

INSIGHTS INTO THE NEW GEOGRAPHY OF CATALONIA



SOCIETAT CATALANA DE GEOGRAFIA
INSTITUT D'ESTUDIS CATALANS

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Segre River at Coll de Nargó

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SETEMBRE
2023

GEOGRAPHY
FOR OUR COMMON FUTURE

GEOGRAFIA
PER AL NOSTRE FUTUR COMÚ

GEOGRAFÍA
PARA NUESTRO FUTURO COMÚN

LA GÉOGRAPHIE
AU SERVICE DE NOTRE AVENIR COMMUN



Foreword

The book you are holding in your hands has been published to mark the occasion of the 9th EUGEO Congress, convened under the slogan of “Geography for our common future”: a future, which seen from the perspective afforded by the present day, will see us battling with the challenges posed by the climate emergency, the spread of disinformation, the polarisation of societies and a general democratic backsliding. Geography, as a social science that concerns itself with the interaction between societies and their physical environment, cannot remain on the sidelines of these issues. It must contribute to building the knowledge that might mitigate and reverse these trends that forewarn of a bleak future.

The Catalan Society of Geography (SCG) is aware of this pressing need and seeks to take advantage of the 9th EUGEO Congress to showcase Geography to the broader Catalan society, and Catalan Geography to the rest of European Geography. In this globalised world that has consecrated the English language as the only one in which the sciences – and I include here the social sciences – can advance, minoritised languages of stateless nations must take advantage of extraordinary events to make themselves heard. This EUGEO congress represents such an opportunity.

This book provides a non-Catalan-speaking public with some insights into the latest work of the SCG, namely *L'esguard de la SCG (1935–2020)* [*A Look Back at the History of the SCG*] and *La nova geografia de la Catalunya postcovid* [*The New Geography of Post-COVID Catalonia*], both published in 2021. The first chapter, specially written for this book, summarises key moments in the history of our learned Society by drawing on the research reported in the first of these two books. The second chapter constitutes the Introduction to the second book, but has been updated accordingly. The third chapter again is based on the content of the second book and was written to mark the 2022 Centennial Congress of the International Geographical Union (IGU). The fourth chapter includes a selection of the maps used to illustrate *La nova geografia de la Catalunya postcovid*. The fifth chapter undertakes a state-of-the-art report on university geography in the Catalan language domain. The book concludes with an epilogue specially written to mark the occasion of the 9th EUGEO Congress.

Rafael Giménez-Capdevila
President of the Catalan Society of Geography

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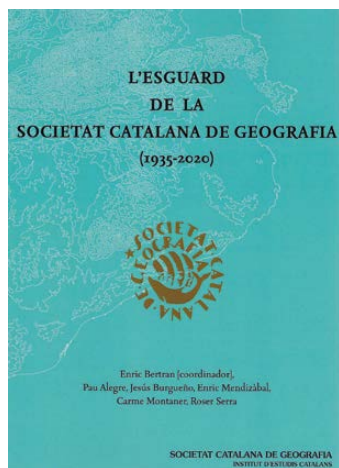
THE CATALAN SOCIETY OF GEOGRAPHY: FROM TIMES OF TURBULENCE TO CONSOLIDATION



The Catalan Society of Geography: From Times of Turbulence to Consolidation

Enric Bertran González

This chapter presents a summary of *L'esguard de la Societat Catalana de Geografia* (1935–2020) [*A Look Back at the History of the Catalan Society of Geography*], a book that examines and retells the history of this learned geographical society — a history marked by the political vicissitudes experienced from its foundation down to the present day — and which charts the evolution of Geography as a science over those years. In so doing, the book offers an exhaustive analysis of the geographical themes addressed in the activities organised by the Catalan Society of Geography (SCG),



enabling us to appreciate the influence of shifting geographical paradigms and the interdisciplinary vision that has guided the practice of Geography within the Society. What emerges from this historical reflection is that, in the intervening decades, the SCG has been, and continues to be, both a meeting place and a

place for debate and the dissemination of the ideas of all those who have the territory of Catalonia as their field of study.¹

Times of Inception

The Catalan Society of Geography is a subsidiary society of the Institute of Catalan Studies (IEC) and, today, is affiliated to the IEC's Section of Philosophy and Social Sciences (SFCS). This means that, while an autonomous entity in its own right, it forms part of the academic and organisational structure of the IEC. The SCG was founded on 20 May 1935, the date on which the articles of association were drawn up at a meeting of the Governing Council, in the presence of its twenty-seven founding members. At this first meeting, the statutes of the new Society were approved by the Full IEC Assembly and the SCG was formally registered at the offices of the General Government of Catalonia, in accordance with the Law of Associations prevailing during the Second Spanish Republic.

The first lecture delivered from the Society's tribune was given by its first president, Pau Vila i Dinarès. Its title could not be more explicit: "What has been done

1. *L'esguard de la Societat Catalana de Geografia* (1935–2020), published in 2021, is the fruit of a research project promoted by the Institute of Catalan Studies (IEC), undertaken between 2018 and 2020. It was carried out by Pau Alegre, Enric Bertran (co-ordinator), Jesús Burgueño, Enric Mendizábal, Carme Montaner and Roser Serra.

in Geography in Catalonia from the earliest times to the present day”. In his talk, Vila was at pains to stress that Geography in Catalonia already boasted a long history. Here, my intention is not to provide a summary of the history of Catalan geography, but rather to identify the most immediate precedents of the foundation of the SCG to show that the Society did not emerge from nothing.

To do so, we need to be aware of the presence of various founding members of the SCG, and that of other original fellows, in institutions of the day dedicated to Geography and to have an understanding of their activities. The oldest was the ephemeral Geographical Society of Barcelona (1895–1897), with clear ties to Eduard Fontserè, the father of Catalan meteorology and a key figure in the eventual foundation of the SCG. Later, we find the Society of Commercial Geography of Barcelona, which enjoyed a longer existence (1909–1927), during which time it organised the II Spanish Congress of Commercial and Mercantile Geography (1913). Again Fontserè was active here along with the historian Carreras Candi, who oversaw the publication of a *Geografia General de Catalunya* (1908–1918) [*General Geography of Catalonia*] in six volumes, and the engineers Josep M. de Rivera and Manuel Ferrer de Franganillo, successive directors of the Geographical Service of Catalonia, responsible for publishing the *Mapa Geogràfic de Catalunya* [*Geographical Map of Catalonia*] 1:100,000 (1922).

Another key place where Geography in Catalonia was being conducted was the *Escola d'Alts Estudis Comercials*, affiliated to the *Escola del Treball* (two schools dedicated to ensuring Catalonia had a qualified workforce). The *Escola* was promoted by the *Mancomunitat* [*Commonwealth*] of Catalonia — an auto-

nomous deliberative assembly representing Catalonia's four provinces — that promoted Geography as an instrument of the movement known as *Noucentisme* and which was to dominate the cultural and political panorama of the early 20th century. In this *Escola* and until his untimely death, Geography was taught by Joan Palau Vera, and later by his replacement Pau Vila, who was called to become a key figure in the advancement of geographical science in Catalonia. Also at this time, Geography was being carried out in the homonymous section of the part-cultural, part-rambling club, the *Centre Excursionista de Catalunya* (CEC), whose members included Fontserè, Faura i Sans, Josep R. Bataller, Jaume Marcet, Carreras Candi, Gonçal de Reparaz Ruiz, Josep Iglésies, Solé Sabarís... and whose president was none other than Pau Vila.

By way of these individuals and institutions, the influence of the French regional school began to permeate its way into Catalonia. Initial contact was established by Ferrer de Franganillo, on visiting the *Institut de Géographie* at the Sorbonne in 1921, where he met leading figures in this geographical school, including Lucien Gallois, Jean Brunhes, Emmanuel de Martonne and Albert Demangeon. A second wave of influence arrived by way of the teacher and pedagogue, Miquel Santaló, and the relationship he forged with Spanish geographer Ricardo Beltrán y Rózpide and, in all likelihood, with Dantín Cereceda, disseminators of the French methodology in Spain. However, the third wave was to prove the most critical: in 1923, Pau Vila, with a scholarship from the *Mancomunitat*, went to the *Institut de Géographie Alpine* in Grenoble, where he met Raoul Blanchard, one of the leading disciples of Vidal de La Blache and whom Vila would later recognise as having been his great influence and master (Oliveras, 2020).

Pau Vila (1881-1980), first president of the SCG, circa 1920



Pau Vila was very much the geographer of the moment: he echoed the humanist approach of the themes addressed in the French regional monographs (Vila, 1922); he oversaw the Spanish translation of the *Géographie Universelle* written by Paul Vidal de La Blache and Lucien Gallois; he wrote the monographic study

of the *comarca* (county or traditional Catalan administrative division) of *La Cerdanya* (1926); taught courses at the CEC; and invited Raoul Blanchard to speak on the human geography of the mountain regions at the Monographic Courses organised by the *Mancomunitat* of Catalonia, Daniel Faucher to lecture at the *Escola Normal de la Generalitat*, a teacher training college where Vila was a senior Geography teacher, and Henri Gaussen and Max Sorre, among others, to talk to the CEC during his presidency of the club. The relationship with the French regional school is marked by other milestones, involving members of the future SCG, including Gonçal de Reparaz, who spent time at the Sorbonne as a visiting research student, organised by the Geography Section of the CEC.

However, it is worth pointing out that Catalan geographers were not immune to other schools of geographical thought of the day: Solé Sabarís acted as a guide to the English geographer E. H. G. Dobby on his visit to Catalonia; Gonçal de Reparaz translated Norbert Krebs' *Geografía humana* into Spanish for the *Labor* publishing house (1931), as part of the dissemination of the ideas of the German school; and Jaume Marcet, Miquel Santaló and Pau Vila were present at the main international geography conferences of the decade: Paris (1931), Warsaw (1934) and Amsterdam (1938).

Against this backdrop, Puig i Cadafalch went off in search of Pau Vila. The *Modernista* architect and art historian, Josep Puig i Cadafalch, who had been president of the *Mancomunitat* of Catalonia (1917–1924), was, in the early 1930s, rotating president of the Catalan Institute of Studies, of which he was also a founding member. The Institute sought to attract the scientific elite of the Catalan-speaking world and, in

this way, to advance research and the dissemination of knowledge in all areas of Catalan culture. Pau Vila, who Puig knew from his time with the *Mancomunitat*, his work in promoting Catalan University Studies and his role in the CEC, was the man chosen to promote a new learned Geography society under the auspices of the IEC, which was keen to expand its field of action.

In the first document outlining a possible roadmap for the future foundation of the SCG, Eduard Fontserè, member of the Section of Sciences² of the IEC and vice-president of the CEC, at a CEC council meeting chaired by Pau Vila, talks about Geography as a research science open to everyone, as a valid field of study for university education (with the mention of specific subjects) and of popular dissemination to interested schools, and as a public service responsible for drawing the map of Catalonia. It is clear that Vila was aware of this document and that he adopted it as his own, since he signed another almost identical version that was later presented to the *Generalitat*, the government of Catalonia.

The makeup of the first Governing Council of the SCG, albeit provisional, clearly indicates that the Geography Section of the CEC served very much as its seedbed, with all the posts being taken by members of the Catalan rambling club: Pau Vila, president; Pere Blasi, vice-president and director of publications; Josep Iglésies, secretary; Enric Ribas, treasurer; Lluís Solé Sabarís, vice-secretary and accountant, and Eduard Fontserè, IEC delegate. The Council sent out a letter of invitation to everyone interested in advancing

geography in Catalonia within the scientific domain to which it belongs and in which it enjoyed recognition in other countries.

The very open nature of this invitation meant that the membership of the SCG presented a high degree of intellectual diversity from the outset. Thus, among the founding members alone, we find professors of the natural sciences and geology, engineers and physicists, cartographers, journalists and historians, architects and lawyers engaged in political activity and in historiography, linguists and teachers, teachers of commerce and workers from private firms, and even one or two autodidacts.³ To all of these labels, we need to add that of geographer, because each of them brought to Geography the specific perspective afforded by their own specific personal education and training.

It might surprise the reader that no reference has been made in the above process to the University. Yet, during the early decades of the 20th century, Geography in Catalonia was estranged from its University on both political and scientific grounds: Eduardo Pérez Agudo, full professor of Geography for decades at the University of Barcelona — Geography being limited in those years to just two subjects in the degree in Philosophy and the Arts — was opposed to teaching in Catalan and to steps to transform the University of Barcelona into an autonomous seat of learning. The scientific nature of the Geography taught there was also called into question, being conceived as a tool at the service of History and because of its heavy emphasis on rote learning. Having said that, however,

2. The SCG was initially affiliated to this Section, until that is, in 1968, when the SFCS was created and its affiliation was switched.

3. The complete list of the 27 founding members can be consulted at *ObradorObert* (<https://scg.iec.cat/Scg6/Scg63/S631935.htm>), with links to the brief biographies of each.

the presence of several university professors among the founding members of the SCG, including Joan Coromines, Marià Faura, Eduard Fontserè and Jaume Marcet, cannot be ignored.

The SCG was conceived, therefore, outside the walls and lecture halls of the University, like the *Société de Géographie*, in Paris, and the Royal Geographical Society, in London, before it, albeit some hundred years later. The Society, however, would never command anything like the financial resources of these two institutions, capable of financing expeditions around the world. While the latter enjoyed the support of the State in sponsoring their activities of colonial discovery and exploitation, the SCG has only ever known the support of an autonomous regional government, that of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia. Thus, it is in this political and economic context, that a knowledge and understanding of its own regional territory became the primary objective of SCG initiatives.

The activities of the SCG following its inception adhered closely to the roadmap drawn up by Fontserè i Vila (for a full report, see Bertran, 2021, pp. 253–314). Lectures were organised and pamphlets on toponymy were published, but all of its projects came to a shuddering halt with the military uprising of July 1936 and the outbreak the civil war. Plans had been in place to host a group of French geographers, led by Emmanuel de Martonne, director of the *Institut de Géographie* at the University of Paris, to publish studies of the geography of Catalonia and a yearbook including all the lectures delivered from the tribune of the SCG, and to draw up a syllabus for a degree in Geography, based on similar syllabuses being taught in countries such as France, England and Germany (cf. Mendizàbal *et al.*, 2022; Solé Sabarís, 1985). But,

in 1936, the SCG was mired in institutional paralysis and could do no more.

Times of Resistance

The triumph of the rebels in the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and the imposition of the fascist dictatorship had almost fatal consequences for the Catalan Society of Geography, given that the IEC had been as good as shut down, cut off from all its financial resources and outlawed from its premises in Barcelona's old town, in what had been the Hospital of Santa Creu, on *carrer del Carme*. To fill the gap, a number of provincial institutions were set up (*Instituto de Estudios Ilerdenses*, *Instituto de Estudios Gerundenses* and *Instituto de Estudios Tarraconenses*) in Lleida, Girona and Tarragona, respectively, and in Barcelona the delegation of the *Instituto Juan Sebastián Elcano* (IJSE) was established, affiliated to the Spanish National Research Council (*Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas* or CSIC).

The Institute of Catalan Studies, however, proved to be especially resilient, despite the hostile political atmosphere that reigned, bereft of any money and with many of its members dead or living abroad. In 1942, on returning from a brief exile, Puig i Cadafalch, as president of the Historical-Archaeological Section, summoned to his home those members of the Institute that had survived the conflict and not fled abroad (deemed, nevertheless, to be there in spirit). Among the few that showed up was Eduard Fontserè, in representation of the Science Section and on which the SCG depended. In this and other clandestine meetings, two new subsidiary societies were founded,

while those created before the war were reactivated, including the SCG, with more or less immediate and long-lasting results.

With the help of a restructuring commission formed by Eduard Fontserè, who acted as the Institute's delegate (a role he would play until 1969), and the former secretary, Josep Iglésies, who was also his son-in-law, the SCG was slowly revived. They were soon joined by Pere Blasi, vice-president before the war, and the priest, *mossèn* Ramon Bataller, founding member of the SCG and secretary of the Science Section. The first lecture on the resuming of business was delivered by Fontserè on 22 December 1947: "The *tramuntana* and *mestral* winds in Catalonia". Yet, the social landscape was still far from propitious for its work: the SCG operated covertly and, excluding the numerous expatriate fellows, including Pau and Marc-Aureli Vila, Gonçal de Reparaz, Joan Coromines and Miquel Santaló, only about thirty members remained who were not yet ready to resume their work.

Although no formal relations existed between the SCG and the three Barcelona groups of those years dedicated to geographical studies, there is evidence of the participation of members of the SCG, including Salvador Llobet, Josep M. Puchades, Lluís Solé Sabarís, Joaquina Comas, Maria de Bolòs and Joan Vilà-Valentí, in the *Cercle de geògrafs* (Circle of Geographers), led by Pierre Deffontaines at the *Institut Français* in Barcelona. Solé Sabarís and Llobet, on the other hand, would successively preside over the IJSE, located on *carrer de les Egipcíaques* in Barcelona, just across the way from the building that the IEC had been expelled from. And many members from this early period continued to be members of the Geography and Natural Sciences Section of the CEC.

This overlapping of memberships ensured relations between the SCG and these three institutions were on a good footing.

The covert conditions in which it was forced to work and the economic hardships it had to face gave the SCG no other option than to accept the impossibility of conducting its own research and so it settled for disseminating studies developed elsewhere or by scholars working alone. Under the dictatorship, research in Geography in the 1940s was the exclusive concern of the IJSE, aided, of course, by geographers linked to the SCG. Research would later be further promoted in the

Josep Iglésies (1902-1986), circa 1964



Faculty of Philosophy and the Arts, with the creation in 1966 of the Department of Geography on the initiative of Joan Vilà-Valentí. Prior to that, between 1940 and 1965, any relationship with Geography as taught at the University of Barcelona was non-existent: the tenured professors, including Pérez Agudo and, later, Luis García Sainz, had no interest in the academic, associative initiatives of the city and the country.

Under the presidencies of *mossèn* Josep Ramon Bataller (1948–1954) and Josep de Calassanç Serra Ràfols (1954–1970), the SCG concentrated its activities in lectures, prizes and publications. In these years of what bordered on underground activity, the SCG was forced, at first, to hold its meetings at the home of Josep Iglésies or some other private address, and, after 1961, at the seat of *Òmnium Cultural*, a cultural association, in the Palau Dalmaes on *carrer* Montcada in Barcelona. The political and cultural repression that was still raging in Catalonia during the 1960s, and which saw the police shut down the headquarters of this association, did not prevent the SCG from holding almost monthly meetings. Records show that 161 lectures were delivered in this period, that is, an average of eight in each academic year.

A third of these lectures were given by the SCG's most active members: Josep Iglésies (17 papers), Serra Ràfols (16), Solé Sabarís (7), Pau Vila (7) and Francesc Gurri (6). They were followed by Oriol de Bolòs and Joan Vilà-Valentí, Maria de Bolòs, *mossèn* Bataller, and Pere Català-Roca, offering an extensive list with a rich thematic diversity that highlights the vitality of the SCG, despite the obstacles faced. At these meetings, both local and regional research was disseminated by university professors and lecturers, but also by scholars, experts and cultural activists interested in

Geography and other disciplines, taking care to maintain an academic rigour that went beyond simplistic accounts rooted in folklore. The speakers were primarily residents of Catalonia, with a very small presence of speakers from other Catalan-speaking territories and none from beyond these borders. The lectures are the subject of a detailed analysis carried out by Pau Alegre who classifies them thematically according to whether they constituted regional monographs or discussed Catalan territory and society, physical geography, urban or local geography, prehistory or history, toponymy and toponomastics, in territories outside Catalonia (cf. Bertran, 2021, p. 61–118).

Among all these lectures, it is worth highlighting the eighteen that made up the series “Lleida forms an integral part of Catalonia as strictly defined”, given in the 1966–67 academic year, at the headquarters of CSIC. This was a joint enterprise involving the SCG and the *Centre Lleidatà* in Barcelona and centred on the decision of the Ministry of National Education to segregate the province of Lleida from Catalonia and to incorporate it within the *Región del Ebro* in high school geography books, a ruling that, fortunately, would later not be enforced. The texts of the talks were published some time later (AADD, 1971); however, the front matter of the book, in the same way as the initial call for papers, makes no mention of the role played by the SCG.

The rest of the SCG's activities in this period were concentrated on the Eduard Brossa Prize for toponymic studies and the publication of various geographical works. The prize, endowed with a thousand pesetas (taken, more often than not, straight from Josep Iglésies' wallet), was awarded annually between 1953 and 1976 (for a list of winners, see Bertran, 2021, p.

119). A couple of these toponymic studies, as well as the texts of two of the papers delivered at the inaugural sessions of the academic year — those delivered by Eduard Fontserè and Oriol de Bolòs, on seismicity in Catalonia and its vegetation zones, respectively — were published by the SCG and later reissued in no. 25 of the Society's journal, *Treballs de la SCG*. Most of the Eduard Brossa Prize winners, therefore, remained unpublished at the time, due to budgetary restrictions. Only two studies of historical demography written by Josep Iglésies saw light of day, being published privately by the author.

In this overview of the period, what is evidently missing is any mention of the support from the university geography departments for a programme of activities that aligned with the national and international development of the discipline. Especially notable by its absence is the lack of any explicit references to the publication of the work, *Geografia de Catalunya* (1958–74) [*Geography of Catalonia*], edited by Lluís Solé Sabarís and published by AEDOS. Several of the authors of these three volumes lectured at the SCG, their papers subsequently being exploited in a variety of ways. Solé Sabarís himself delivered lectures on more than one occasion, but must not have considered it opportune to present his *Geografia* to the Society.

This period of political and cultural resistance terminated with the virtual paralysis of the SCG. Between 1969 and 1970, the Society was even at risk of disappearing altogether, owing essentially to the adverse personal circumstances faced by certain members of the Governing Council who had been in office for a long time (in particular, the deaths of the SCG president, Serra Ràfols, and the IEC delegate, Eduard Fontserè) and to the successive states of emergency decreed by

Franco to deal with the social instability of the day. As such, expectations for the 1970–71 academic year were far from optimistic. And yet, for the new generation of university geographers, it was clear that the Governing Council needed to be overhauled in order to redress the situation and a programme of activities needed to be designed that reflected the new methodological approaches being developed in Geography.

Times of Normalisation

The Institute of Catalan Studies quickly filled the void left by Fontserè by appointing Pau Vila — who had been a numerary member of the IEC since 1968 — as the new delegate to the Governing Council of the SCG, in the autumn of 1970. Vila did not take long to set up a new Council, elected unanimously at the General Assembly of Members on December 10 of that year: Josep Iglésies, president; Enric Lluch, vice president; Carles Alabart, secretary; Lluís Casassas, treasurer; and Jordi Borja, voting member (replaced after a few months by Maria de Bolòs). Thus, four geographers straight from the university took up office with two longstanding SCG members, Vila and Iglésies. Indeed 1970 has rightly been identified as the year in which the Society might be said to have been re-founded, with university professors taking their seats on the Governing Council of the SCG.

