

Cultural Village of Europe

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Contribution from P o r r ú a



STATE AND LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES

First of all, we want to emphasize that local municipalities are the politic institutions that are closer to the citizen, where democracy and neighbours's participation are the most important values of its organisation and functioning. The municipalities represent the lowest level of the administrative grade scale in the politic organisation of the territory and that's why they have so many problems because their competences are very reduced and their financing is an unsolved problem. In Spain, state has had historically a very centralist organisation; geographically Madrid, its capital is in the centre, in Asturias it is exactly the same thing Oviedo is just in the middle and 80 % of the population lives in its heartland. In Spain everything is very central, including the municipalities.

Porrúa with its 400 inhabitants forms with more than 50 other villages, some of them bigger and others smaller are in Llanes municipality .Llanes is the name of the capital which is also the geographic and administrative centre where more than a third of the population of the municipality lives. This explains the differences between the villages are very important and that municipal government have a very difficult task which is to give the same services to all the neighbours. In Llanes municipality there are urban villages but most of them are rural villages. These two kind of villages have very different needs and the municipal services have to be very different too.

In Spain, municipalities have many differences among themselves. For example in Castile (centre of Spain) there are more than 2000 municipalities because each village has its town council. In Asturias there are only 78 municipalities that group many villages, these municipalities are normally where there are the most inhabitants. At the same time we can find groups of municipalities in the same district merging. These are groups of municipalities that are close and have common interests, so they do activities and make services to population together. The principal reason of their merging is to share the activities of services and touristy and entrepreneurial promotions.

It is necessary to emphasize that one of the principal changes that the democratic transition has supposed for Spain in the last 30 years, has been the creation of autonomous regions. These autonomous regions group one or more provinces and have political autonomy in front of the state. They have their own parliament and develop their own legislation for the citizen within their competences. The social and cultural reality in Spain is so diverse and different between some and other regions that the territorial politic is a permanent debate between the political parties. Although Spain hasn't a federal system of polity organisation, the autonomous communities have supposed a very important political decentralization for very different territories that have even different languages.

The advantages for the citizen have been very important, today the public services like education and health are administrated by regional administrations closer to population and experts of their problems. The inconveniences of this new political organisation are that the continuous arguments between the region and the state, and the tension in the internal polity which has generated that state nationalism is now substituted by regional nationalism.

This new situation of Spain has originated that the debate of the municipal problems hasn't started yet while the central and the regional administrations are in permanent discussions. Finally all the problems focus on the financing of the public services that are rendered, and the municipalities are the true losers of this situation. Many times town councils have to accomplish repairs and services that central and regional administrations don't do, specially when those municipalities haven't got a big population and no big cities (so no political interests). The situation of infrastructures and transport and communication nets are very different in a small municipality like Llanes from those of the big city centres.

There are so many needs in the municipalities and so scarce are the budgets that it is not strange that their financial situation is in many cases almost in bankruptcy. The debt's resources are no longer available, and working with their own resources is almost an utopia.

One of the principal entrances that municipalities receive, and this is how it happens in Llanes, is the one originated by the construction policy. In Spain this is a municipal competence so the more we build the more important will be the municipal entrances, but also the more services we will have to render to people who will acquire those houses. If we add to this the fact that it is a touristy place, with a big demand of second residences for people from the big cities, we have here our big problem which is to limit housing development and edifications and to try to maintain our principal touristy attraction which is landscape and nature. Nowadays it is foreseen to edify over 5000 housings but there is no indication of a growing population.

In the villages of Llanes municipality, the new housing problems are more in the coastal zone, near the sea. Porrúa is in the inside of the municipality and its population depends more on the cattle activities than on tourism and there are not so many constructions yet. Porrúa watches cautiously how other villages near the coast have grown and their houses are empty all the year, there are only people during the summer. Those villages became lifeless the rest of the year.

How could we harmonize the urban growing of Llanes villages without harming their identity and the neighbours coexistence? This is the big challenge to resolve in the future. There is no doubt that tourism creates bigger opportunities and lets young people think that they can stay and live in the villages, but it also means that we have to face new problems and services demands to the municipality.

Local culture also suffers these problems derived from the touristy situation, it is difficult to find collaboration of people who only come temporally to participate and organize cultural events. Cultural values are often so different that it is more and more difficult to maintain participation in the cultural local traditions. Perhaps for this reason in Porrúa we think that it is very important to safeguard our identity and our cultural traditions from this new culture of touristy attraction. The solution to this possible lost of identity of the local values is to integrate tourists and visitors in the village activities, this is the great work that our cultural association LLACIN is carrying out in Porrúa. When there is a strong organisation that combines the participation of all the neighbours and attracts visitors who respect this culture, this is when we can strengthen our culture.

Life in villages demands a strong commitment face to the urban culture values that are imposed to us. Only the opinion and the participation of the neighbours doing their own cultural activities can face the threat of the global culture. Town councils as the political organisation closer to the citizen must accomplish the role of safeguard the culture, the interests and the identities of their villages. Their principal commitment has to be democracy and neighbour's participation. The fact that our citizen become culture consumers has to be avoid, they must go on being main characters of all the activities that are realized. This the principal challenge for the future.