of location.

This strategy is already bearing fruit. Private amenity standards (electricity, drinking water, sewerage and telephone connection) have increased considerably over the last fifteen years, with the entire country now better served in this respect (though it is acknowledged that more attention must still be paid to the needs of Spain's interior regions). Isolation is also less of a problem today than in the past, and most areas are accessible via an extensive and much-improved road system. The problem of regional disadvantage is being addressed through a corrective strategy that has sought to channel additional resources into laggard areas: this strategy has been focused on general economic advancement rather than the specifics of housing difficulties.

More general rural diversification – naturally occurring and bolstered by the LEADER programme – is making a strong contribution to the social and economic reactivation of Spain's peripheral areas, bring huge improvements to physical infrastructure (housing, services, utilities and transportation) and widespread job creation. However, land values have been driven up by these processes in many areas and there have been concerns that controls over the future development of tourist infrastructure may not be effectively enforced. This concern has been heightened by the past failures of the planning system.

Conclusions

While rural housing matters might indeed be obscured by a broader – and urban-dominated – national agenda, it is apparent from the above discussion that such matters are viewed as extremely important at the regional level. In Galicia, Andalucía, Castilla and Leon and many other areas with an abundance of small, farming communities, the issues of rural housing supply and quality have been subject to considerable attention and remedial effort. It is clear that these and

similar areas in the Spanish countryside are subject to rapid and complex change. Housing no longer simply services the needs of a population engaged in agrarian activities; rather, there are multiple markets. The reduced importance of farming within the rural economy – along with associated demographic changes – indicates that there is an increasing external demand for rural housing, among both new permanent residents and those seeking second homes. Some of the rural stock, especially traditional housing types, form part of a new tourism base within Spain's countryside.

The economic decline and depopulation of rural areas are key issues for policy-makers. These processes are of particular concern in remoter rural areas, but tend to have a lesser impact in those areas closer to larger urban centres. Housing pressure is seen to stem from the economic impacts of a reanimation of agrarian activity alongside successful economic diversification (in the agrobusiness sector and tourism). In other words, success generates pressure, drawing in new forms of economic activity and new residents. But housing access in the countryside appears to be both easier and cheaper than in nearby towns and cities, as a result of lower construction and land costs. Access is less of a problem than housing quality. A clear quality division between housing locked into the traditional agrarian sector and that serving the new tourism industry is a key feature of the rural housing market. The main theme of rural policy has been to bring about greater parity in the quality of housing in these two sectors and has focused on the provision of running water and electricity. The same divisions exist between urban and rural municipalities and policy has focused on the equalisation of services and housing standards. Much of this policy is devised and implemented at the regional level or via local initiatives.

Future problems for the rural housing stock are also anticipated, and these will stem from two main processes. First, the ageing of the rural population will mean that many homes will become unsuited to the future needs of their current occupants. Second, an increasing number of immigrants continue to pour into the intensive agricultural regions (e.g. Andalucía, Comunidad Valenciana and Cataluña) piling further pressure onto Spain's already stretched housing resources. While existing policies have met with some success, it remains to be seen whether or not they are equal to the task of dealing with future housing pressure.