The period covered in this section (1970–1992) were years of change in world Geography. Moreover, in Catalonia and Spain, the first decade coincided with the death of the dictator Franco and the transition to democracy and the decentralisation of political life. Precisely because of the innovations that Geography

in Catalonia underwent in this period – due essentially to influences from abroad, and because the previous political obstacles we speak of the idea of *normalisation* in their analysis of this stage in the history of the SCG. A symbolic milestone in this *normalisation* was the recovery of the IEC's former premises in the Hospital de la Santa Creu and, as a result, the transfer of the SCG's lectures to the *Casa de Convalescència* of this hospital. From an epistemological point of view, in little more than twenty years, other ways of doing Geography in Catalonia were added to that of regional possibilism, with the incorporation, among others, of theoretical-quantitative, radical, and humanistic approaches. These new geographies would all find a home in the SCG, through the active role played by the lecturers at Catalonia's universities, which were undergoing far-reaching changes with the creation of the first Geography departments.

In addition to the presidency of Iglésies (1970–73), during this period there were to be three more presidential mandates, each overseen by a university professor: Lluís Solé i Sabarís (1973–81), Salvador Llobet (1981–85) and Lluís Casassas (1985–91). The IEC delegates in these years were Pau Vila (1970–80), who was also made honorary president of the SCG, Josep Iglésies (1981–86) and Marc-Aureli Vila (1989–2001). During the first of these three mandates, the SCG was recast as a scientific institution not only for discovering the country but now, and above all, for the analysis and discussion of everything that impacted the territory. This shift is attributable to the increasing presence of young university geographers — most notably, Carles Carreras, Josep Oliveras, Maria Sala, Josep M. Panareda and Lluís Riudor — who also took on managerial tasks alongside the members mentioned above.

Lluís Casassas (1922-1992), circa 1950



The renewed drive was quickly reflected in the organisation of monthly meetings throughout the academic year centred around a given theme, specialised courses and seminars, and field trips around Catalonia. Later, the SCG would consolidate relations with other geographical societies and begin its publishing work with much greater regularity. Finally, the Society took to the organisation of local conferences, international meetings and, above all, the First Catalan Congress of Geography. Among the conferences, mention should be made to those dedicated, in the 1973–74 academic year, to the *Atles Temàtic de Catalunya* [*Thematic Atlas of Catalonia*], those in the 1975–76 year to *El pensament geogràfic a Catalunya* [*Geographical thought in Catalonia*], in 1986–87 to *La Geografia catalana i els corrents actuals de la Geografia* [*Catalan Geography and current trends in Geography*], in 1987–88 to *L'anàlisi*

comparativa de l'organització de l'espai urbà [The comparative analysis of the organisation of urban space] and, in 1989–90, *La diversitat dels paisatges, dels emplaçaments i de les activitats econòmiques* [The diversity of economic landscapes, locations and activities]. While in 1973 lectures by foreign professors from the Society's tribune began with a paper read by Jean Tricart. Many others would follow (including Milton Santos, Georges Bertrand and Paul Claval), when subsidies from the *Generalitat* were once again made available via the *Comissió Interdepartamental de Recerca i Innovació Tecnològica* CIRIT (Interdepartmental Commission for Research and Technological Innovation).

These lectures, despite the existence of a common thread, combined too with courses and seminars, were remarkably diverse in content, with a progressive variety of invited speakers — albeit that the Society was still some way from achieving parity of the sexes (Bertran, 2021, p. 186) — and with an increasing presence of local and also foreign university teachers (Moshe Inbar, Gary McDonogh, Jeanne Fagnani and Anne Buttimer, to name only a few), thanks to the international relations forged by Council members such as Maria Sala, Carles Carreras, Roser Majoral and Maria Dolores Garcia Ramon (Bertran, 2021, p. 150 and 154). Having said that, logically, the specific disciplines of the history of geography, economic geography, regional planning, cartography and urban geography continued to dominate with more than thirty sessions each. What stands out in the list of lecturers, however, is the consolidation of the presence of young Catalan university geographers alongside those of the old-school, together with researchers from related disciplines and the appearance of key figures in the field from abroad. Indeed, in this period, we can speak of the internatio-

nalisation of the SCG which, without ceasing to be a place for the discussion and dissemination of the geography reported in Catalonia, was gradually opening up to the world.

Field trips were also consolidated as one of the main activities of the SCG, to the point that they became one of the Society's defining features. They were conceived and implemented with the aim of exploring Catalonia's rich geographical diversity, physical and human, as well as social and economic. The Society went to great lengths to invite experts — be they university lecturers or local scholars — in the particular features and themes associated with each destination. The field trip leaders accompanied members on many different itineraries and participated in round table discussions of local problems, in close collaboration with local research groups and, often, with the financial support of local institutions. The first field trips — to Girona and Manresa — were organised in 1973. Many others followed, covering most of the Catalan territory (Bertran, 2021, p. 308-314). Here, we shall highlight just one: to Cerdanya, at the beginning of June 1976, to mark the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Pau Vila's monographic study of this cross-border *comarca*.

The second key element in this so-called process of *normalisation* was the SCG's publishing work, one of the activities that had been paralysed by the outbreak of war and which was inconceivable during the years of dictatorship due to the many different political and cultural challenges and vicissitudes, not to mention budgetary limitations. The Society's longstanding aspirations in this regard were aptly captured in a frequently cited claim made by Solé Sabarís: “a society that does not publish is a dead society”. The first works

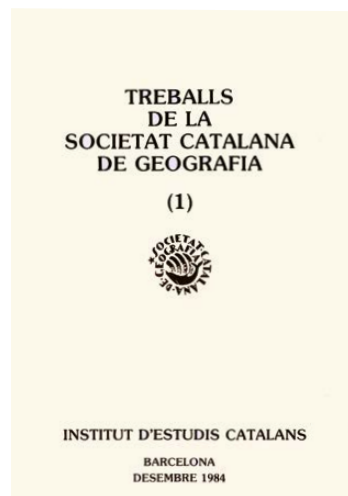
to be published in this period were *Miscell·lània Pau Vila* [*Collected Works of Pau Vila*] (1975), by Josep M. Puchades' publishing house *Montblanc-Martín*, and *Geografia dels Països Catalans* [*Geography of the Catalan Countries*] (1978) by Pierre Deffontaines, a co-edition with *Ariel*. Puchades was also responsible for the patronage and direction, together with an editorial board appointed by the SCG, of the *Revista Catalana de Geografia* (RCG) [*Catalan Journal of Geography*], of which eighteen issues were published in eight volumes, between 1978 and 1982.

In June 1984, the first issue of the journal, *Treballs de la Societat Catalana de Geografia*, was published, with financial support initially from IEC and, later, from the *Diputació de Barcelona*. From the outset, the Society's journal published a good number of the lectures given to its members, research articles by geographers, including those written by the Society's members, reports of SCG events and field trips, gradually establishing itself as a key reference for the 20th century geography of Catalonia. By 1992, with Lluís Casassas as editor, a total of 34 issues had been published, with contributions from leading figures in the field and covering a wide variety of themes.

A third aspect of this process of *normalisation* was the organisation of international meetings. The first to be held was the III Plenary Session of the Permanent International Working Group on the Geography of Textiles in 1985. This event owed much to the personal relationship between the then president of the SCG, Lluís Casassas, and the Polish geographer Ludwik

Straszewicz.⁴ Subsequent actions in this field included the role played by Casassas as a local organiser of the International Commission on Changes in Trade, of the International Geographical Union in 1986 (Casassas and Metton, 1986)⁵. Both events helped open the SCG up to the new currents emerging at that time in Geography.

This desire to reach a broader public led the SCG to participate in the Week of Urban Studies (Lleida), in the Catalan-Magyar Colloquium on regional and urban planning and in the Regional Conference of the International Geographical Union (Barcelona), and, most significantly, in April 1989, to organise the JRCEI or the Conference on the Regionalisation of Catalonia and Intermediary Entities (Casassas, 1990). These events brought together geographers and professionals from other disciplines with overlapping interests from both the University and Government at home and abroad. These meetings served to highlight both the consolidation of a university Geography, which now echoed geographical paradigms from around the world, and the professional activity of geographers holding technical posts in



4. The papers presented at this meeting and reviews of the different events held can be consulted in *Treballs de la SCG*, nº 3, 4 and 5 (<https://scg.iec.cat/Scg8/Scg81/S819.htm>).

5. The papers presented were edited in mimeo format by Lluís Casassas and Alain Metton, at the request of the SCG, and can be consulted in the SCG's bulletin, *Obrador Obert* (<https://scg.iec.cat/Scg82/S821987a.htm>)

Government and within interdisciplinary teams. After the resounding success of the JRCEI, the time was right to convene the SCG's own congress — at least this is how it seemed to Lluís Casassas — who put these ideas in writing in a letter of invitation to all of Catalonia's geo- graphers (reproduced in Bertran, 2021, p. 160).

The First Catalan Congress of Geography, held from 11 to 15 March 1991, called on the geographers of Catalonia to take stock of the current state of Geography (Casassas, 1991). It was structured around nine separate talks, plus an inaugural paper, addressing new themes (Joan Vilà-Valentí, Jordi Borja, Vicenç M. Rosselló, Anna M. Cabré, Bartomeu Barceló, Miquel de Moragas, Juli Esteban, Josep M. Carreras and Pilar Benejam) delivered, somewhat uniquely, at nine dif-

ferent locations around Catalonia. Back in Barcelona, the Council invited three plenary speakers (Nicolàs Ortega, Paul Claval and Peter Gould), and organised a total of 24 presentations and 68 papers. The Congress had the support of a Scientific Advisory Council with representatives from almost all the schools and centres dedicated to geographical research in the Catalan-speaking territories. The title of the inaugural paper, "The continuity of Catalan geography", delivered by Lluís Casassas, captured the spirit of the address given by Pau Vila on founding the SCG in 1935.

Many of the papers were read by their authors in sessions moderated by a speaker who first provided a presentation of the theme under discussion: geographical thinking, regional planning, communications and transport, the pedagogy of Geography, the

Organizing committee of the First Catalan Geography Congress, 1991, at the headquarters of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans in Barcelona.



urbanisation of the territory, population and settlement, agriculture and industry, tourism and tertiary activities, cities and the metropolitan reality, ecology and natural resources, cartography, the State of Spain's Autonomies and the construction of Europe.

The First Catalan Congress of Geography had a significant impact: first, in terms of the public recognition expressed by many in the world of Geography and related disciplines for the event and, in particular, the respect garnered by Lluís Casassas, widely considered the driving force behind the congress; second, in terms of the role played by the SCG as a meeting place for all the geographers of Catalonia, united from an interdisciplinary perspective that embraced a range of theoretical approaches; and third, in terms of the dissemination of the annals of the congress to all Catalan and Spanish university libraries, numerous schools and among all its participants. However, the Congress left the SCG in dire financial straits and, just one year after the congress, Lluís Casassas was to die before his time. The moment called for all members to put their shoulders to the wheel.

Times of Maturity

Over the last three decades, thanks to the concerted efforts of successive Governing Councils, the SCG has become an increasingly mature, active and open society. Under the presidencies of Vicenç Biete (1992–2000), Maria Dolors Garcia Ramon (2000–2006), Francesc Nadal (2006–2012) and Josep Oliveras (2012–2021), its work has grown and diversified,

despite the challenges posed by the economic and health crises of the last decade. Modest support has been provided to research, and the SCG has carved out a presence in the digital world. Its finances have been put on a solid footing, underpinned by a current membership of half a thousand, among whom we find an increasing number of women, and the Society can count on the backing of the IEC and the *Diputació* of Barcelona (the provincial deputation). The institutional relationship forged with the Institute of Catalan Studies — fundamental in the continuing survival of the SCG — has been guaranteed by the three members of the SFCS who have successively served as IEC delegates: Marc-Aureli Vila (until 2001), Joan Vilà-Valentí (2002–2017) and Oriol Nel·lo (since 2017).

A brief look at the SCG's monthly lectures indicates that the traditional thematic thread linking each academic year has gradually been abandoned in favour of diversity.⁶ Indeed, the analysis conducted by Jesús Burgueño and Roser Serra highlights the marked influence in this respect of the four respective presidencies and Councils in the choice of topics to be addressed. Thus, during the 1990s, geopolitical issues predominated, reflecting the shift that was being experienced globally in international relations. In this decade, speakers included Mechtild Rössler, John Naylor, György Enyedi, Jean Bisson and Gita Kewalramani, alongside a host of local Spanish and Catalan experts. In the first years of the present century, the Society's first female president, Maria Dolors Garcia Ramon, contributed to the uptake of epistemological innovations and the incorporation of a gender perspective. Indeed the number of female guest speakers

6. Many of the lectures delivered after 2000 have been published in *Treballs de la SCG* and are listed in the *Obrador Obert* (<https://seg.iec.cat/Seg9/Seg90/S90a.htm>).

from abroad was greater than in any other mandate. The list, while far from complete, saw Jacqueline Bonnamour, Doreen Massey, Janice Monk, Dina Vaiou and Nina Berg, among others, take to the floor of the SCG.

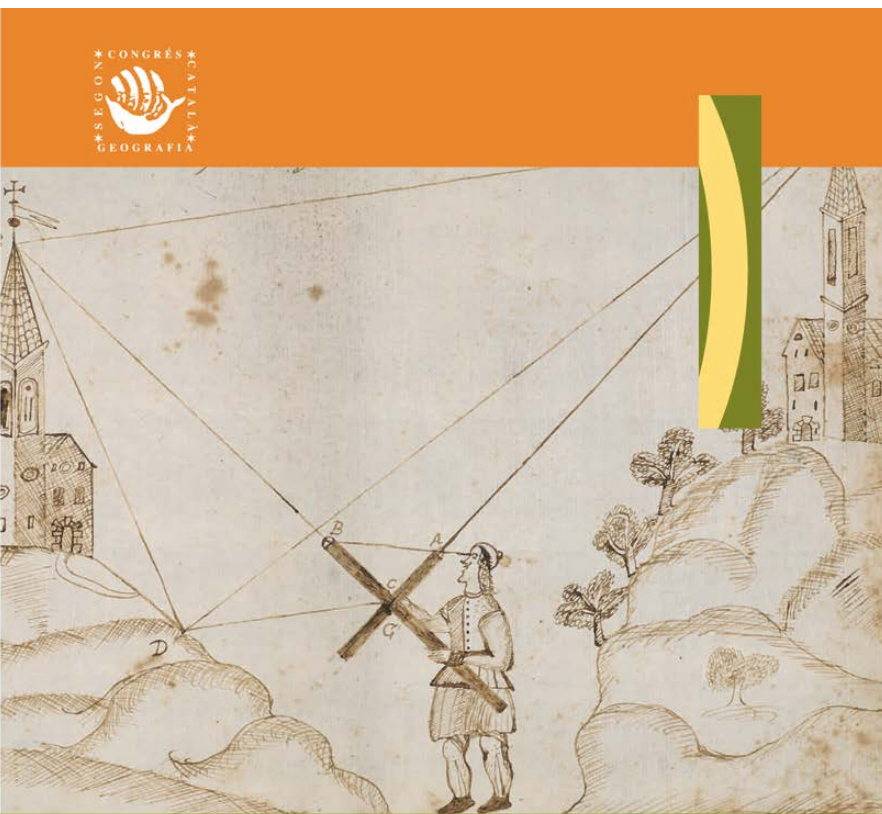
During the presidency of Francesc Nadal, the number of conferences held reached a historic high, reflecting a conceptual boom in the Geography of the first decade of the century. The long list of lecturers included eminent scholars from the English-speaking world, Matthew H. Edney and Rita Gardner, and the Francophone, Roland Courtot and Céline Rozenblat, and, of course, from the Iberian peninsula, most notably, Josefina Gómez Mendoza and João Carlos Garcia. The mandate of Josep Oliveras, the longest of the four, has overcome two major obstacles, the economic crisis and the suspension of all public acts due to the COVID-19 pandemic, by resorting to strict budgetary control and digital tools. In these years of crisis, the SCG has stood firm, continuing to organise its activities in uninterrupted style, and showing, as we shall see, a broad diversity of initiatives.

Over the last thirty years, the SCG has continued to offer courses and seminars disseminating different aspects of the fields of geographical science and providing training in the tools required to work in them. For example, courses have been dedicated to aspects of geomorphology, climatology, cartography and toponymy, demography and tourism, droughts, floods and forest fires and research in Geography education. Courses have also been taught in digital photography, thematic mapping and geographic information systems.

The SCG has always been keen to express a debt of gratitude to its most distinguished members and has

organised various events in their memory, including those dedicated to Lluís Casassas (1992, 2002 and 2017) and Marc Aureli Vila (2008), as well as those in earlier times, dedicated to Eduard Fontserè (1960 and 1970), Pierre Deffontaines (1979), Pau Vila (to whom the 1980–81 academic year was dedicated on the occasion of his centenary), Solé Sabarís (to whom the 1985–86 academic year was dedicated) and Josep Iglésies (1979). Similarly, and with the aim of supporting early research in Geography, the Society created the Lluís Casassas Award for young university students, and, as of 2020, the Joan Vilà-Valentí Prize (formerly the Joan Palau Vera Prize), awarded to research studies undertaken by high school students.

In 2008, the Second Catalan Congress of Geography was held, entitled “The map as the language of geography”. The conference comprised six papers, including one read by Mark Monmonier, the opening and closing plenary sessions and four lectures on cartography. Here, it is worth adding a series of other academic activities in which the SCG has been involved, either as an organiser or participant, and which have played an important role in projecting its public image both home and abroad: *Eurocongrés 2000 dels espais occitans i catalans* (2000-2003) [*Eurocongress 2000 of Occitan and Catalan spaces*], *Geografies dissidents* (2001) [*Dissident geographies*], *XVIII Congrès de l'Asociación de Geografía Española* (2003) [*18th Conference of the Spanish Geographical Association*], *Geografia i gènere al món: qüestionant l'hegemonia americana* (2006) [*Geography and gender in the world: questioning American hegemony*], *Les transformacions territorials a banda i banda dels Pirineus* (2010) [*Territorial change on both sides of the Pyrenees*], among others. This international projection has been strengthened with the




SEGON CONGRÉS CATALÀ DE GEOGRAFIA

EL MAPA COM A LENGUATGE GEOGRÀFIC

SOCIETAT CATALANA DE GEOGRAFIA
Institut d'Estudis Catalans


29, 30 i 31 de maig de 2008
Barcelona / Vilanova i la Geltrú

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active participation of Maria Dolors Garcia Ramon (2002), as president of the SCG, at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers (AAG), and at various conferences organised by the International Geographical Union and the publication of the entry “Catalan Society of Geography” (2014), written by Josep Oliveras, in “The International Encyclopedia of Geography” of the AAG.

In the more formal institutional arena, between 2014 and 2022 (with the forced parenthesis of the years 2020 and 2021), the society organised, jointly with the *Diputació de Barcelona* a series of conferences (with an itinerant base rotating through Barcelona, Vic, Igualada, Manresa, Sitges and Puigdàlber) dedicated to regional planning, with the papers being published in *Treballs de la SCG*. The SCG has also been represented, on occasions, on three consultative bodies of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia: *Consell Rector de l'Institut Cartogràfic i Geològic de Catalunya* [Governing Council of the Cartographic and Geological Institute of Catalonia], *Consell assessor de l'Observatori del Paisatge* [Advisory Council of the Landscape Observatory] and *Comissió de Delimitació Territorial* [Boundaries Commission].

In 1998, the SCG started publication of a collection of books, which currently exceeds twenty titles. The series was originally conceived with the idea of republishing classic texts of Catalan Geography. Some have served to honour the name of leading

Organizing committee of the Second Catalan Geography Congress, held in 2008



scholars of Catalan geography and key figures in the history of the SCG. However, more recently the collection has expanded to include other topics and other authors. *La nova geografia de la Catalunya post-covid* [*The New Geography of Post-COVID Catalonia*] (2021) brings together the work of a good many of today's Catalan geographers, under the editorial guidance of Jesús Burgueño, and serves as the basis for sections 3 and 4 of this book. The books in this series have all been formally presented by the SCG, as have other titles written by geographers with links to the Society. During the mandate of Josep Oliveras alone, there have been 23 book presentations

The society's flagship publication, however, continues to be its journal, *Treballs*, which is steaming steadily towards its one hundredth issue, appearing every six months and including various monographic volumes, dedicated, respectively to the annals of the V Spanish Population Congress (nº 46, 1998), "Views on the Geography of Catalonia and Valencia from the English-speaking World" (nº 61-62, 2006), regional planning (nº 67-68, 2009) and "A Geographers' Perspective on storm Glòria" (nº 89, 2020). Edited, in the first instance, by Enric Mendizàbal, who passed on the baton, successively, to Lluís Casasas, Jesús Burgueño and, as of 2022, to Valerià Paül, with Joan

Alberich acting as deputy editor, *Treballs de la SCG* seeks to disseminate geographical knowledge rooted in a rigorous scientific approach, to raise awareness of a range of spatial, social and environmental problems, and to enrich the Catalan scientific tradition in relation to the various geographical disciplines. The journal operates an anonymous peer review system that guarantees the quality of its scholarship and is currently seeking to satisfy the requisites that would allow it to be included in academic journal indexes in dedicated databases. For this reason, as of 2022, the Society's *crònica* (diary) is to be published separately, leaving only academic papers and book reviews in *Treballs*.

Since 1992, the SCG has organised more than a hundred field trips, ranging from half-day, full-day and two-day excursions, depending on whether the idea was to make “Urban Discoveries” near Barcelona, explore more distant districts around Catalonia or to hike through one of the region’s mountain ranges. In the footsteps of the inimitable trips led by Lluís Cassasas, the organisers — who include Joan Tort, Jesús Burgueño, Josep Oliveras and Jordi Ramoneda — have striven at all times to provide scholarly academic insights, seeking the contributions of local experts and often ending the day with a talk or debate on aspects associated with the place visited. Particular mention should be made of a dozen guided visits to exhibitions of geographical interest (Bertran, 2021, p. 314), the twenty Easter field trips to destinations in the Mediterranean and parts of the neighbouring Atlantic coast, between 1998 and 2019 (Bertran, 2021, p. 225), and, since 2018, the celebration of Geography Night, in coordination with several European geographical societies.

Between 2000 and 2020, Pau Alegre produced a digital news bulletin, the *Obrador Obert*.⁷ It is worth mentioning here because it offers extensive information on the activities of the SCG throughout its history, a directory of its members and their contributions to the Society, biographical sketches of past members (including all the first one hundred), the complete series of the journal *Treballs de la SCG* and texts from other publications, and more than 500 reviews of books, most of them after 1991, written by geographers associated in one way or another with the SCG. Indeed, the *Obrador Obert* constitutes an essential source for

accessing the history of the Society. The SCG currently operates a modern website (scgeo.iec.cat) that provides all kinds of information about the Society and allows access to a wide range of content, including teaching materials for secondary schools (*recursos-geografia.iec.cat*). The SCG also has an important presence on the social platforms.

Under the mandate of Rafael Giménez-Capdevila, appointed in October 2021, the Catalan Society of Geography continues to address the challenges of increasing its membership (currently standing at around 550), while promoting a whole series of activities that, both quantitatively and qualitatively, serve as a guarantee of its ongoing commitment to the Catalan-speaking territories, the dissemination of geographical knowledge and its dialogue and exchanges with Catalan universities, the associated societies of the IEC (including the Catalan Society of Regional Planning), professional bodies such as the Institute of Geographers, and with other cultural and scientific entities both in and outside Catalonia. In undertaking to organise the 9th EUGEO Congress (Association of Geographical Societies in Europe), in September 2023, in collaboration with the University of Barcelona, the SCG hopes to take a further step in this direction.

7. Currently stalled for technical reasons, but accessible in full at <https://scg.iec.cat>.



Ildefons Cerdà, 1861: *Plano de las alrededores de la ciudad de Barcelona: proyecto de reforma y ensanche*. Col·lecció de la Cartoteca, Institut Cartogràfic i Geològic de Catalunya

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2

THE GOALS OF
THE NEW GEOGRAPHY
OF POST-COVID CATALONIA



The Goals of *The New Geography of Post-COVID Catalonia*

Jesús Burgueño Rivero
Josep Oliveras Samitier

Since the 1970s, Geography has undergone major positive changes throughout the world and, in this regard, Geography in Catalonia is no exception. Yet, generally speaking, this transformation has gone unnoticed by the wider public, albeit that the results of these changes occasionally feature in the media (though not as often as they should). Never before have so many maps been used in the press, on television and on the social platforms; new geopolitics is attracting a growing audience; the geographical analysis of space is identifying interrelationships that can be confirmed using advanced statistical techniques; and thanks to geographic information systems, the merging of statistics and automated cartography is producing remarkable outcomes.

This increasing specialisation — quantitative and highly experimental in the case of Physical Geography; more qualitative and subjective in that of Human Geography — is immediately verifiable in the articles that appear in the SCG's journal *Treballs de la Societat Catalana de Geografia* as well as in other publications.

Yet, perhaps, this specialisation is not the best letter of presentation for Geography. Professionals to-

day seem to specialise to such a degree that they end up forgetting that Geography is a science of multiple connections. They are producing excellent studies, but often they are only intelligible to those that share the same passions and degree of expertise. This is further aggravated by the fact that universities, intent on securing a good position in the world rankings, attach greater and greater importance to research — of varying degrees of utility — than to training good professionals and citizens for the future. All their efforts are focused on climbing up the rankings. We seem to have lost sight of the fact that in a democratic European society what is required are honest geographers, capable of working with both common sense and a critical sense to examine actions that impact at the spatial level. An education in Geography is very much a matter of emancipation through self-reflection rather than mimetic conformity, to reiterate an earlier idea expressed by Tim Unwin (1992).

The professional, understandably anxious to obtain stability in the workplace or to climb the ladder in the world of academia, writes solely for specialist journals (typically in English) and dedicates all their efforts to

1. English translation of Jesús Burgueño and Josep Oliveras' introduction to the book Burgueño, Jesús (Ed.): *La nova geografia de la Catalunya postcovid*. Barcelona: Societat Catalana de Geografia, 2021, pp. 7-17.

one aspect, or sub-aspect, of a given theme. This professional often forgets to carry out in-depth analyses, such as that of an area or region, in an effort at understanding what is happening in their own living space. Geographers should be exploiting their rigorous scientific expertise to reflect on a social reality. Unfortunately, the geographer today is not greatly concerned with bringing to the attention of a much larger public how certain elements of the economic, political, legal and ideological structure affect the organisation of the space in which they live and the physical elements of the continent on which their social groups have settled. It should come as no surprise to us then that the public have little appreciation of the role played by Geography today and of the function of professional geographers — an ignorance that fully complies with the interests of powerful social groups that prefer this state to that of engaged scientific knowledge.

The analysis of a specific space or region has been seen by many geographers as constituting the core of the discipline, the sum — in a given framework — of the knowledge of different themes and their connections, but which is not the same as conducting a study in which each section has little bearing on all the others. David Harvey in *Explanation in Geography* (1969) considered that geographers tend to concentrate their attention on meaning at the regional scale and that, as such, one of the principles of geographical thinking is that the geographers' domain is best approached at a regional level of resolution. Years later, and from other perspectives, Derek Gregory (1984) stressed the need for geographers to know about the constitution of regional social formations, of regional articulations and their transformations. These proposal were very much

shared by Doreen Massey, who in the same years called on geographers to study the problems experienced by regions, as these were closely connected to their economic and political organisation; and three years later, David Stoddart claimed that studies in geographical research could be combined to demonstrate the distinctive characters of places and regions, but that the key lay in identifying geographical problems and using that knowledge to alleviate and even fix them.

These beliefs, with certain variations, continue to be held to this day, with the addition of the importance of studying regional or national identities and the corresponding sense of belonging, as in the case of Catalonia. These spaces — or regions as Geography would have it — should be understood as systems, which while not fully closed are not entirely open either. Such

Back cover of the book la Nova Geografia de la Catalunya postcovid, illustration made by Raül Gesalí



spaces are the product of history yet, at the same time, they are under constant construction, in a process that emphasises their role for identity, representation and belonging, but also their role as a functional environment of management, action, intervention, domination and control. These are all reasons that more than justify the need for their analysis and diagnosis.

Alexander Murphy (2018) likewise argues the need to be able to diagnose spatial transformations, and claims that understanding current changes requires Geographers to make a major effort on various fronts. Change cannot be understood if there is no awareness of problems, that is, “if students and scholars lack the analytical perspectives and tools needed to assess the evolving spatial organisation and material character of places and regions” (p. 20). Reflecting on problems using geographical criteria means taking into account a set of variables that interact within a certain territory. Catalonia in our case.

We should also understand that, for a single person, to carry out an analysis on different aspects of a specific geographical region — be it an administrative or functional region, a historical nation or social formation — is a very difficult task if it is to be done with sufficient scientific rigour and with the intent of identifying the multiple connections that make up its fundamental structure. Pierre Vilar a geographer and disciple of Albert Demangeon, before becoming a historian, saw this very clearly when writing *Catalunya dins l'Espanya moderna* [*Catalonia in Modern Spain*] (1962): “to take an object that is too vast in its entirety requires learning that is overly varied to the detriment of the effectiveness and precision to be gained from the handling of each specific research instrument. There is a certain contradiction in each

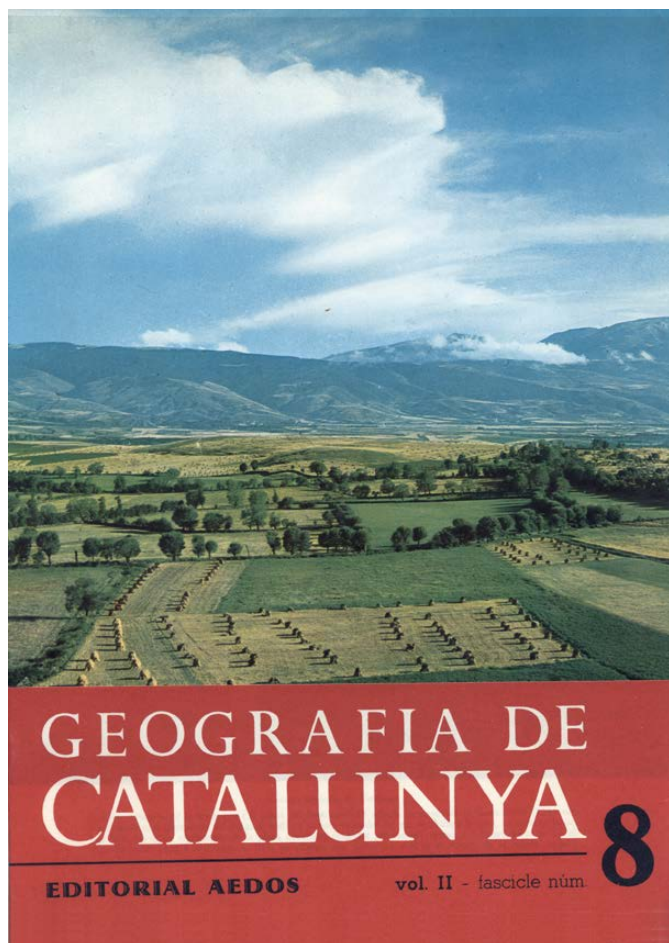
scientific essay between breadth and depth, between variety and solidity”, and taking on a regional monograph would constitute a veritable struggle of conscience for the geographer.

This explains why regional geographies have — for years now — been collective works, the case, for example, of the *Geografia de Catalunya* (1958-1974) [*Geography of Catalonia*], published by Aedos, and of the work the SCG published in 2021 thanks to the efforts of geographers drawn from different branches of the subject, with the aim of capturing, understanding and making proposals about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on different aspects and spaces of Catalonia's territorial and national reality.

From Aedos to COVID-19

In 2014, the SCG initiated a series of round table sessions commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of the first volume of its magnum opus, *Geografia de Catalunya*, published by Aedos and coordinated by Professor Lluís Solé Sabarís. The first of the seven sessions counted on the participation of Professor Joan Vilà-Valentí, the only surviving member of the book's editorial board.

The motive for the commemoration was none other than remembering the importance that this *Geography* — published originally in the form of instalments, with a number of insightful photographs and maps — had had. The book was acquired not only by those with an interest in the world of Geography, but by many people working in other professions and with other interests, who saw in it an opportunity to be able to read about, and understand, the physical and hu-



man structure of a country subjected to a dictatorship prone to cultural and scientific illiteracy, especially as regards anything referring to Catalonia.

Aedos' *Geography* strengthened the Catalan national movement, at the same time as it provided an interpretive framework, not only for ramblers and enthusiasts of geographical knowledge, but also for university graduates keen to put their geographical knowledge

into practice. And this effect was not limited solely to the Arts Faculty but applied also to the Faculty of Sciences in the field of the Natural Sciences, which in the course of time would be transformed into the specialist disciplines of Biology and Geology, and also in the new faculty of Economic Sciences, where this *Geography* was well known to, and used extensively by, the initiators of studies of the regional economy.

Other works would follow the *Geography* but they did not enjoy the same acceptance, despite the interest of some of their content. Yet between 1974, the year in which the third volume was finished, and the present day, the landscape of Catalonia has undergone significant changes in many aspects, including its vegetation cover, infrastructure, mobility, types of farming, population and migration patterns. Urbanisation has tended to dominate rational urban planning guided by good practices, the tourist phenomenon has unfolded in parallel to deindustrialisation, while digital communication has become indispensable. Regarding these interconnected phenomena, geographers are expected to have opinions and to be able to offer explanations that are of interest to the general public.

In recognition of this expectation, in the 2017-2018 academic year, a proposal was presented to the Society's Governing Council to write and edit a new Geography of Catalonia that would address the main transformations — by thematic area — undergone by Catalonia in the recent past, so as to be able to provide fresh interpretations of its physical, social and economic structure. The proposal adhered to the guidelines provided by J. F. Hart, president of the Association of American Geographers, who in a memorable speech in 1982 highlighted the advantages of so-called Regional Geography for its unique educational value,

for young and old alike, and as a means of knowing and interpreting the conditions of complex realities: A protocol that can equally be applied to Catalonia. The SCG, always keen to promote the geographical education of young people, also felt the need to make a renewed contribution to the teaching of Geography in high schools, and one that might, at the same time, be extended to adults.

The proposal was academic in format and embraced such a variety of themes that the finished work threatened to be excessively long unless the content could be whittled down considerably. After various debates, many of an epistemological nature, the complexity of the task meant the project was assigned to the back drawer of good intentions. With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the idea was overhauled and a new selection of themes was made to illustrate both the situation before the first wave of the virus and the consequences of the health crisis and its side-effects, which impacted almost all sectors throughout Catalonia.

An editorial board was set up. Each of the Catalan universities teaching geography was represented, while Jesús Burgueño was entrusted with overseeing the project. Once the themes to be addressed had been agreed on, suitable authors were sounded out, on the understanding that they should be SCG members and experts in the chosen theme, as reflected by their publishing record. While initially one author was selected per chapter, the authors agreeing to take on the task could choose to do so jointly with other colleagues (as long as they were also SCG members). The board also agreed that a series of short articles would be commissioned expressing a well-substantiated opinion on some specific aspect of the theme addressed in each chapter.

A Work that Reflects the Multi-crisis of the Period

It is commonplace to say that the pandemic has impacted greatly on every one of our social structures, on our daily habits, on our very perception of the world even. Indeed, the crisis has been an unprecedented event for all aspects of contemporary life and we have experienced radical changes at all levels. We have had to face a health emergency at a scale that has triggered an economic crisis, albeit that in this latter sphere deep underlying trends were exacerbated that had been developing for years, most notably processes of digitalisation with the emergence of online commerce and remote work.

On the eve of the outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the world had one basic concern in mind: that of climate and environmental change, captured in the disquieting expression the ‘climate emergency’.

And in Catalonia, all of this was unfolding against the backdrop of a major political crisis, which was not unlike a global cultural and political process of social polarisation, but which here presented its own defining features, derived from the problem of just where Catalonia fits within Spain.

Finally, the city continues to be the scene of conflicts — one of its essential facets it would seem — albeit no more than before the pandemic. Some of the most pressing problems faced by contemporary society manifest themselves above all in the urban environment. It remains to be seen whether or not the lockdown, which was experienced most intensely in the cities, will have consequences for the settlement model. Reality often disproves hastily made forecasts, showing them to be no more than urban legends, such

as the increase in birth rates that the lockdown was supposed to provoke.

Thus, we faced major crises on four fronts and, indeed, following the publication of the book these conflicts have only grown, acquiring an increasingly greater global scale. But at that particular moment in time that there should be four main themes to the book seemed logical, with the incorporation of a fifth, a brief reference to the urban world and, more specifically, to the city of Barcelona, where some of the territorial changes and conflicts take on a paradigmatic dimension — even at the international scale — as in the controversy surrounding tourist apartments. We should not lose sight of the fact that Catalonia is fortunately a multifaceted country — we say fortunately as the opposite would be a country without character, tending towards simplicity and irrelevance, which would be much worse.

One of the primary goals of the book was to showcase the work that geographers do and to highlight the diversity of fields in which we work. The book highlights the fact that the gaze of those who dedicate themselves to Geography is transversal, and that it embraces an extraordinary variety of objects of study. Geographers are professionals whose work needs to be taken into account in a multitude of ways when seeking to address a problem, because not only do we dedicate ourselves to considering such problems, but because we can make valuable, well-documented, original contributions, given that we — unlike other experts — see the prevailing reality with a greater awareness of its complexity. We are more aware of the repercussions that a specific decision may have in terms of less obvious, unforeseen aspects. This is exactly what the pandemic has highlighted: the complex chain of unsuspected

repercussions that a specific limitation or prohibition can generate. If we lock Barcelona down, the beaches are overwhelmed and bikes aggravate mountain path erosion in the city's Collserola park. If we unlock the doors after confinement, the number of mountain accidents and mountain rescues soars. It is the task of geographers to detect such butterfly effects.

It is self-evident that our politicians and decision-makers should be taking into closer account the geographical gaze. The management of the pandemic — which left much to be desired — has shown that they have little understanding of Catalonia, that they do not have the measure of the territory. There have been many examples — including, the lack of foresight with regard to the health problem posed by the high number of floating population, living in very precarious conditions, in the city of Lleida during the fruit harvesting season. And, perhaps most tellingly, considering the *comarca* of Barcelonès (with its nearly 16,000 inhabs/km²) as if it were comparable to a bucolic rural region demonstrates a short-sightedness comparable only to that of those who believe that the 5 inhabs/km² of Pallars Sobirà merit the same mobility restrictions as, say, Tarragonès (the *comarca* of Tarragona).

Returning to the book, an inspection of the contents page — plural in scope, but without seeking to be exhaustive either — shows the reader the versatility of the different gazes afforded by Geography and its interest for a wide range of topics.

The first section addresses the health crisis, albeit not in its strictly medical sense (unfortunately neglected by Catalan Geography to date) but in terms of the social issues directly associated with the pandemic: its demographic repercussions, the territorial manage-

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the foreign trade balance. Mobility is a transversal feature of the social reality that cuts across the whole of this section, and is one that could have been included in all the others, because it is also an urban characteristic of great importance, because mobility restrictions have been the watchword of the management of the pandemic (when in reality the aim was to reduce human interrelations) and because obviously transport has notorious environmental repercussions.

It would have been inexcusable not to address Catalonia's environmental problems, particularly those linked directly with the climate emergency, starting, obviously, with the climate itself, but also turning to consider various aspects of risk management and the elements of our natural environment: water control, the specific problem of a fragile coastline in regression, wildfires, the landscape and its protection.

ment of the crisis and the lockdowns, the territorial organisation of the Health system, the impact on the health of disadvantaged social groups and the increase in violence suffered by women isolated during the confinement.

The second section describes the impacts of the pandemic on the economy in various sectors, starting logically with its effects on employment and continuing with agriculture, industry, trade, tourism and

The climate emergency calls, above all, for a change in the energy model for one based on sustainability, a discussion that rounds off this section.

A section dedicated to urban conflicts and to Barcelona, in particular, was also considered worthy of a place in this book — albeit not a major one, given that these issues are examined in studies in other sections, in terms of political questions and the social impact of the pandemic, etc. It was imperative, however, to

analyse the aftermath of the last great economic crisis, following the bursting of the housing bubble, a disaster from which Catalonia had largely recovered in terms of employment, economic activity and mobility, but which has left an indelible mark on the cityscape and society as a whole. It was also essential not to ignore the processes of gentrification or expulsion of the working classes from certain city neighbourhoods, partly as an effect of the tourist boom that has been particularly exaggerated in Barcelona — the contrast with the deserted city streets of the lockdown was extraordinary to behold. Facing these different crises, Catalonia's capital was left reeling and is still struggling to find a path out towards stabilisation and progress. This situation deserves consideration in this section, but also from other perspectives, as in the last section.

Catalonia finds itself in an unprecedented political impasse of enormous proportions. The region, which years earlier had prioritised the integration of the generations of migrants from the rest of Spain and the establishment of a single people, has been split into two blocks condemned to indefinite stalemate. The deadlock calls on all Catalans to forget the extremes of the past and to seek out constructive spaces of shared experiences and goals that can be aspired to by the majority. Any reflections on the pro-independence movement of the years 2012 to 2017 — such as those we have just made — are open to partisan criticism. It is for this reason that this book has considered it appropriate to include contrasting thoughts, personal and non-transferable, without enhancement or limitation, but above all, well-argued views that might enrich the debate. This section has also made it possible to give a voice to the other Catalans, those

from the North (France), in the article contributed by Joan Becat.

Twenty-eight chapters plus an epilogue by Oriol Nel-lo — IEC delegate with a seat on the SCG's Governing Council — and twenty-three brief articles are the outcome of the work of sixty-four Catalan geographers. To these, we have added a further two contributions from members working in the professional fields of law and history. This constitutes one of the riches of our Society: the fact that it is open to everyone with a certain sympathy for Geography, a feeling that goes well beyond a mere academic qualification.

The authors are drawn from across the generations — from retired (as opposed to inactive) teachers to young students completing their doctoral theses — and from many different backgrounds — from the university (certainly the most represented group) to government entities, by way of those geographers making their way as freelance professionals. This is a collective work, which highlights the vitality of a professional field, albeit small, but one that is endowed with a personality full of creative potential. The authors were given considerable freedom in the approach they adopted: although they were each asked to provide an analysis of the current state and to situate their discussion within the framework of the evolutionary context that describes or explains the theme being addressed, specifically within the first decades of the current century.

Sixty-six members of the Catalan Society of Geography, who wanted to make it quite clear that Geography matters and that geographers can make relevant contributions for a better understanding of our reality, have come together in creating this book.

3

CATALAN GEOGRAPHY
IN TIMES OF CRISIS



Catalan Geography in Times of Crisis¹

Valerià Pau i Carril
Rafael Giménez-Capdevila

Introduction

The year 2014 was a milestone for the history of Catalonia and, at the same time, for Catalan geographers. In 2014, Catalonia commemorated the tercentenary of the fall of Barcelona into the hands of Philip V's army during the Spanish War of Succession, an event that led to the abolition of the institutions that had existed in Catalonia since the Middle Ages and, most significantly of all, the dissolution of its Government (the *Generalitat*). In the 1930s, the *Generalitat* would be restored, now as a subordinate institution of the Spanish Republic, and after the 1936–1939 civil war, it survived in exile, until, in 1977, it was re-established for a second time. In 1979, thanks to the passing of a Statute of Autonomy, provided for under the Spanish Constitution and adopted the previous year, it once again began to operate within the institutional framework of the Spanish State. Coinciding with this

tercentenary, in 2014 the *Generalitat* organised a popular consultation on the political future of Catalonia, a self-determination referendum that would subsequently be suspended by the Spanish Constitutional Court before it was held and declared unconstitutional by the same court in 2015.² The referendum formed one of the events of the so-called *procés*, that is, the 'process' which would supposedly lead to the independence of Catalonia (a subject we return to in the following pages), initiated in 2010³ and culminated in 2017,⁴ albeit that at the beginning of the 2020s it is not entirely clear that it has yet run its course.

This chain of extraordinary events has had, as we show below, a marked impact on Catalan Geography. In 2014, Catalan geographers were also celebrating their own anniversary, the year marking fifty years since the publication of *Geografia de Catalunya* [*Geography of Catalonia*] — an edited book coordinated by Solé i Sabarís (1958–1974) and published in three

1. Text reproduced from Pau i Carril, Valerià; Giménez Capdevila, Rafael: "Catalan Geography in Times of Crisis". In: *Spanish Committee of the International Geographical Union: Spanish geography at contemporary times. State of the question (1972–2022). Spanish contribution to 35th IGC. Paris 2022. Time for Geographers*. Madrid: Asociación Española de Geografía, 2022, pp. 353–380. DOI of the complete book: <https://doi.org/10.21138/lugi.en.2022.le>

2. Some 2.3 million votes were cast (from a census of 6.3 million). Of these 84% voted 'Yes-Yes', that is, 'Yes' to Catalonia becoming a state and 'Yes' to this state being independent.

3. Usually considered the year in which the *procés* began, given it was when the Spanish Constitutional Court delivered its ruling on the lack of constitutionality of key articles of the 2006 Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, opening the floodgates to massive, openly pro-independent protests (Pau i Carril, 2021).

4. The year in which the independence referendum was held and although preventively suspended by the Spanish Constitutional Court, voting went ahead. On this occasion, nearly 2.3 million votes were also cast (from a census of 5.3 million), of whom 92% voted in favour of Catalonia becoming "an independent state in the form of a republic".

volumes — which can be considered fundamental in the evolution of Catalan Geography. In 2021, the SCG proceeded with the publication of a new multi-authored Geography of Catalonia, entitled *La nova geografia de la Catalunya postcovid* [*The New Geography of Post-COVID Catalonia*]. The publication, coordinated by Burgueño (2021a), sought to establish a connection with the earlier work, as its introductory chapter, contributed by Burgueño and Oliveras i Samitier (2021), makes patent. Indeed, the inside sleeve of the dust jacket claims that:

If the *Geografia de Catalunya* [...] overseen by Lluís Solé Sabarís [(1958-1974)] was the point of reference for Catalan geography at the end of the Franco regime and during the transition, the *Societat Catalana de Geografia* has believed it necessary that the geographers of the first decades of the 21st century make their own collective contribution to our understanding of the new country emerging from this period of multi-crises.

In 2021, the SCG also published a history of the institution, coordinated by Bertran (2021), analysing 85 years (1935–2020) of activity only interrupted during the onsets of the dictatorship from 1939 to 1947. As such, recent output by Catalan geographers includes both an in-depth reflection on the evolution and state of Geography as well as a study of Catalan geography in the form of a collective monograph in which a series of different crises play a central role in the narrative told. It is against this backdrop that the present contribution has been written in the hope of providing a critical review of this and other recent literature published since 2010, but firmly grounded in the traditions of the discipline as it has developed in Catalonia. Nel-lo's (2021) epilogue provides what might be considered the guiding principle for this

present article, since what the author does is to take stock of the 29 chapters and the 24 brief contributions that make up Burgueño's (2021a) *New Geography* and he does so by organising his discussion around five “regional challenges” — population/cities, mobility/location of activities, cohesion/access to services, sustainability/energy and government/citizen organisation — albeit that here we adopt a slightly different classification, as will become clear.

The present article structures its discussion around four crises that we consider significant for understanding the current tasks of Catalan Geography: (1) the crisis that was initiated in 2008, initially impacting the property market and the financial sector, but which later would have far-reaching socioeconomic effects for the whole of Catalonia; (2) the COVID-19 crisis, which broke out in March 2020 and which is profoundly reconfiguring the lives of people everywhere, including in Catalonia; (3) the geopolitical crisis in Spain and Catalonia, whose origin, as mentioned above, can be traced to 2010; and, finally, (4) the global environmental crisis, which, if we adhere to one of the recent theories about the Anthropocene, began with the industrial revolution but whose effects did not acquire a combined human signature until the last decades of the 20th century or even the beginning of the current one.

The Long Shadow Cast over Catalonia by the Socioeconomic Crisis Initiated in 2008

Although the emphasis of the contributions in the collection edited by Burgueño (2021a) is very much on the pandemic that broke out in 2020 (a crisis that



we return to later), it should be borne in mind that the pre-pandemic situation, to which their authors often refer, is marked by an earlier crisis. In fact, there must be some doubt as to whether this crisis had been fully overcome by this date. Thus, Gutiérrez-Palomero and Domènech (2021), for example, record that the bursting of the housing bubble in 2008⁵ was followed by a period of more than 100,000 foreclosures (evictions) in Catalonia as home owners defaulted on their loans, a devastating situation that persisted with the recovery of housing prices in the years after 2016, when we would enter a new expansionary cycle of the property market. So, although the macroeconomic indicators suggested the crisis had been left behind some seven or

eight years after it first broke out, its social effects not only did not disappear, but rather they grew worse and continued to be present throughout Catalonia.

Based on specific data charting the demographic evolution and changes in the labour market, Alberich (2021) and Pujadas and Bayona-i-Carrasco (2021) conclude that as of 2015 Catalonia was enjoying something of a recovery: on the one hand, because the number of people being furloughed fell from almost 80,000 in 2012 to little more than 10,000 in 2016 and, from then until 2019, the numbers held steady at around or below this level; and, on the other, because of the reactivation of immigration, among other reasons, thanks to the recovery of the labour market, with

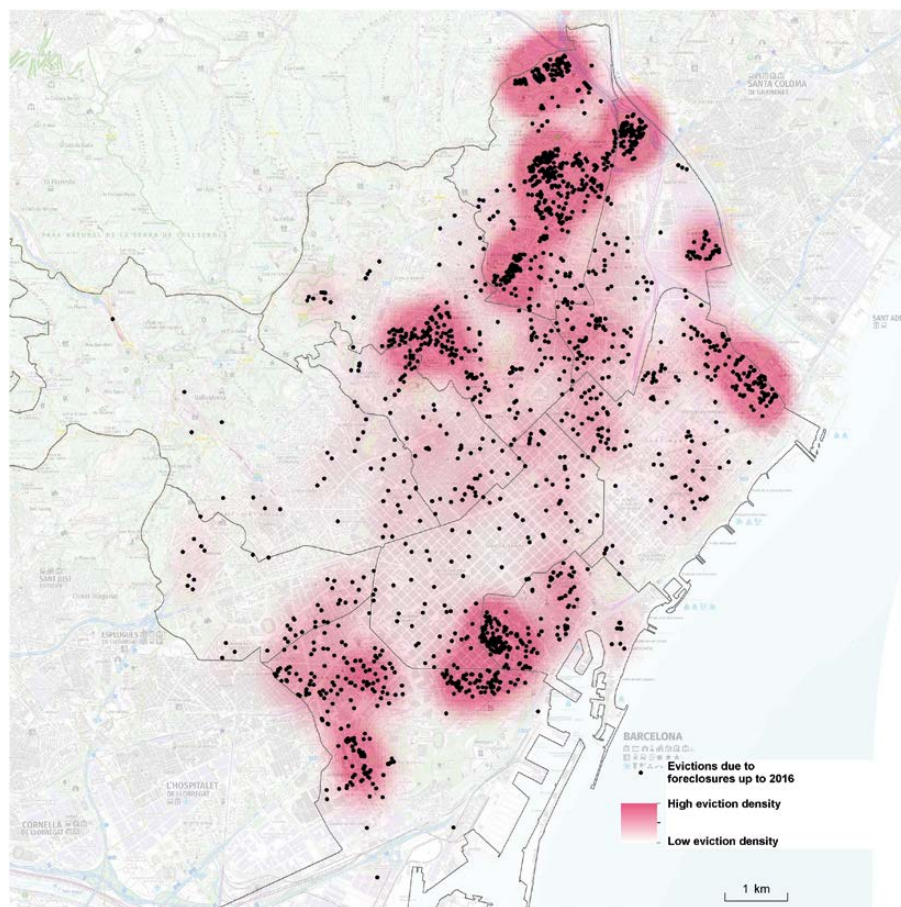
5. Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy on 15 September 2008, symbolising the beginning of the global financial crisis, which would soon affect the rest of the world, Catalonia being no exception.

the consequent entry of new population — in 2019, the number of new immigrants once again exceeded an annual figure of 100,000, returning to pre-2008 levels. And yet Pujadas and Bayona-i-Carrasco (2021: 40) point out that “immigration is growing again, not so much because of the incipient economic recovery as because of the persistence of expulsion factors in the areas of origin”. Here, they refer above all to Latin America and Africa, the two main regions supplying population born abroad according to 2020 data (some 1.5 million of Catalonia’s present population of 7.7 million inhabitants). In short, towards 2015 these indicators were used to infer the end of the crisis that had begun in 2008, but, as mentioned, other persisting effects cannot be ignored.

A study of the Catalan geographical literature dedicated to the 2008 crisis highlights that the downturn was a consequence of the extraordinary bubble in property prices that formed in the 1997–2007 cycle — somewhat appropriately referred to in Spain as the “prodigious” decade of construction (Burriel de Orueta, 2008). The effects of the bursting of this bubble in Catalonia have been analysed by Domènech and Gutiérrez-Palomero (2018), a book published by the SCG, whose main title eloquently translates as

Landscapes After the Battle: Geographies of the Housing Crisis [Paisatges després de la batalla: geografies de la crisi immobiliària]. This study, as well as that undertaken by Gutiérrez-Palomero i Domènech (2021), shows that the geography of evictions — the most dramatic phenomenon associated with the post-2008 crisis — is highly uneven, affecting, above all, the most vulnerable neighbourhoods, that is, those with the highest rates of

Evictions in Barcelona up to 2016.



Source: Burgueño (2021a: 329).

unemployment, the most non-European immigrants and the lowest levels of education, etc., in such a way that it exacerbates existing socio-economic inequalities. According to Bertran (2021: 218), Domènech and Gutiérrez-Palomero's (2018) study "is the book in the collection [i.e. the SCG collection, comprising 21 works published between 1998 and 2021, one per year, approximately] cited most frequently in the news media, a study that showcases the importance of the contribution of the work of geographers in analysing the main issues of the day".

The social consequences of the post-2008 crisis in Catalonia are clearly captured in the following excerpt:

It had a far-reaching impact on the labour system [...], resulting in a dramatic reduction in jobs and a highly significant increase in unemployment. The most immediate consequences were an increase in poverty and social exclusion for one part of the population and a reduction in the well-being and quality of life for the other part. Over the last decade, [...] [there occurred] a general rise in poverty with a fall in the mean family income, an increase in poor households with dependent children, a reduction in the ability of some families to face unforeseen expenses and a chronification of poverty. [...] Between 2013 and 2018 [as such, well beyond the alleged end of the crisis], there was talk of the risk of the chronification of these situations, and even of the polarisation of the social structure. (Ortiz and Solana-Solana, 2021: 70–71).

Nel-lo and Donat (2014), Prats *et al.* (2015) and Blanco-Fillola & Nel-lo (2018), among others, have dedicated studies to the socioeconomic effects of the post-2008 crisis from a geographical perspective. Of particular note is the geographical contribution made by Nel-lo and Checa (2019) to the report on social cohesion in Catalonia (edited by Cardús, 2019), which focuses on territorial *fractures* or divides and which

encapsulates much of this previous research. In this work, the authors return to previous contributions, including Nel-lo (1991, 2001), that showed that the geographical treatment of spatial divides is nothing new, being associated, for example, with the notion of the spatial imbalances which geographers have been concerned with for decades. Nel-lo and Checa (2019) report that spatial divides have increased with the post-2008 crisis with regards to both poverty levels and segregation. This is true of Catalonia as a whole, at the level of the *comarques* (roughly speaking, equivalent to 'counties' in English), but also within metropolitan areas, along urban corridors, and within municipalities, neighbourhoods and even between streets. Indeed, Blanco-Fillola and Nel-lo (2018) show that urban segregation in Catalonia is currently dictated by the obstacles the poorest face to escape the areas they inhabit and, just as much if not more, by the efforts taken by the most affluent to distance themselves from these areas.

In this discussion of the socioeconomic crisis, we cannot ignore questions related to gender inequality. In practice, Catalan Geography has not been slow to adopt feminist approaches (Baylina and Rodó-de-Zárate, 2019). Salamaña (2021) shows that the most feminised sectors of the economy — corresponding to those with a high occupational segregation of women — have been hit hardest by the cuts associated with the post-2008 crisis, the case, in particular, of healthcare and primary and secondary education. This has led to a widespread increase in the precarious nature of both job contracts and wages, with the consequent rise in female unemployment and a greater loss of purchasing power among women workers. In parallel with this, Salamaña (2021) reports that the crisis has led many women to

opt for a reduction in their working hours in an effort to reconcile family life with their work and that this has served to widen the gap between women and men.

One notable effect of the post-2008 crisis has been the emergence of gentrification, a term with more than half a century of history — its origins usually being traced to a seminal work by Glass (1964) — but in Catalonia it has only really begun to be used in the last decade, achieving, for example, a considerable presence in the media and in public debates about the city, sparking conflict even in some neighbourhoods (Blanco-Romero and Blàzquez-Salom, 2018; López-Gay, 2021). The epicentre of gentrification is, undoubtedly, Barcelona, where it has been associated with the city's rapid touristification. López-Gay (2021: 352) holds that the emergence of gentrification occurred in the wake of the economic recovery, i.e. around 2015 based on macroeconomic indicators, while Blanco-Romero and Blàzquez-Salom (2018: 10) argue that it was the crisis which began in 2008 that led to a restructuring of capital and the massive buying and selling of real estate by large property holdings and corporations — in short, a process of property concentration that, ultimately, led to gentrification.

The recovery undergone by immigration has also contributed to the processes of gentrification, above all in the city of Barcelona, particularly since the flows recorded in the second half of the 2010s (an average of more than 25,000 people each year) are no longer dominated entirely by non-European Union, low-income contingents as was the case prior to 2008, and they

now include a significant percentage of qualified people (with university studies) from other European countries, that is, with higher incomes (López-Gay, 2021). This new wave of demand is impacting on a property market already suffering the past stresses — including, the so-called, *airbnbification* (Gutiérrez-Puebla *et al.*, 2017) — and reconfigured, as discussed, by the crisis that broke out in 2008. Closely related to these processes of gentrification, Benach (2021) carries out an analysis based on a deconstruction of the discourse of the city of Barcelona since the 1992 Olympic Games, a subject she broaches in part in an earlier study (Benach, 2015). We have been at pains to emphasise here that this particular crisis ends with the social effects of the COVID-19 crisis, but Benach (2021: 348) stresses that “none of this [what has been observed since March 2020] has been, in fact, the result of the pandemic”, stressing that the pandemic has merely served to exacerbate prior processes already in motion and reinforced since 2008: “the urban planning violence and poverty already existed; they form part of a system that is, by nature, unfair and which no vaccine can solve”.

The Effects of the COVID-19 Crisis in Catalonia since March 2020

The target set the authors in Burgueño's (2021a) new Geography was to analyse the consequences for Catalonia of the pandemic that broke out in March 2020,⁶ which means here we shall seek merely to sum-

6. Paül i Carril and Trillo (2022) provide a detailed chronology of the out-break of COVID-19 in Catalonia. In February 2020 the first cases had been reported, but it was not until the week commencing March 9 that the spread of the virus led to the taking of a series of unprecedented decisions: on March 12, the first territorial confinement was announced in Conca d'Odena (Anoia, Central Catalonia) and, then, on the (long) weekend of March 14–15, a series of meeting and debates would end in the declaration of the first 'state of alarm', with a general lockdown of the entire Spanish population.

marise these contributions. To do so, we distinguish between two main blocks of research carried out into this question: first, the effects on the Catalan population and its settlement dynamics; and, second, its impact on mobility and the economy. Between the two blocks we examine a question linked to the first of these, concerning the recent Rural Geography of Catalonia, but which, as we shall see, dates back to a period pre-COVID-19. Finally, two additional lines of research are briefly introduced that are closely related to the geographical studies undertaken on this matter: namely, climate and geopolitics.

In discussions of the demographic impact of the pandemic, Domingo *et al.* (2021) report quite alarming figures of its effects: some 20,000 deaths attributable to the virus in the first year of the pandemic (from February 2020 to February 2021, that is, 2.7%)⁷ and a consequent fall in life expectancy of 1.7 years in 2020 (having stood at 83.8 years in 2019). Moreover, Domingo *et al.* (2021) predict other effects of the disease on Catalan demography in addition to this excess mortality, including a deterioration in health conditions as a consequence of the virus and the impact on other causes of mortality, such as cancer, because they have not been detected in time or it has not been possible to treat them properly. They also predict a further fall in fertility and a stemming of the flows of immigration, changes that, if confirmed

by data for 2021 and 2022, will make it difficult for Catalonia to achieve the 8 million inhabitants that demographic models have forecast for the end of this decade.⁸ Finally, it should be borne in mind that Ortiz and Solana-Solana (2021) stress that the impact of the pandemic has been much more marked among the disadvantaged. And, operating within the framework of Gender Geography, Salamaña (2021) shows that women have been particularly affected by the crisis, finding themselves overburdened with reproductive work as a direct result of the lockdowns, the largely mandatory implementation of remote working and the associated psychological effects and impact on well-being of having to care for children and dependents.

Baylina (2020), Aldomà (2021) and Nel·lo (2021), in discussing the impact on Catalonia's settlement dynamics, reflect on a certain discourse, widely disseminated in the media since the outbreak of the pandemic, to the effect that because of the virus, there is, or will be, a shift of the population from denser urban areas towards less dense (perhaps, rural) areas. The links between this discourse and that of the sanitary movement of the 19th century and with the idealisation of the countryside (Baylina, 2020; Paül i Carril *et al.*, 2020) are more than evident. However, initial analyses based on data of residential census displacements for 2020 and 2021 indicate that the vast majority (88%) of those recorded from the Barcelona metropolitan

7. For indicative purposes only, and without considering the structural defect of the crude mortality rate, this ratio stood at between 8 and 9‰ between the years 2000 and 2019, except in two years when it fell below 8‰ and one when it slightly exceeded 9‰ (reaching 9.07‰ in 2003, the year of the major summer heat wave). In 2020 it climbed almost two points per 1,000 inhabitants to 10.32‰. At the beginning of 2022, the latest annual crude mortality rate available was still that of 2020. Source: <https://www.idescat.cat/indicadors?id=anuals&n=10344&col=1> (accessed in March 2022).

8. The latest projection made by the *Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya* ('Statistical Institute of Catalonia', 2021–2071, average scenario) suggests the 8 million threshold will not be reached until 2027. The *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* ('National Statistics Institute' of Spain), which only offers a forecast for the 2035 horizon, also forecasts a Catalan population at over 8 million by that year. Sources: <https://www.idescat.cat/publ?id=proj> and https://www.ine.es/prensa/pp_2020_2070.pdf (accessed in March 2022).



region have as their destination other urban municipalities and that only the remaining 12% have taken up residence in municipalities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants. In fact, it seems that a significant proportion of the residential changes reflect registrations in second homes and that many of these were reversed before the year was out.⁹ In short, if in certain Catalan rural *comarques* characterised by depopulation and ageing it was thought that there would be a change in these trends due to an influx of urban population to the countryside, this does not seem to be happening. Another thing is that domestic rural tourism (of Catalans visiting rural Catalan *comarques* on staycations) has increased dramatically since the summer of 2020, the one immediately following the first strict lockdowns, unlike international urban tourism that visited Barcelona and the coastal regions, which has fallen dramatically since that date (Paül i Agustí and López Palomeque, 2021).

This is an opportune moment to mention a specific characteristic of Catalan Rural Geography that has emerged in recent years in relation to Spanish Rural Geography, and which is in part linked to the pandemic. Spanish Rural Geography has been dominated by the debate on the so-called *España vacía* or *vaciada* (empty or hollowed out Spain), a term coined by Del Molino (2016), to such an extent that the 2020 Spanish Rural Geography conference was devoted to this demographic challenge. The debate generated, initially in the media and academic circles, has had a rapid reflection in the political map, with the emergence of provincial candidates in the interior of the peninsula that have won parliamentary seats in the Spanish general elections and in some autonomous regions, based on the perception of grievances in Spain's rural communities attributable to the cities, above all Madrid (Paül i Carril, 2020; Paül i Carril *et al.*, 2021). The origin of this debate can be traced to 2016, although, since

9. Keynote address delivered by Jordi Domingo "Covid-19 i migracions: parèntesi o canvi de paradigma?" at the IEC on 19 January 2022.

the outbreak of COVID-19, the controversy has been renewed, largely due to the role played by the news media. Indeed, it is argued that it should be possible to correct this negative dynamic, although, if the studies conducted in Catalonia are anything to go on, this does not seem to be happening nor does it seem likely to happen in the foreseeable future.

Yet, in Catalonia this debate centred on an *empty* or *hollowed out* rural space hardly seems relevant, given that Catalonia's rural communities have, for decades now, presented both positive demographic and economic indicators (Garcia-Coll and Sánchez-Aguilera, 2005; Aldomà, 2009, 2015, 2021), with the result that Catalan Rural Geography has developed in a different direction exploring other avenues of research. In fact, a recent book published in this subdiscipline, co-edited by Cerarols and Nogué (2022), offers a fresh, exciting vision of the Catalan countryside, one that is full of hope for its future. It reports a plethora of positive experiences, which have little to do with the pessimistic discourse of Spanish Rural Geography critical of the recession affecting its rural areas. In many ways, this particular vision of Catalonia's rural geography was already present in previous studies, including that of Monllor (2015) on young rural dwellers. On the other hand, we cannot overlook the fact that Catalan Geography has developed a whole line of territorial thinking on the relationship between Barcelona and Catalonia, embodied in the work of Casassas (1977, 1991), a debate continued in Burgueño's (2021a) new Geography, with the contributions of Castañer and Martín-Uceda (2021) and Nadal (2021), in which it is evident that the nature of the relationship between the capital and the rest of the Catalan territory is highly idiosyncratic.

Having digressed to examine for a moment the concerns of Catalan Rural Geography, we now return to the second block of geographical analyses of the effects of Covid-19 in Catalonia territory focused on mobility and the location of activities. The reduction in mobility that characterised the lockdowns impacted the population enormously, especially in middle- and high-income neighbourhoods, and above all the collective transport sector (Checa *et al.*, 2020; Miralles-Guasch *et al.*, 2021; Nel-lo, 2021). The enforced adoption of remote working constitutes one of the main reasons (Alberich, 2021; Blanco-Romero, 2021). Despite this, it appears that neither international trade nor Catalan internal trade have suffered the effects; in fact, they have actually remained buoyant thanks to e-commerce, although the distribution activity of local, zero-km, trade has been impacted (Carreras and Frago, 2021; Pallarès-Barberà and Vera, 2021; Salamaña, 2021). And, as mentioned, tourist mobility has decreased significantly across the board, with the exception of Catalan domestic demand for Catalan destinations (Paül i Agustí and López Palomeque, 2021). Likewise, urban mobility has been transformed, so that, in the case of Barcelona, for example, there has been a rapid expansion of personal mobility vehicles (bicycles, scooters and other devices), to the detriment of collective public transport (Miralles-Guasch *et al.*, 2021).

One of the main socioeconomic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis has been a new rise in unemployment, which, as we have seen, had recovered in relation to the previous crisis. The unemployment associated with the pandemic has impacted, above all, the services sector, particularly in those coastal municipalities specialised in tourism, both on the Costa Daurada and the Costa Brava (Alberich, 2021). Alberich (2021)

reports quite alarming figures: if during the post-2008 crisis almost 80,000 workers were furloughed each year, in 2020 a million workers were affected in one blow, multiplying by a hundred the number of workers affected in 2019. Once again, the impact on female workers has been especially marked, among other reasons, because the destruction of jobs has been higher in the more feminised sectors of the economy characterised, that is, by a high occupational segregation of women (Salamaña, 2021).

One specific outcome of the Covid-19 crisis that should be mentioned here is the improvement experienced in air quality due to the decrease in pollution, especially from transport, during the months of lockdown (spring 2020). This reduction has been clearly documented in the case of Barcelona by Martín-Vide *et al.* (2021). These authors report that during this pe-

riod the emissions of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases derived from the use of fossil fuels fell. Although the reduction was still insufficient, they conclude that we should have taken advantage of this change in trend to build a new energy model, a critical opportunity given the seriousness of the global environmental crisis (see below for a more complete discussion).

Finally, Paül i Carril and Trillo (2022) adopt an original approach to the study of the Covid-19 crisis that ties in with the discussion in the following section. They employ a geopolitical perspective to demonstrate that much of the debate in the first month of the pandemic centred on the political management of the crisis was a response to the Catalonia/Spain conflict. Their study also emphasises that the post-1978 Constitution “Spain of the autonomous communities” model was put under considerable strain and while



this was not a problem exclusive to Catalonia, the tensions here were notable. Indeed, Burgueño (2021b), Galindo *et al.* (2022) and Trillo *et al.* (2022) highlight these tensions in studies of the specific characteristics of the regionalisation of healthcare in Catalonia, at variance with the regional map of the Spanish State in Catalonia. This, in fact, is not a new topic, since questions concerning political divisions (*organització territorial* in Catalan) within Catalonia is one of the most timeworn aspects — or, dare we say, *the* most timeworn — of Catalan Geography since the foundation of the SCG (Bertran, 2021).

The “Catalan Crisis”

Among the different names coined to refer to the stormy political debate centred on the possible independence of Catalonia over the last decade — the *procés*, as we have called it so far — the “Catalan crisis” has been one of the most frequently used. However, Geography has not been the most active discipline in the undertaking of analyses of this conflict, although various contributions can be found, for example, Paül i Carril (2021). In fact, of the five chapters of Burgueño’s new Geography (2021a) included under the heading *Atzucac polític* (A Political Blind Alley), only one, that of Paül i Carril (2021), refers directly to the “Catalan crisis”, while two of the others — as mentioned above — concern themselves with the relationship between Barcelona and Catalonia (Castañer and Martín-Uceda, 2021 and Nadal, 2021), one focuses its attention specifically on Northern (French) Catalonia (Becat, 2021; we return to this study below) and

a fifth, ironically, is the “*procés* seen by a historian” (Puigvert, 2021).

When all is said and done, the response of Catalan Geography to the “Catalan crisis” has been timid. As Paül i Carril (2021) points out, it is evident that geographers from other parts of the Catalan language area have paid more attention to this conflict — the case, for example, of Rullan and Vives-Miró (2020) based in Mallorca, and the prolific output of Romero (2006, 2009, 2012, 2017) based in the Valencian Country. Significantly, the SCG opted to mark the end of the 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 academic years with address given by Joan Romero and Onofre Rullan, respectively. It would seem, therefore, that in Geography it has been more common to approach the crisis from ‘abroad’, but based on the proximity that comes from belonging to the same language community. Moreover, and again according to Paül i Carril (2021), in the few studies examining the Geopolitics of Catalonia carried out by Catalan geographers, a largely retrospective historical component dominates, normally starting in modern history, as indeed we began the present article. As such, what can be regarded as being more strictly geographic in nature tends to have less weight in this debate.

One of the motives for the apparent lack of *appetite* shown by Geography for this debate might be attributed to a degree of conservatism, inertia even, among geographers, unable to break free from the political map inherited from previous generations (Paül i Carril, 2021). For this reason, the argument defended by Font (2013) to the effect that Catalan Geography is built on Catalan nationalism must be questioned; at least, it is not especially evident in current academic

Geography.¹⁰ This attitude of relative indifference towards internal geopolitics contrasts with the unre-served geopolitical interest aroused from ‘abroad’, as exemplified by the case of French Geography years ago, with a study dedicated to this question (Loyer, 2006).

Among geographical studies, Nel·lo (2013) offered his own somewhat unique take on the “Catalan crisis”, arguing that it had much to do with the effects of the 2008 crisis, which saw many members of the Catalan middle classes embrace independence because they understood that the Spanish Government (or, perhaps, more accurately, the Spanish State as a whole) was not doing anything to help them, rather just the opposite. And, yet, analyses of the electoral geography (including Nel·lo and Gomà, 2018, and Paül i Carril, 2021) fail to bear this out fully, as they do not find a spatial correlation between socioeconomic variables, on the one hand, and electoral behaviour (grouping pro- and non-independent stances), on the other.

Other geographers who have conducted specific analyses that provide a distinct understanding of the causes of the Catalan independence movement include Vicente (2019) and Nogué and de San Eugenio (2020). The former considers that the conflict is due to an ‘antagonism of nationalisms’ (Catalan and Spanish), where reconciliation is impossible. The latter, on the other hand, recognises the civic, participatory and

democratic foundations on which the *procés* is built, disconnected, that is, from more formal party politics. Elsewhere, Olcina (2013), Oliveras i Samitier (2019) and others stress the role played by questions of language and culture as the trigger for the post-2010 “Catalan crisis”. Meanwhile, within the framework of the theorisation of the Geopolitics of Regional Planning (Subra, 2007), Giménez-Capdevila (2008) identifies the massive disruption suffered by the suburban commuter rail network in 2007 — associated, in part, with the disastrous work being carried out on the high-speed train project and in the broader context of the highly deficient Spanish State management of Catalan infrastructure — as a possible trigger of the growing support for independence.

Elsewhere, the analyses of electoral geography carried out by Frago (2019) and Paül i Carril (2021) show that in recent electoral contests there has been a contrast between Catalonia’s two main metropolitan areas (Barcelona and Tarragona), on the one hand, and the rest of the Catalan territory, on the other. In general, support for independence in the latter area is above the average, while support in the two great metropolitan areas falls below. Yet, it should be borne in mind that these metropolitan spaces contribute hundreds of thousands of votes that are key for the *procés*. Likewise, it ought not to be forgotten that, outside these two metropolitan areas, the urban sys-

10. In the past, a marked Catalan nationalistic sentiment, even pro-independence, was evident among the first generations of the SCG. This was true of Casassas (1977, 1991) and, at an earlier date, of Pau Vila. The latter’s writings, included in the anthology edited by Tort (2004), offer little doubt of this. For example, “Now in light of the insistence of the Catalans to reasonably assert *the indisputable right that we have to govern and administer ourselves alone*, now in a generous spirit of brotherhood with the other peoples of Spain, *we are content, instead of the complete freedom that corresponds to us, with autonomy*; [...] the [port] of Barcelona and that of Tarragona [are] [...] the only two ports that really count in our *national* economy. [...] It is a true usurpation, because it must be recognised that the *Spanish State has no right to our ports* [...]. [T]hey are, then, very much ours; therefore, as they are consubstantial with our economy, which is the life of us all, we should be able to dispose of them fully. In the *national interest*, the *Generalitat* must act accordingly” (Vila, 1934, in Tort, 2004: 69–71; italics added). Incidentally, these arguments are similar to those of Giménez-Capdevila (2008) three quarters of a century later in a study of the origins of growing sentiments of independence in the last decade.



tem is particularly dense (Casassas, 1977, 1991; Nel-lo, 2001; Aldomà, 2015), so that we are not dealing with a simple rural/urban divide. Indeed, *comarques* such as Penedès, which is often considered “metropolitan” (Paül i Carril, 2017), are markedly pro-independence in terms of their voting behaviour (see map 19: Distribution of electoral support for independence by basic health areas in the 2017 election).

As mentioned above, a fairly unique geographical contribution is provided by Becat (2021), in a study that seeks to relocate Northern Catalonia — under French sovereignty since the 17th century — within Catalan territory, by describing, for example, its contribution to the *procés*, by providing storage for the ballot boxes that were to be used in the 2017 referendum and which the Spanish authorities sought to confiscate. Becat’s (2021) point of view, together with the geographical gaze — as discussed — from other territories in the same language area as that of the “Catalan crisis”, highlight another issue that is also key in this debate, namely, the deployment from a geopolitical perspective of the Catalan-speaking territories — often referred to as the *Països Catalans* (‘Catalan Countries’) (Rullan and Vives-Miró, 2020), albeit a name that attracts few adherents, especially in the Valencian Country. Without specifically invoking this name, Boira (2011, 2021) has referred on numerous occasions to the consolidation of a Catalan-Valencian corridor as being key for both regions in their efforts to counter the influence of a *radial* Spanish system centred on Madrid. In all circumstances, this is a geopolitical reading subordinated to present-day

Spain, in line with various geographers who maintain that “[a]n independent Catalan republic might be the wish, but it is one that is quite removed from reality” (Oliveras i Samitier, 2019: 54).

Oliveras i Samitier (2019) and Rullan and Vives-Miró (2020) offer a list of possible ways out of the “Catalan crisis”, which range from upholding the *status quo* to independence, passing through various intermediate steps of (con)federalism of the Spanish State. Whatever the outcome, since the Covid-19 crisis — and even before — geographical research has confirmed the consolidation of a Spanish nationalist position as part of a recentralising position that seeks to reconfigure the “Spain of the autonomous communities” introduced with the 1978 Constitution (see, among others, Giménez-Capdevila, 2008; Romero, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2017; Vicente, 2019; Rullan and Vives-Miró, 2020; Paül i Carril, 2021; Boira, 2021; Paül i Carril and Trillo, 2022).

Finally, an issue that bears a close relation to the “Catalan crisis” has emerged in the study of borders, as Paül i Carril and Trillo (2022) report. They refer not only to the present-day international borders, but also to Catalonia’s borders with Aragon and the Valencian Country (internal borders within Spain). This question is a longstanding one in Catalan Geography (Paül i Carril, 2017) and one that the emerging agenda of Border Studies has brought to the forefront once more (Paül i Carril *et al.*, 2017), while it has also gained increasing relevance as a result of the *procés* and its current, or potential, geopolitical fallout. Specific exam-

ples of this academic output include analyses of the creation of a cross-border Euroregion — often seen as emulating the so-called expanded *Països Catalans* or the former Crown of Aragon (Durà and Oliveras González, 2010; García-Álvarez and Trillo, 2013) —, the cooperation established between the autonomous community of Catalonia under Spanish sovereignty and the *département* of the Pyrénées-Orientales — coinciding largely with Northern Catalonia under French sovereignty — (Castañer and Feliu, 2012; Oliveras González, 2013; Berzi, 2017; Paül i Carril *et al.*, 2017; Becat, 2021) and the problems created by the borders between the autonomous community of Catalonia, on the one hand, and those of Aragon and the Valencian Country, on the other (Sancho and Tort, 2012; Tort and Galindo, 2018).

The Global Environmental Crisis and its Impact on Catalonia

An entire block of contributions to Burgueño’s (2021a) new Geography, under the heading “Environmental Emergency”, addresses the global environmental crisis, from which, of course, Catalonia is not immune. Chronologically, this crisis cannot be compared to the three crises analysed up to this point, all of which can be clearly delimited in time, since its origins cannot be pinpointed with any accuracy.¹¹ In Catalan Geography, Boada and Saurí (2002) wrote a key book focused on *global change*, which might well mark

11. Any discussion of the debate concerning the onset of the global environmental change lies outside our remit here. Having said that, a consensus appears to have been reached to the effect that the 18th century represented a point of no return in the acceleration of the anthropic impact on the Earth’s natural systems, although these effects on the environment are clearly observable since, at least, the Neolithic and many of the indicators employed to speak in terms of the Anthropocene did not begin to rise dramatically until well into the 20th century —the ‘Great Acceleration’ (Castell and Terrades, 2019).



the awakening of interest in this matter. These authors illustrated the magnitude of the planetary change induced by mankind by resorting to studies previously conducted in Catalonia, for example, in the Montseny natural park. In the words of Ribas (2021: 252), recorded in Burgueño's (2021a) new Geography "by global environmental change we understand the alterations caused by human activities to the functioning of the natural systems, the effects of which cannot be assigned to one specific location, but rather they affect the whole of the Earth".

It is significant to point out here that Javier Martín-Vide, one of Catalonia's most highly renowned geographers, was to change his opinion in the early 2000s about the causes of the variation in climate recorded in preceding decades. Having previously maintained that it was attributable to natural climate variability,

he was to recognise that it is a consequence of anthropic action (Martín-Vide, 2007). His shift in thinking coincided with the period between the third and fourth reports issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), that is, between 2001 and 2007, when the claim that climate change is "likely" caused by human action shifted to a recognition of the fact that this was a "very likely" explanation. In fact, from the fourth report onwards (2007), Martín-Vide has participated in the IPCC reports and coordinated the third report on climate change in Catalonia (Martín-Vide, 2016), the conclusions of which he examines (Martín-Vide, 2021) in his contribution to the book edited by Burgueño (2021a).

Martín-Vide (2016, 2021) documents that the climate of Catalonia is currently warmer than a century ago, with statistically significant rates of temperature



increase, corresponding to a “very high level of confidence”. This results in a greater recurrence of tropical (minimum temperature of $>20^{\circ}\text{C}$) and torrid nights ($>25^{\circ}\text{C}$) in summer, particularly in cities, with a notable contribution from the urban heat island. On the other hand, rainfall does not show a statistically significant trend during the same period, despite the fact that water needs are greater because the temperature rise increases evapotranspiration. Looking to the future, Martín-Vide (2016, 2021) and López-Bustins and Martín-Vide (2020) indicate that climate projections foresee marked increases in temperature, even if global emissions of greenhouse gases decrease — something that is not occurring but, if it were to occur, the inertia of the climate system would not facilitate a direct change in the trend either. The climate models also predict a reduction in annual precipitation, with greater annual and interannual variability and a consequent increase in droughts.

As Martín-Vide (2007) explains, the atmosphere is fully interrelated with the hydrosphere, the lithosphere, the biosphere, the cryosphere and the socioeconomic system, so that climate change interacts and has effects on these other five components. Summarising the research carried out on this crisis, if we adhere to the sequence adopted by Burgueño (2021a), the first aspect to consider is hydrology, the focus of the study by Farguella and Pavón (2021). On the one hand, these authors show how rates of river discharge are tending to fall, largely because the increase in forested areas traps or intercepts a good part of the precipitation — as occurs in the Montnegre mountains, according to Otero *et al.* (2011). On the other hand, Farguella and Pavón (2021) observe an increase in the recurrence of flooding, a phenomenon studied by other geographers, including Aldomà (2007) and Ribas *et al.* (2020). This trend correlates with an intensification of rainfall irregularity, but also with an increase in vulnerability.

Here, it is worth mentioning that in 2020, the SCG journal, *Treballs*, published a special issue, coordinated by Ribas and Saurí (2020), dedicated to Storm Gloria, an extreme meteorological event that occurred in January of the same year. Much of the work focused on floods, for example, Pavón and Panareda (2020) studied the Tordera basin and Ribas (2020) the Ter basin. The special issue also contains a number of studies based on what is strictly climate research that debate whether Gloria constitutes a short- or medium-term episode of climate change (Barriendos and Barriendos, 2020; López-Bustins and Martín-Vide, 2020), while other contributions examine the storm's impact on coastal areas (Blay and Àvila, 2020; Pintó *et al.*, 2020; Santasusagna and Tort, 2020).

Another aspect that tends to correlate with climate change is the coastal regression being experienced in Catalonia due, among other phenomena, to the rise in sea level attributable to the melting of planetary ice masses. This process is, in turn, associated with the major artificialisation of the coastline and a decrease in the sediment levels provided by the rivers, due, among other factors, to the building of reservoirs. Pintó (2021) focuses on these processes, reporting evidence of the regression of the three main Catalan deltas: the Ebro, Llobregat and Tordera. Yet, Pavón and Panareda (2020) explain how the latter actually grew due to the effects of Storm Gloria. Pintó *et al.* (2020) also refer to this delta and extend their reflections to the whole of the Catalan coast. Blay and Àvila (2020) specifically analyse the case of the regression of the Ebro Delta, a particularly heart-wrenching account. It should be noted, here, that a number of geographers, including Josep Pintó, have participated in joint studies led by experts from other disciplines, the case, for example,

of the third of the reports on nature in Catalonia entitled *Natura, ús o abús?* [*Nature, use or abuse?*] (Folch *et al.*, 2019), in which the chapter on the coastline was contributed by Pintó *et al.* (2019).

Turning to the cryosphere, studies here connect with a deep-rooted line of Geomorphological research in Catalan Geography (Oliva, 2018). To give a recent relevant example, Oliva *et al.* (2019) analysed the almost absolute contraction of the cryosphere in the Pyrenees, correlating it with global environmental change.

Mention has already been made of a number of studies that report the increase in forest area in Catalonia and how this affects runoff (the case of Otero *et al.*, 2011 and Farguell and Pavón, 2021). In Burgueño's (2021a) new Geography, Panareda (2021), Pèlachs and Vila-Subirós (2021) and Úbeda (2021) also address this problem. These geographers have vast experience in the study of the environment, especially its vegetation, from different perspectives. One that we wish to highlight here is the increase in, and also the *deseasonalisation*, of forest fires due to climate change, with an increase in the intensity of the large fires that affect wooded areas, with more and more episodes occurring out-of-season in autumn, this despite the fact that it is the season marked by the highest rates of rainfall in most of Catalonia and, therefore, when there is most humidity available (López-Bustins and Martín-Vide, 2020). Indeed, if we correlate forest fires and torrential equinoctial rains, it is clear that the intensity of flood events increases.

Panareda (2021), Pèlachs and Vila-Subirós (2021) and Úbeda (2021) also all confirm changes in biodiversity and the landscape — in particular, the reduction of areas dedicated to crops and of agroforestry mosaics, which has consequences not only strictly for

the environment, but also for food security in Catalonia and its sustainability (Paül i Carril, 2009). Here, studies confirm that protectionist policies and the proactive management of nature and landscapes have been limited, despite the fact that various geographers have been particularly active in such efforts. This is the case of Joan Nogué, as illustrated by the vast literature produced during his years heading the Landscape Observatory (2005-2017), above all the seven landscape catalogues prepared under the auspices of the *Generalitat*¹² (Nogué *et al.*, 2016). The importance of Joan Nogué's research is also evident in his contribution to an edited volume on the Anthropocene, directed by Castell and Terrades (2019), in which he analyses the state of Catalan landscapes (Nogué, 2019).



The global environmental crisis has initiated a profound reconsideration of the need to change the energy model, a change that involves a reduction in

the use of fossil fuels and, in parallel, the promotion of renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power. In this discussion, Saladié Gil and Saladié Borraz (2021) ask whether such a global energy transition is actually taking place, supported by a radical reset of political thinking, but they find the answer to be negative. However, this is by no means a new issue if we consider that the conflicts centred on the expansion of wind farms, especially in the Terres de l'Ebre (the southernmost Catalan region), have been raging since the beginning of the present century, as reported at the time in the edited work coordinated by Nel-lo (2003) and, more recently, in the specific study undertaken by Saladié Gil (2018).

Conclusions

As we have seen at the beginning of our discussion here, the dust jacket of the book coordinated by Burgueño (2021a) defines the current situation as a period of “multi-crises” and Catalan Geography has certainly not been immune to these upheavals at this the start of the 21st century. Indeed, it has had to respond in real time to the multifaceted manifestations of the crises throughout the geographical region, including floods, elections, lock-downs and evictions, to mention, in reverse order, significant examples of each of them as discussed in the preceding paragraphs. We can, as such, conclude that Catalan Geography has been able to overcome the usual geographical preference for the recent past (Haggett, 1975), which Mendizábal

12. From the Landscape Catalogue of the Terres de Lleida, in 2008, to that of Central Catalonia, in 2016. The eighth catalogue, dedicated to the Penedès, is currently under preparation, and re-plans a region which to date has been the subject of three previously approved catalogues by the *Generalitat*. See <http://www.catpaisatge.net/cat/catalogs.php> (accessed on March 2022).

(2013) summed up with the claim (or curse, perhaps) that “there is no Geography that is not Historical Geography”. In fact, as we have seen in this review, many studies have been published the same year, or the year after, the events occurred: Storm Gloria, political demonstrations, the gentrification of city neighbourhoods, etc. We have even reported climatic or demographic forecasts — to give two highly credible examples — which show that Geography has acquired the capacity to make future projections. Likewise, as we have also shown, many geographers have been involved in the discipline’s applied dimension, including that of politics, and have participated in decision-making in areas that range from landscapes, city neighbourhoods and housing to river basins, to mention again the examples described in the preceding pages.

However, this ability to conduct geographical analyses of Catalonia that has developed in the course of the last decade should not be separated from the sustained tradition enjoyed by Geography as a consolidated science in Catalonia. Hence the constant references made, as facilitated by Bertran (2021), to the history of the SCG, which is the history of the geographic discipline in Catalonia. Similarly, we should stress that many of the considerations made about the current crises refer to works by previous generations of geographers, for example, by many of those who participated in the *Geografia de Catalunya* by Solé i Sabarís (1958-1974), reflecting on such concerns as spatial imbalances, spatial and regional organisation, borders, evolution of vegetation cover, etc.

According to Oliveras i Samitier (2020) and Bertran (2021), the vehicle of expression of the first generation of SCG geographers was the regional monograph conducted at the scale of the *comarca*. One of

the first and best known was a study of La Cerdanya (Vila, 1926), later analysed by Nel-lo (1984), Tort (2004, 2019) and Oliveras i Samitier (2020). Indeed, Solé i Sabarís and Vila (1964) would return to the geography of this *comarca* four decades later and update its contents. In Paül i Carril *et al.* (2017), we argue that this *comarca* constitutes a highly convenient “laboratory” for examining the evolution of the geography, as well as the Geography, of Catalonia. Today, this *comarca* is dependent on winter tourism and the property sector and, as a result, it has been hit hard by the post-2008 crisis, with a property market that has become dissociated from the territory itself. It is also suffering the problems of sustainability faced by the snow sports sector due to the global environmental crisis. In addition, its cross-border character has led to it being the object of practices of cooperation, including a cross-border landscape plan (Nogué and Sala, 2016) and the only truly cross-border hospital in Europe (Berzi, 2017; Paül i Carril *et al.*, 2017), which has adopted fairly unique management practices during the Covid-19 pandemic, a crisis characterised elsewhere by the strengthening of the borders between the Member States of the European Union (Galindo *et al.*, 2022; Paül i Carril and Trillo, 2022). Indeed, La Cerdanya has been one of the main scenarios for this crisis, at least in the media, due to the massive arrival of those living in Barcelona to take up residence in their second homes, despite restrictions on mobility. Nor should we forget the geopolitical role that this *comarca* has played in the peculiar deployment of the Northern and Southern *Catalonias* (Becat, 2021), a question that Vila himself (1926) had, in his way, earlier addressed. In short, thanks to this unique “laboratory”, the continuity between

tradition and current research in the Geography of Catalonia is made patent.

At the present juncture, the current political-administrative map, and the mental framework of the nation-states that have determined it, appears to hold sway in Catalan Geography. Indeed, with the exception of the aforementioned chapter dedicated to Northern Catalonia (Becat, 2021), the other Catalan-speaking territories (the Valencian Country, the Balearic Islands, Andorra, the *Franja* of eastern Aragon and L'Alguer in Sardinia) are as good as absent from the discussions included in Burgueño (2021a). Nor do they get a mention in their role as neighbours of Catalonia. However, the vocation of the SCG, in keeping with that of the IEC, is to protect and to take a broader perspective on all of these areas, in line with the best Geography of one of the classic geographers in the history of the SCG according to Bertran (2021): that is, Deffontaines and his essay on *La Méditerranée catalane* (1975).

Although the Geography of the incipient SCG produced a *Resum de Geografia de Catalunya* [*A Brief Geography of Catalonia*] by Vila (1928–1935, reissued



by the SCG in 2003 with a prologue by Tort, 2003), we would have to wait for the *Geografia de Catalunya* edited by Solé i Sabarís (1958–1974) to have a monographic work specifically conceived as such, among other reasons, because Vila (1928–1935) divided his Geography in three major regions — coastal and

pre-coastal, the Central Depression and the Pyrenees/Pre-Pyrenees — and, therefore, he did not provide a global overview of the territory of Catalonia. Since then, the Geographies that have been produced (for example, the work edited by Majoral, 2002), have adopted approaches and include contents that coincide with those of Solé i Sabarís (1958–1974). In contrast, the work of Burgueño (2021a), which we have reviewed closely here, has involved a reorganisation of the classic sequence of contents of a Geography of Catalonia, witness for example the interpretation made by Nel-lo (2021) of the five “territorial challenges” that Catalonia faces and which we have listed in the introduction to this contribution, and the organisation of the edited work in five major blocks: public healthcare issues, the economic impact of the Covid-19 crisis, the environmental emergency, urban conflicts and the (geo)political situation. We think that this innovation responds to the adaptation that Geography has undergone with respect to this period of “multi-crises”, which we have focused on here in our discussion of four different, albeit interrelated, crises. However, it is not, we believe, entirely appropriate to consider it a *new Geography*, as Burgueño’s (2021a) title suggests — if anything a *renewed Geography* — given that the work continues to be rooted in a well-established tradition (Bertran, 2021).

4

A SELECTION OF MAPS
OF *THE NEW GEOGRAPHY*
OF *POST-COVID CATALONIA*



A Selection of Maps of *The New Geography of Post-COVID Catalonia*

The following 20 maps have been selected from a total of 60 published in the book *La nova Geografia de la Catalunya postcovid* [*The New Geography of Post-COVID Catalonia*] (2021), some of which are cited in the previous chapters, their respective legends having been translated into English.

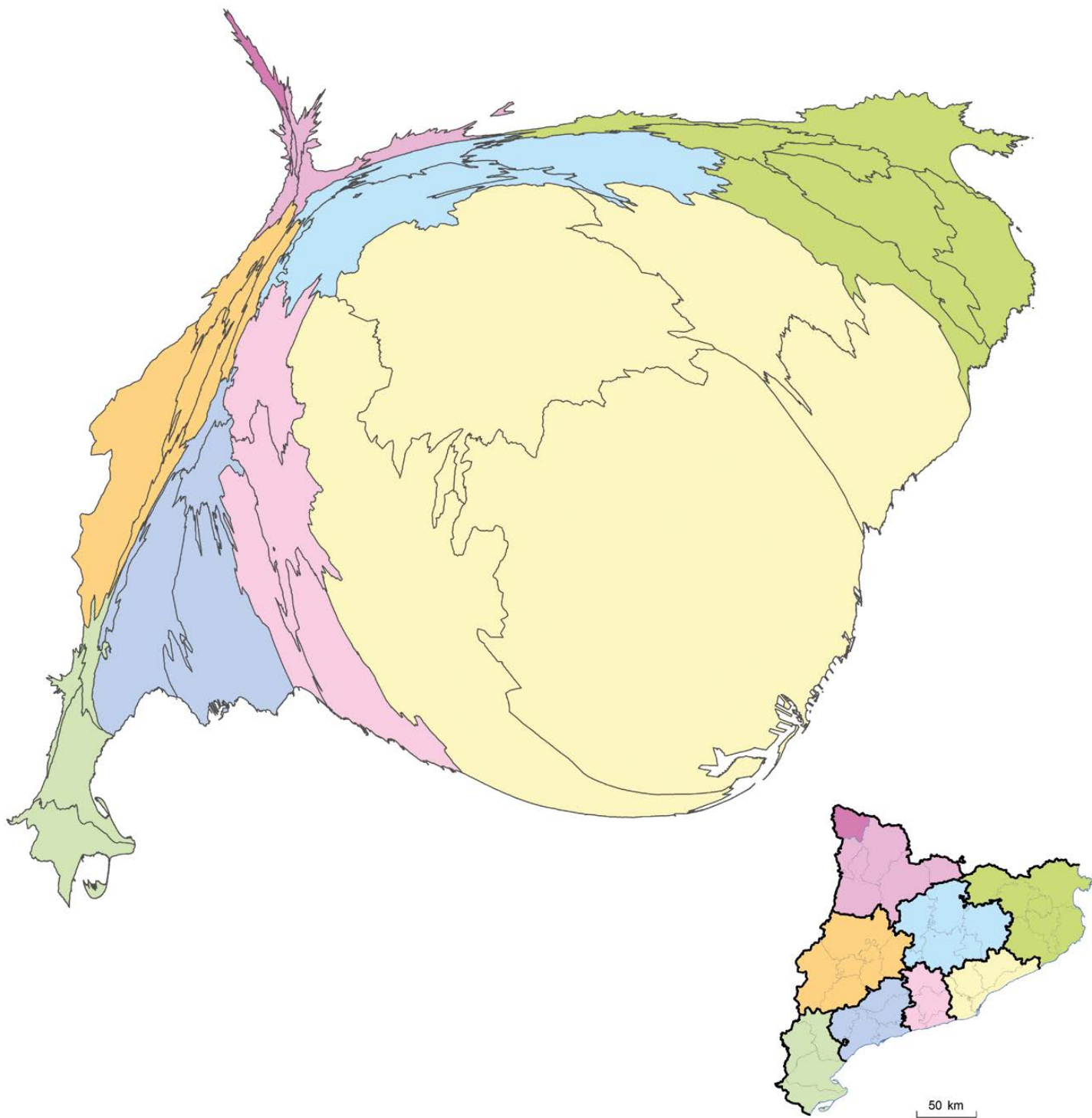
Their selection has been based on two goals: their current relevance and their transcendence in providing an accurate vision of Catalonia's territory today from a sufficiently broad spectrum while illustrating some of the specific themes discussed in the earlier chapters.

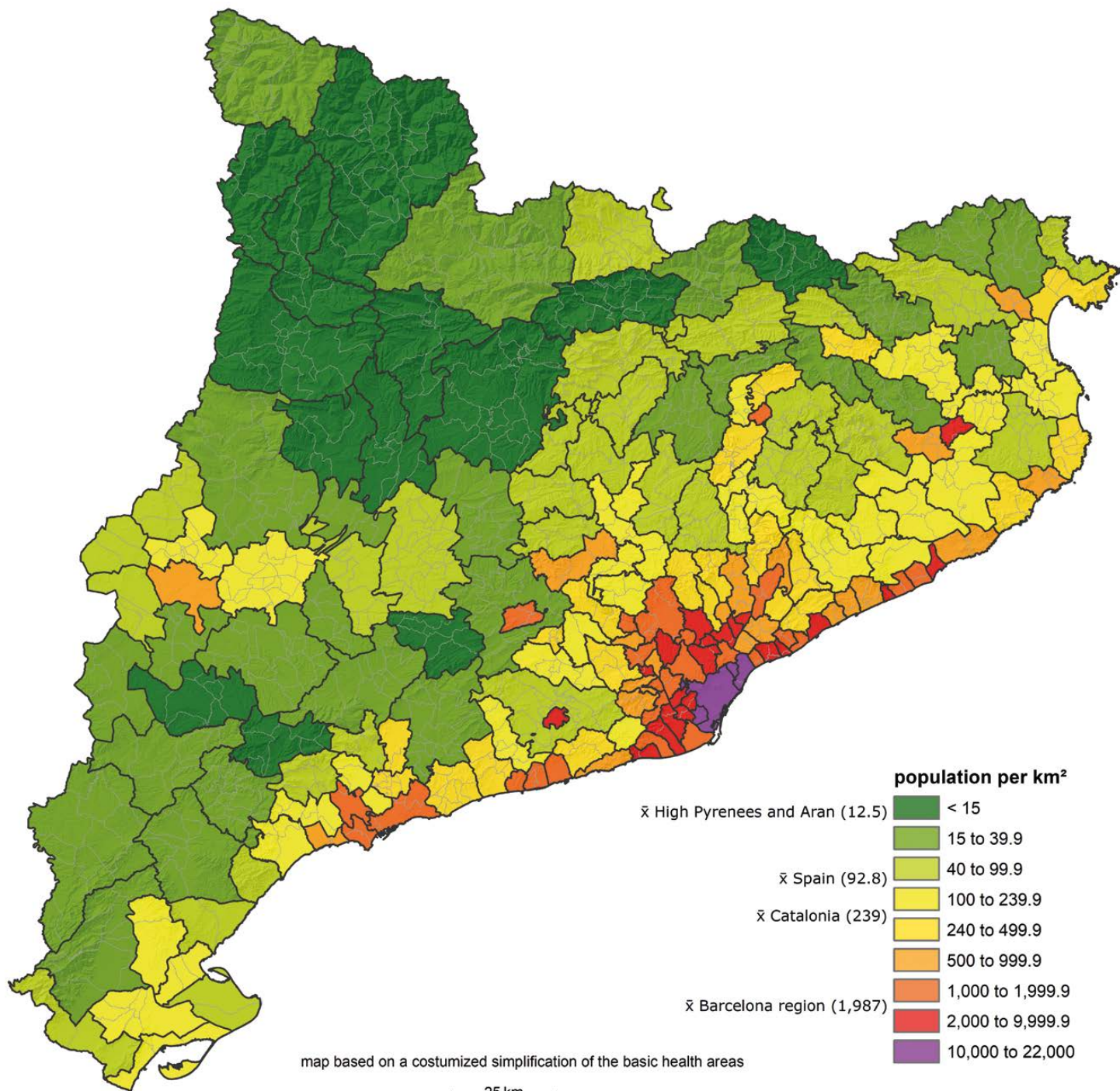
The maps were produced by the Cartography and SIG Service of the University of Lleida, under the direction of Dr. Jesús Burgueño.

List of maps

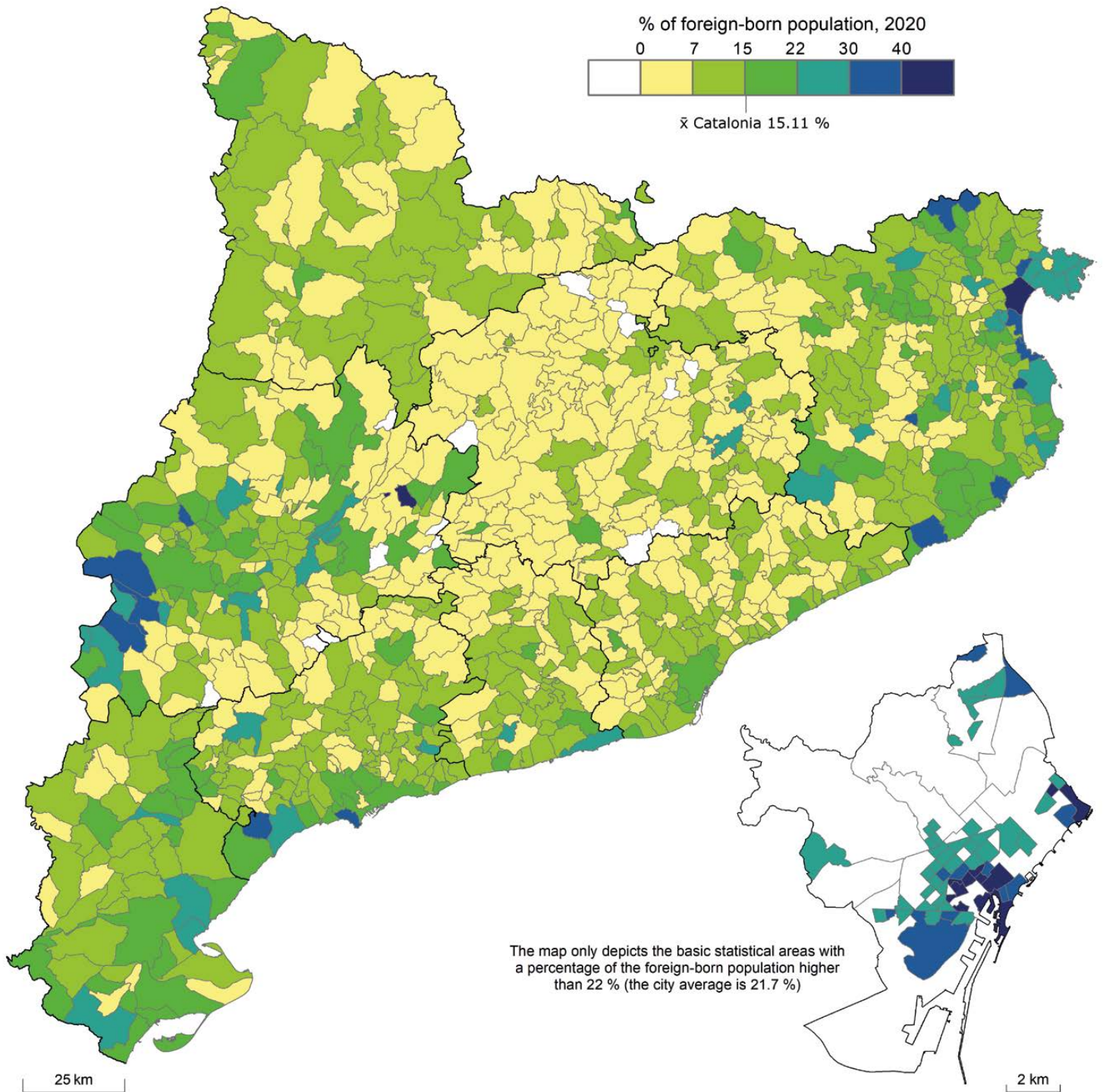
1. Population cartogram
2. Population density
3. Foreign born population
4. Differences in unemployment between women and men
5. Railway network and metropolitan transport authority
6. Main crop groups
7. Synthetic indicators of demographic and economic dynamics
8. Industry workers
9. Shopping malls
10. Exports
11. Extreme Heat
12. Hydrography
13. Ebre Delta topography
14. Protected sites
15. Landscape units
16. Land use
17. Energy production and transport
18. Income level of taxpayers: income tax
19. Independence movement
20. Travel time in relation to Barcelona

1 POPULATION CARTOGRAM

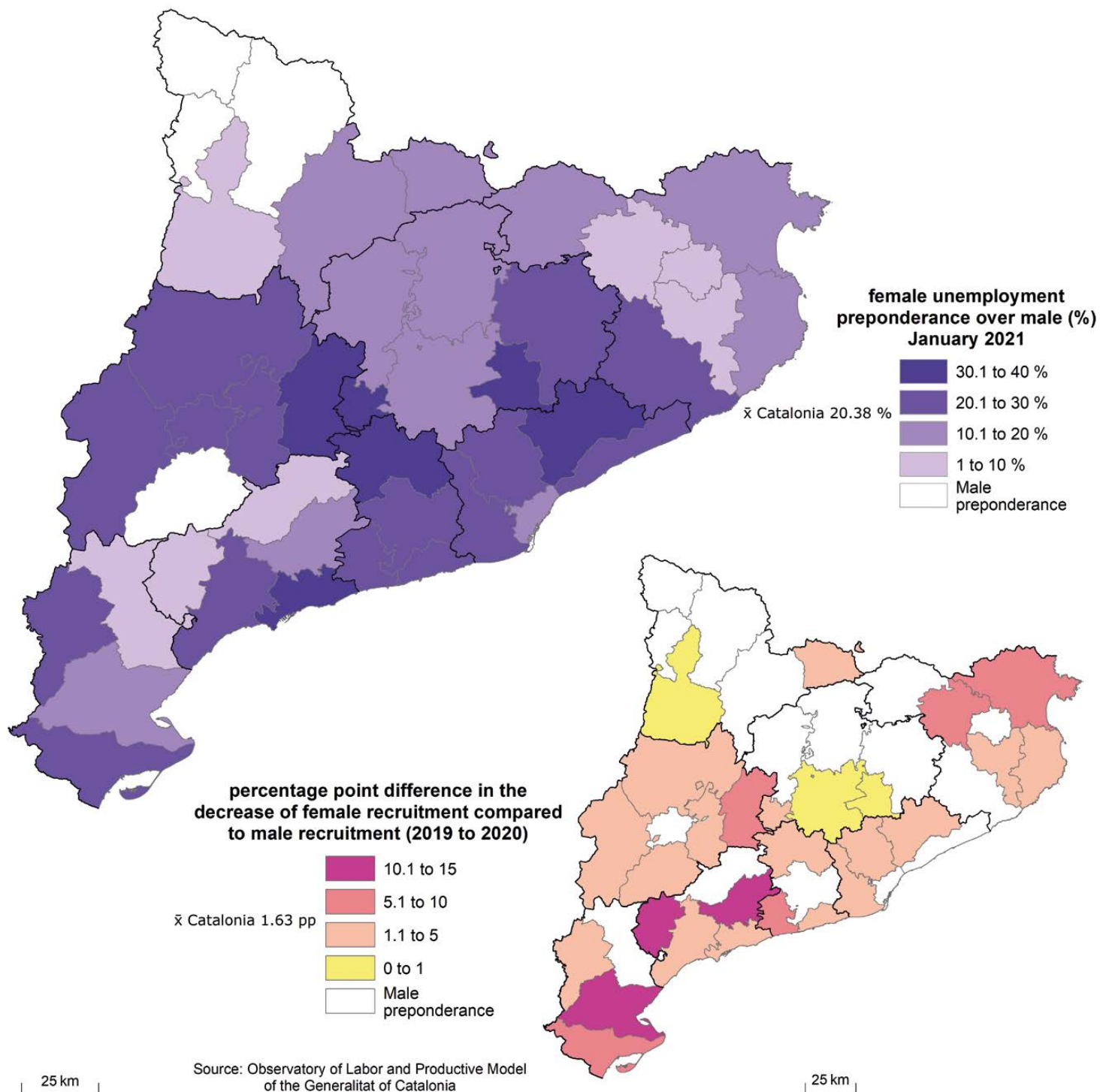




3 FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION



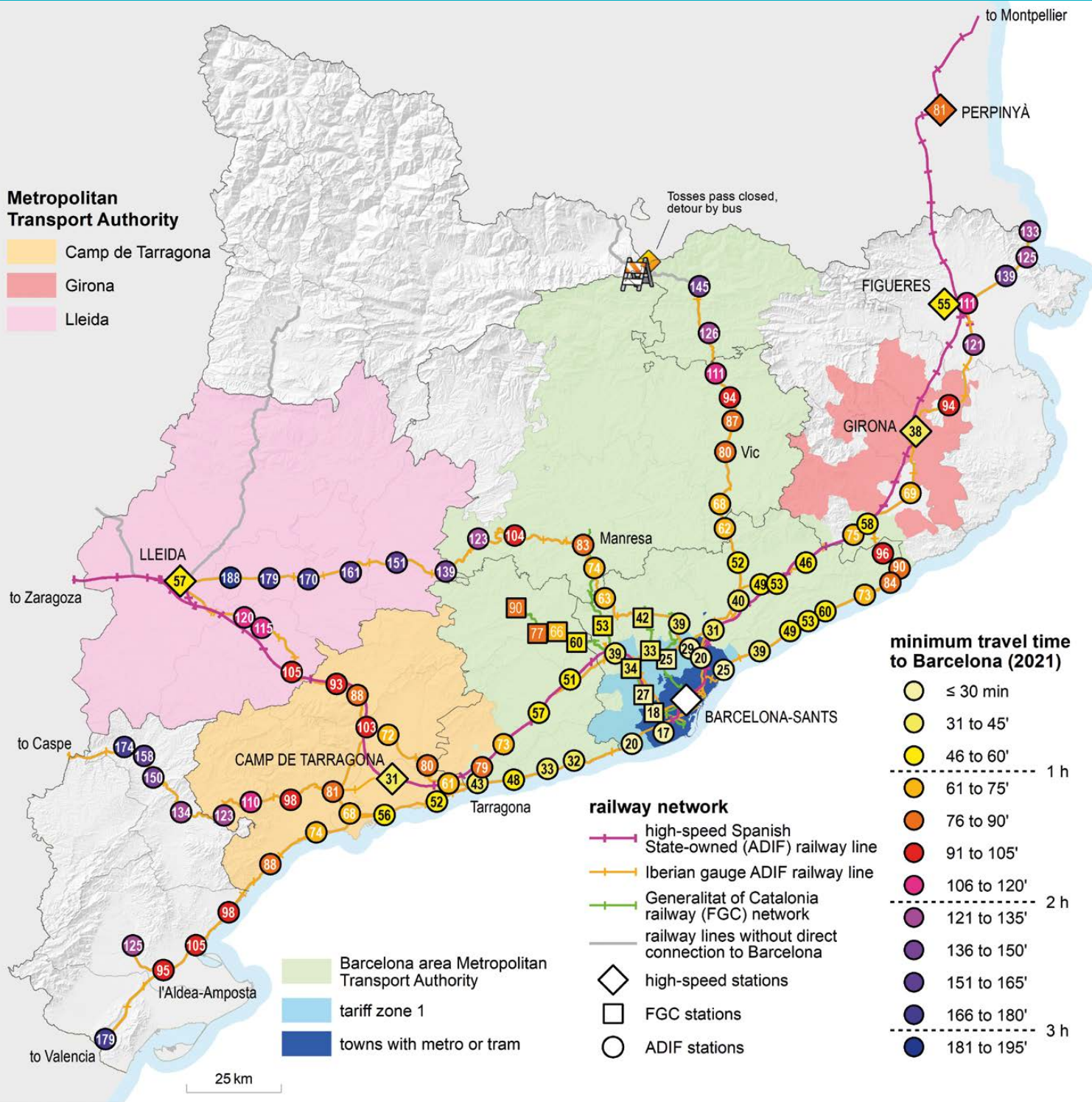
4 DIFFERENCES IN UNEMPLOYMENT BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN



5 RAILWAY NETWORK AND METROPOLITAN TRANSPORT AUTHORITY

Metropolitan Transport Authority

- Camp de Tarragona
- Girona
- Lleida



minimum travel time to Barcelona (2021)

- ≤ 30 min
- 31 to 45'
- 46 to 60'
- 61 to 75'
- 76 to 90'
- 91 to 105'
- 106 to 120'
- 121 to 135'
- 136 to 150'
- 151 to 165'
- 166 to 180'
- 181 to 195'

railway network

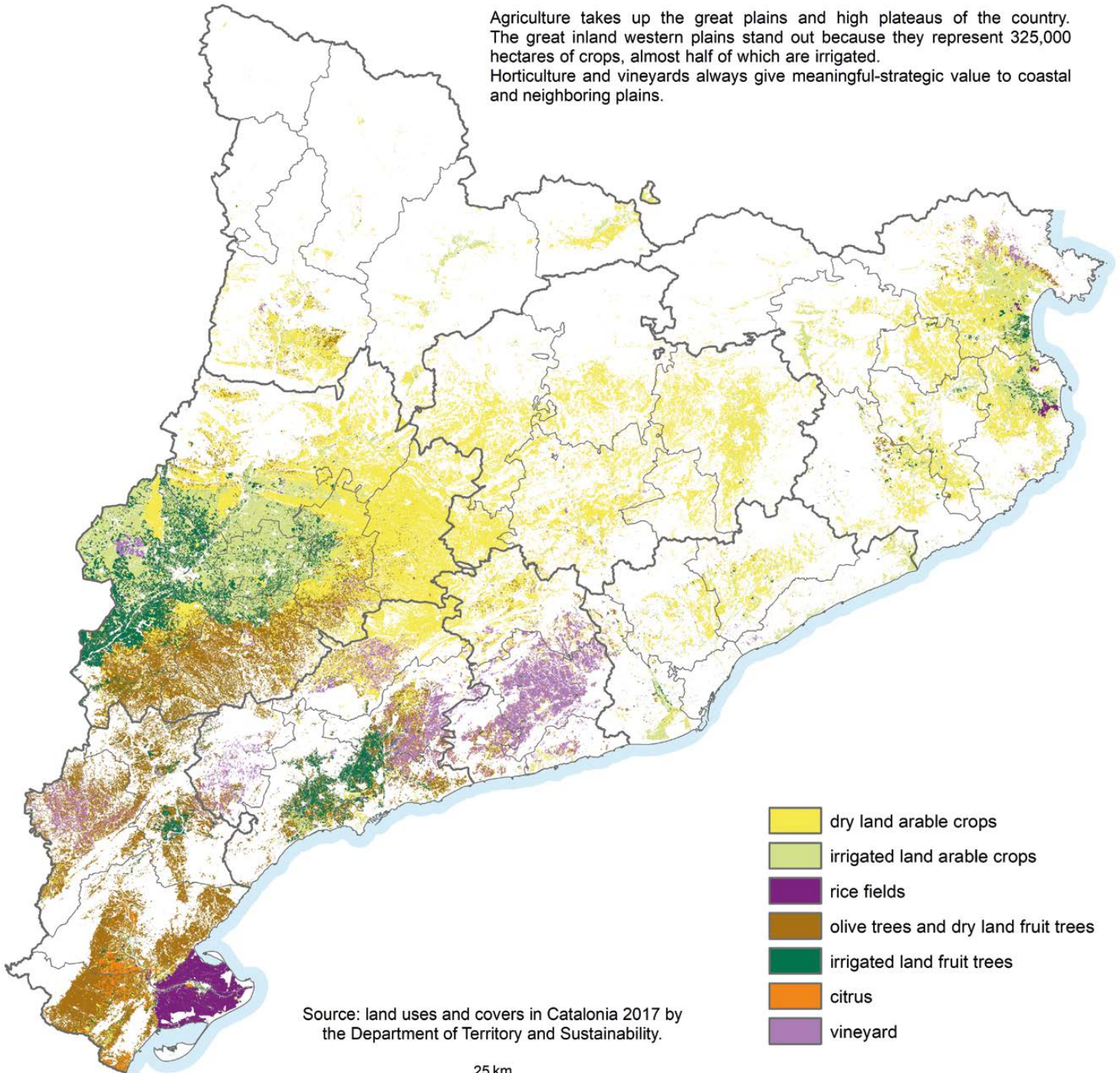
- high-speed Spanish State-owned (ADIF) railway line
- Iberian gauge ADIF railway line
- Generalitat of Catalonia railway (FGC) network
- railway lines without direct connection to Barcelona
- high-speed stations
- FGC stations
- ADIF stations

- Barcelona area Metropolitan Transport Authority
- tariff zone 1
- towns with metro or tram

25 km

6 MAIN CROP GROUPS

Agriculture takes up the great plains and high plateaus of the country. The great inland western plains stand out because they represent 325,000 hectares of crops, almost half of which are irrigated. Horticulture and vineyards always give meaningful-strategic value to coastal and neighboring plains.

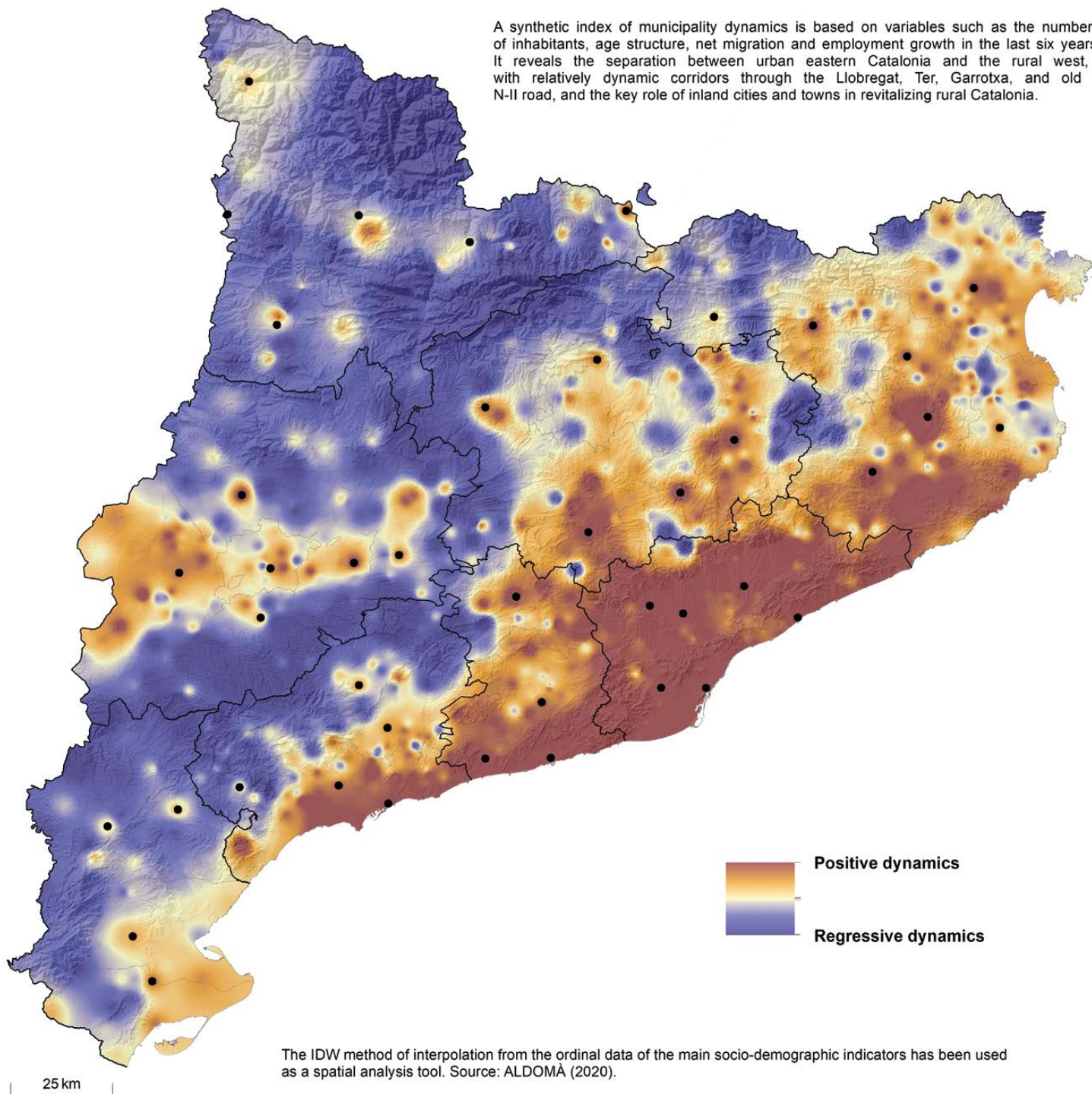


Source: land uses and covers in Catalonia 2017 by the Department of Territory and Sustainability.

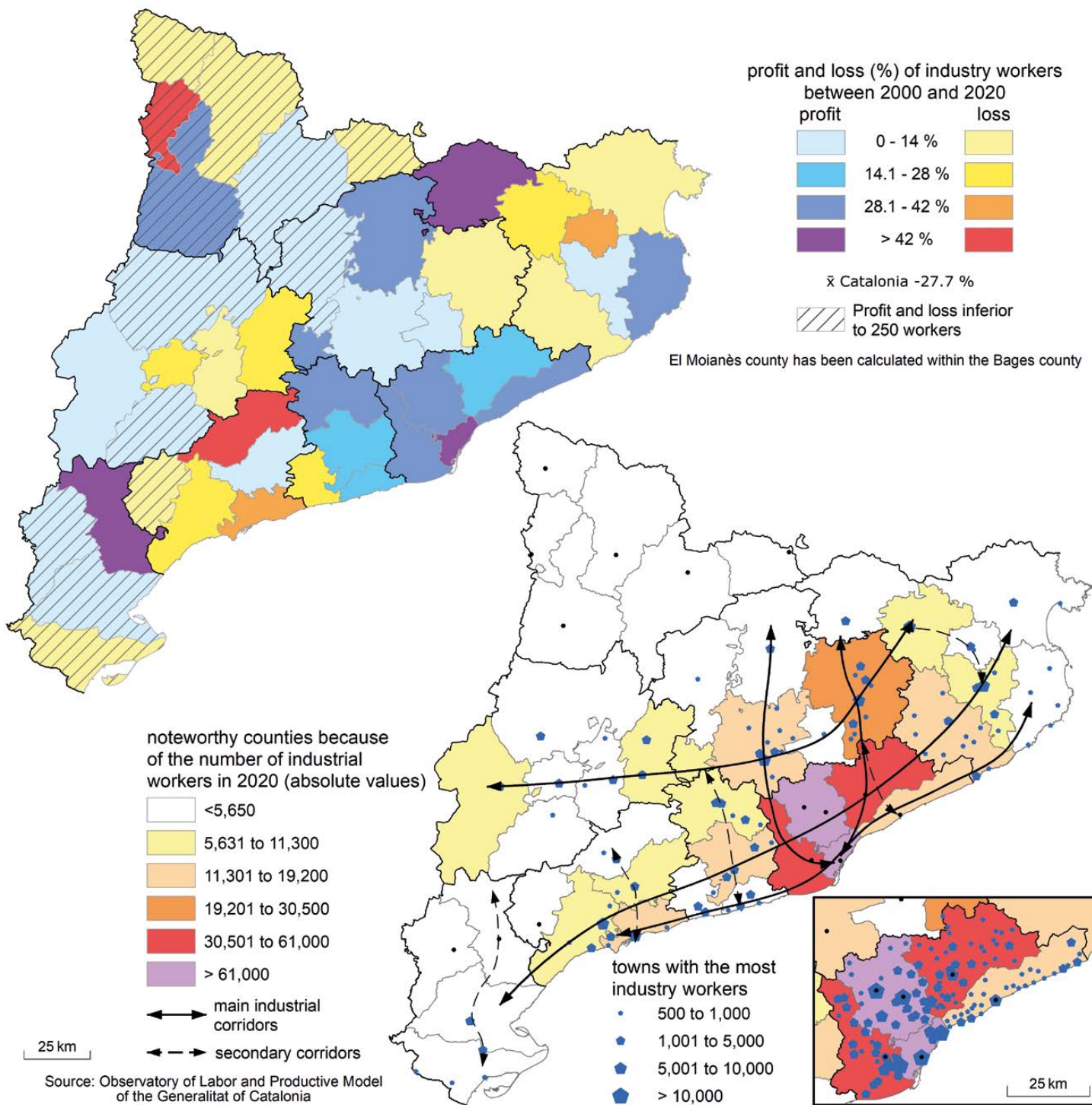
25 km

7 SYNTHETIC INDICATORS OF DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC DYNAMICS

A synthetic index of municipality dynamics is based on variables such as the number of inhabitants, age structure, net migration and employment growth in the last six years. It reveals the separation between urban eastern Catalonia and the rural west, with relatively dynamic corridors through the Llobregat, Ter, Garrotxa, and old N-II road, and the key role of inland cities and towns in revitalizing rural Catalonia.

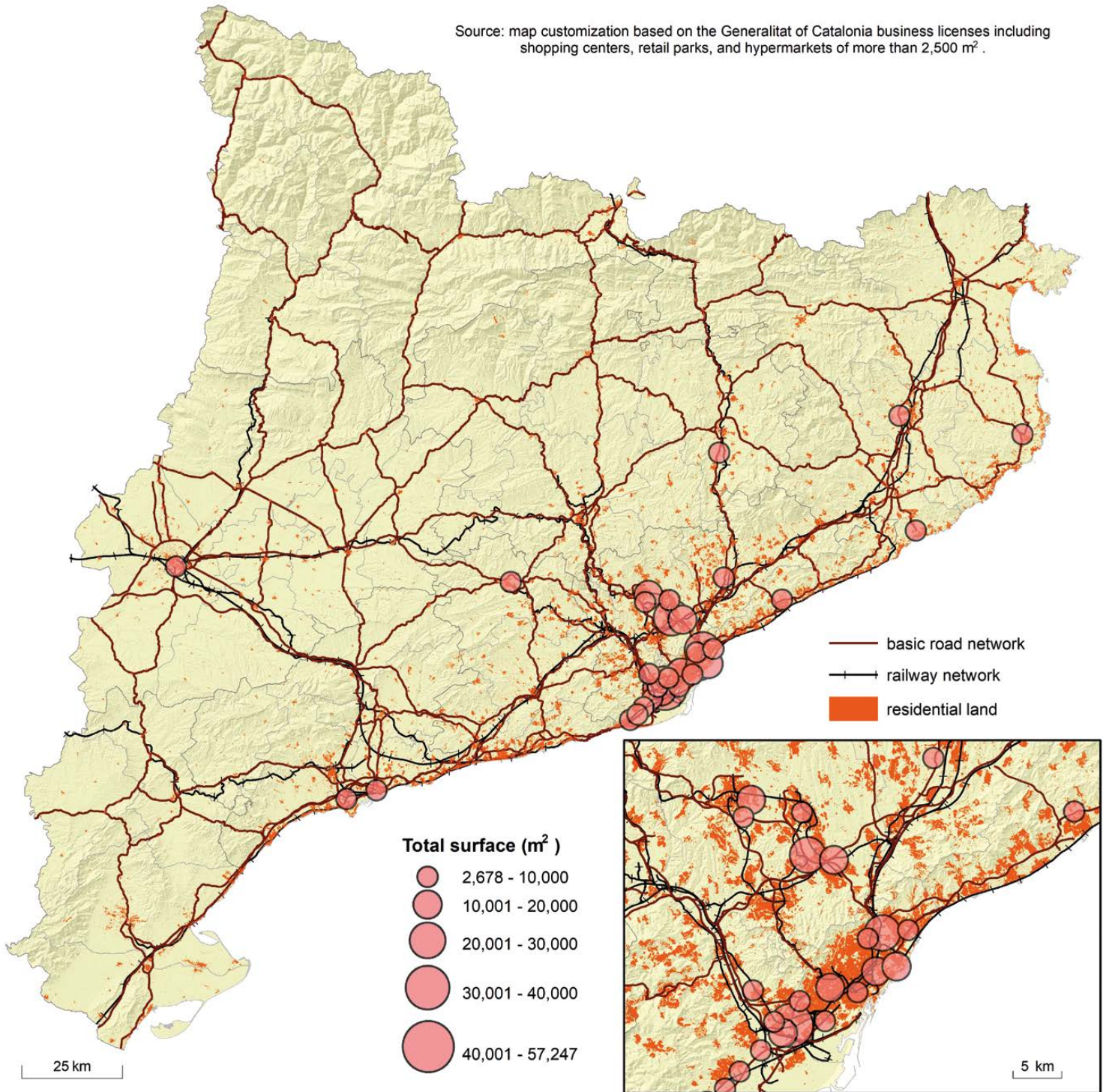


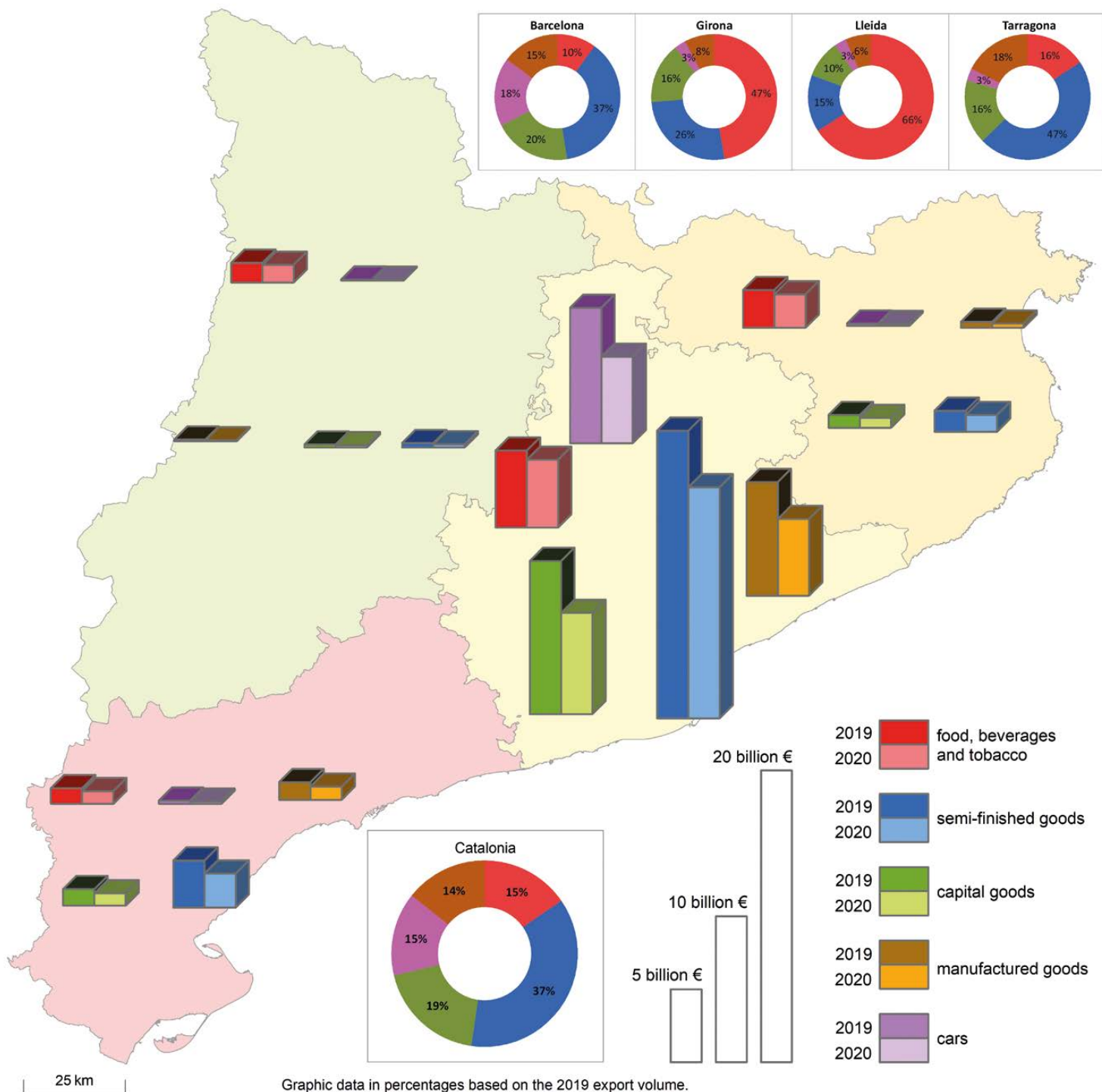
The IDW method of interpolation from the ordinal data of the main socio-demographic indicators has been used as a spatial analysis tool. Source: ALDOMÀ (2020).



9 SHOPPING MALLS

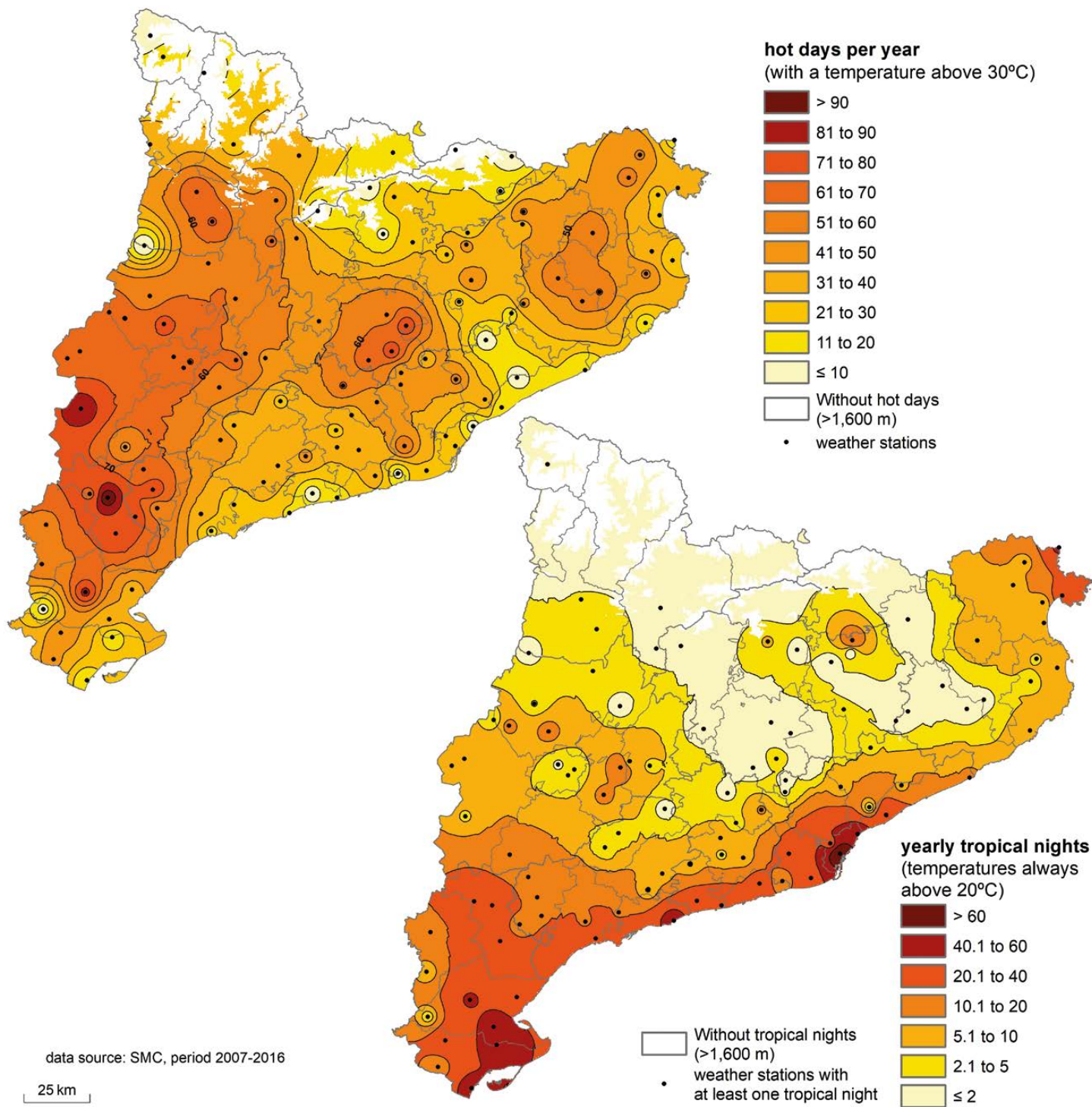
Source: map customization based on the Generalitat of Catalonia business licenses including shopping centers, retail parks, and hypermarkets of more than 2,500 m².

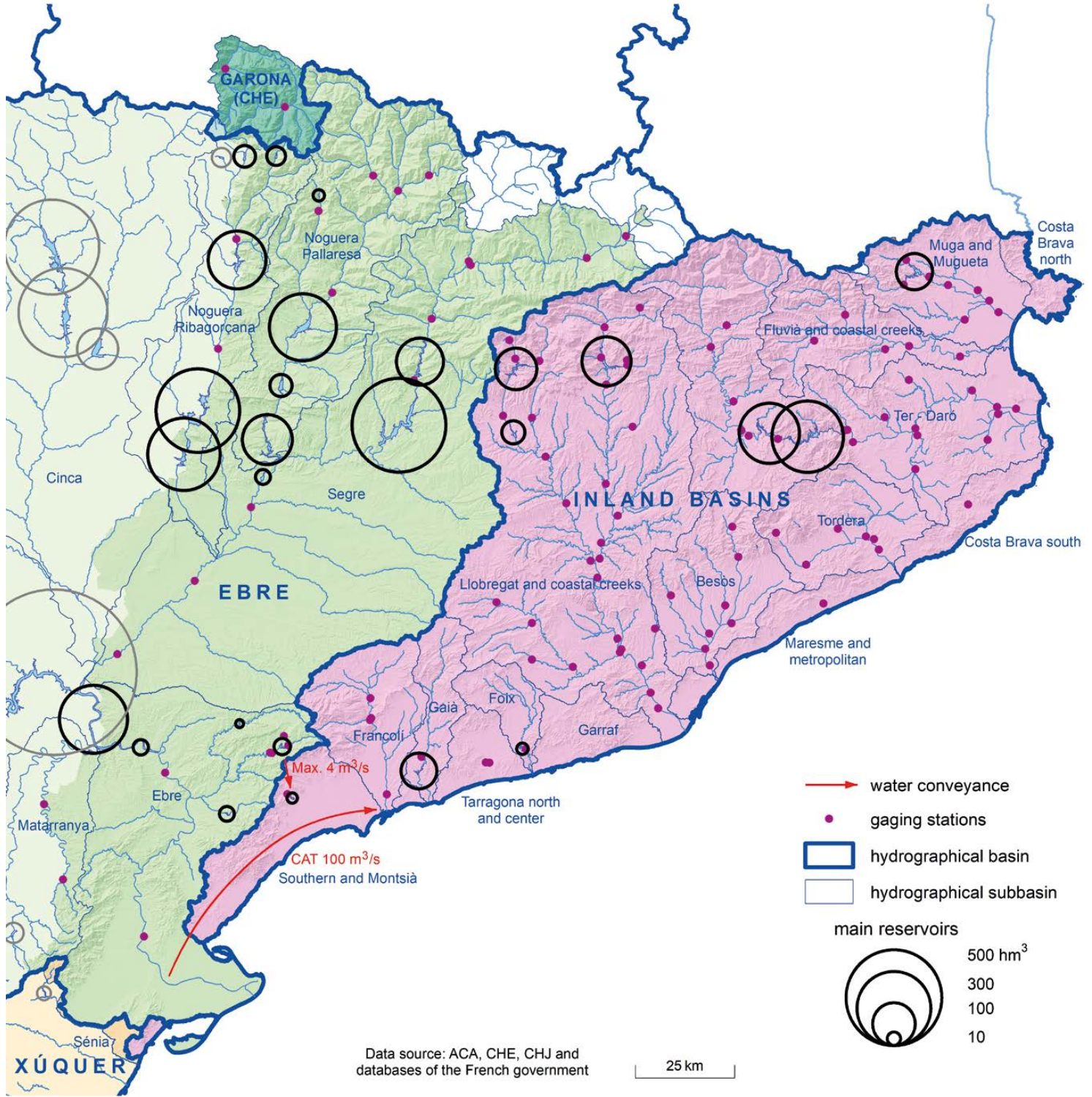




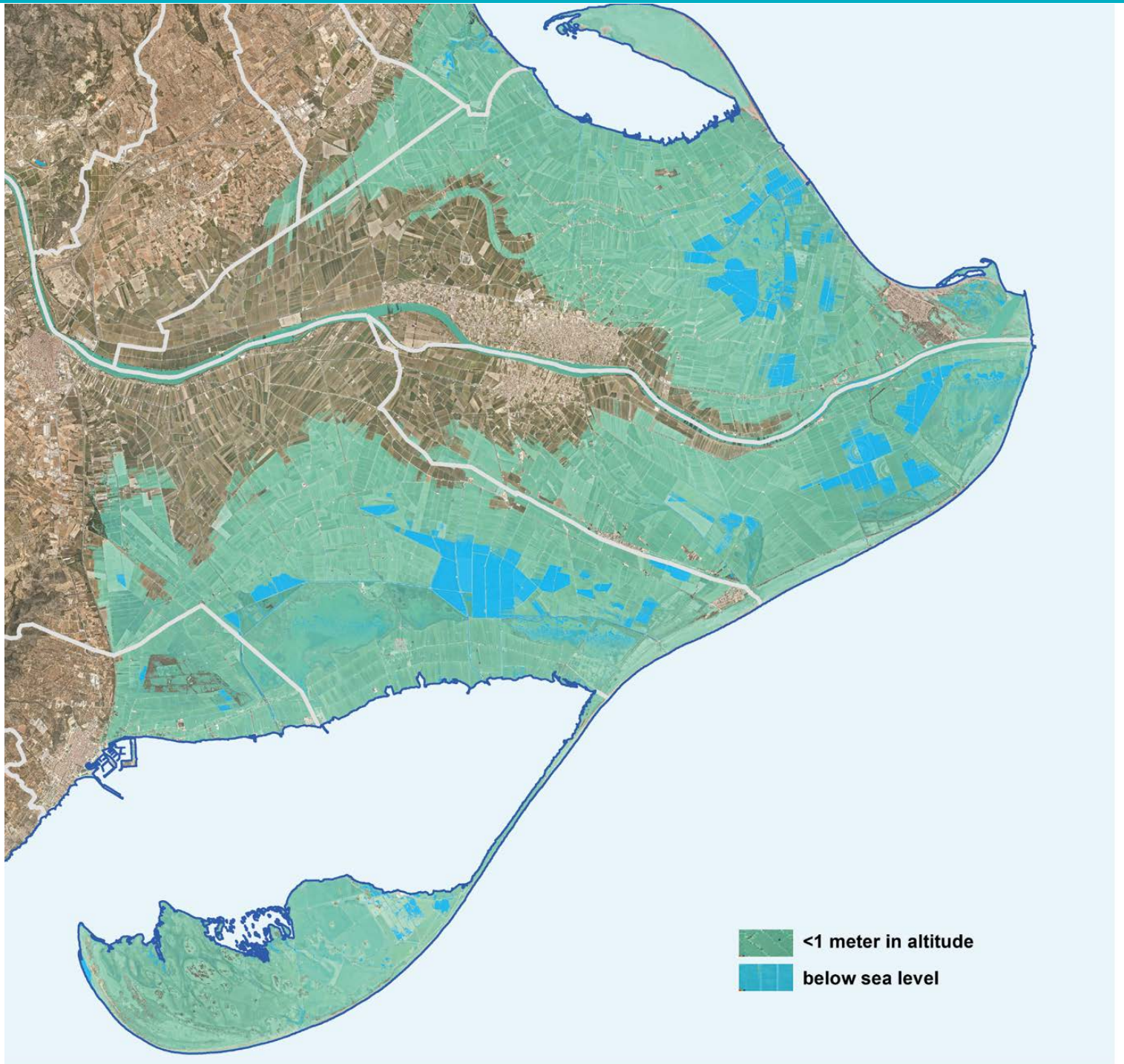
Graphic data in percentages based on the 2019 export volume.

11 EXTREME HEAT














13 EBRE DELTA TOPOGRAPHY



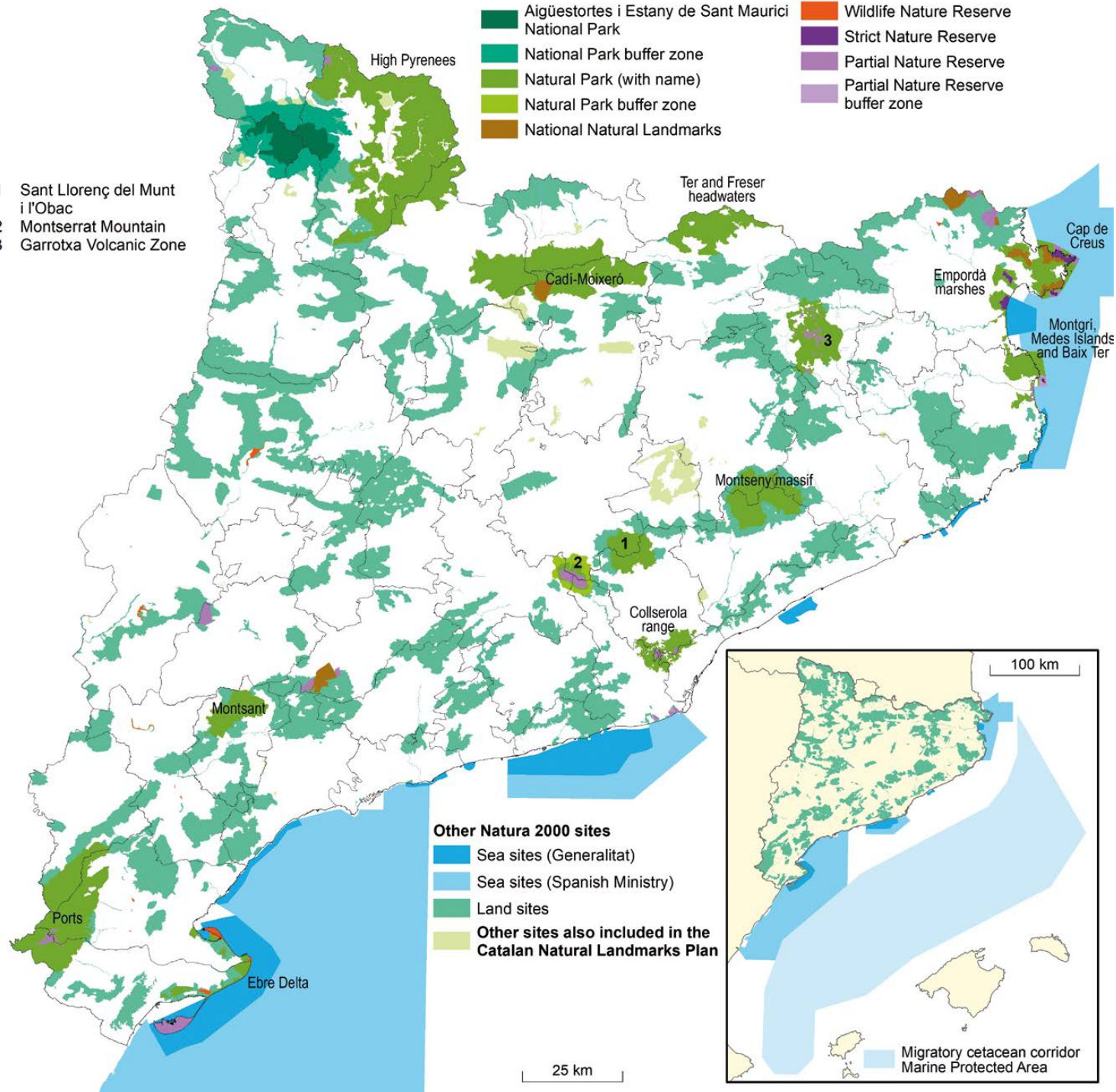
2 km

Source: Orthophoto 2016 and land elevation model 2x2m, ICGC.

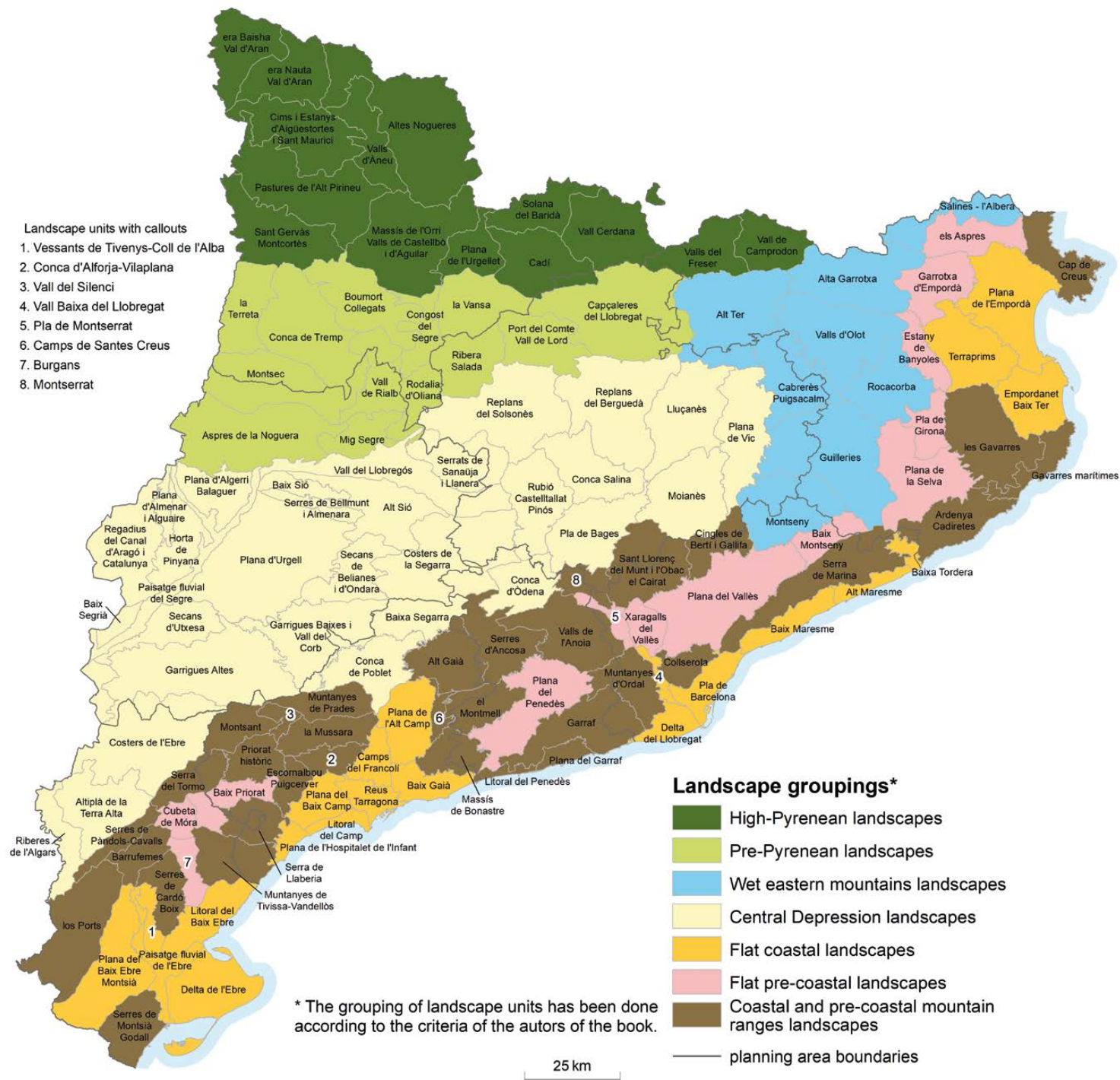
Specially Protected Nature Sites

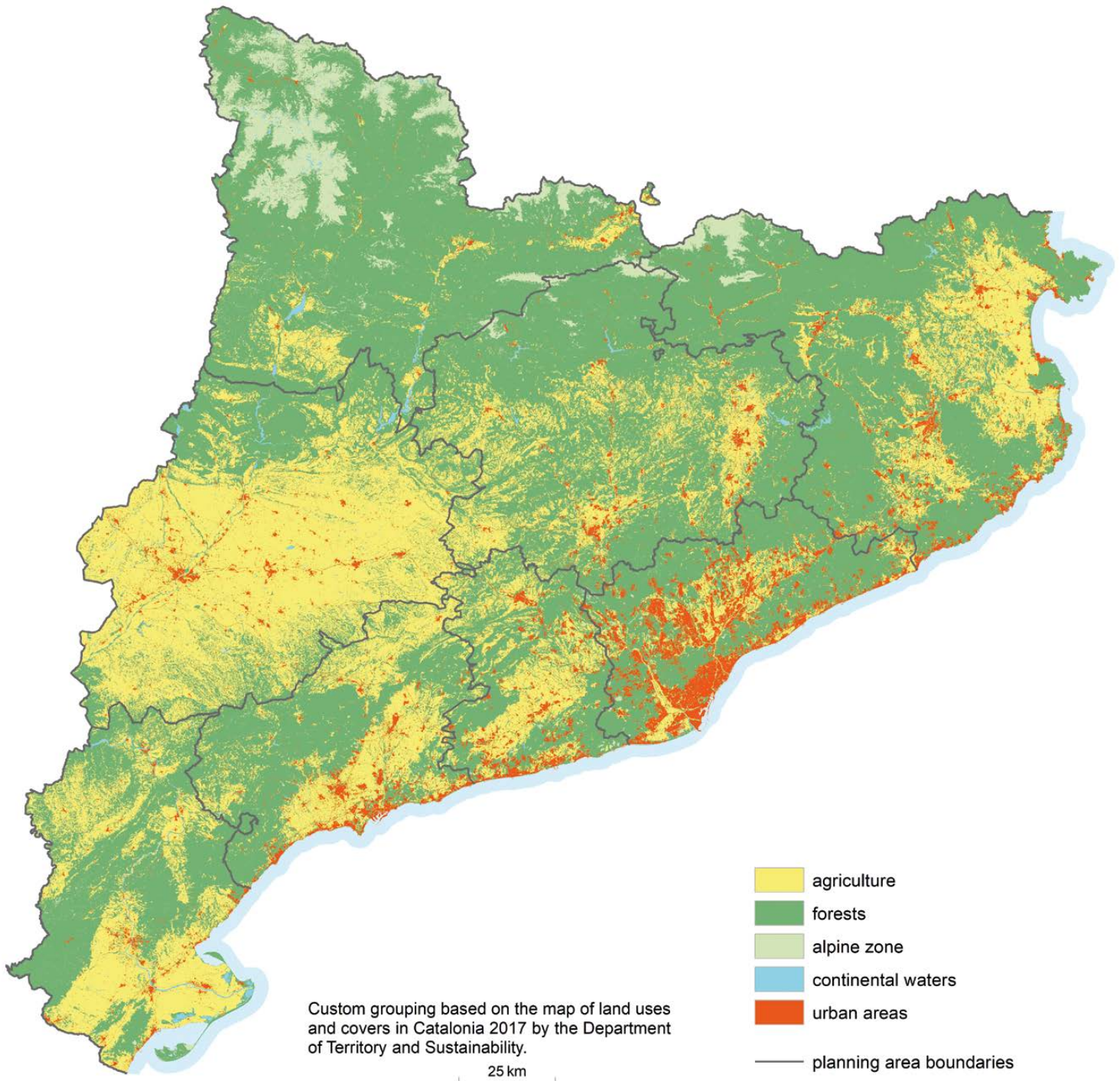
- | | | | |
|---|---|---|------------------------------------|
|  | Aigüestortes i Estany de Sant Maurici National Park |  | Wildlife Nature Reserve |
|  | National Park buffer zone |  | Strict Nature Reserve |
|  | Natural Park (with name) |  | Partial Nature Reserve |
|  | Natural Park buffer zone |  | Partial Nature Reserve buffer zone |
|  | National Natural Landmarks | | |

- 1 Sant Llorenç del Munt i l'Obac
- 2 Montserrat Mountain
- 3 Garrotxa Volcanic Zone

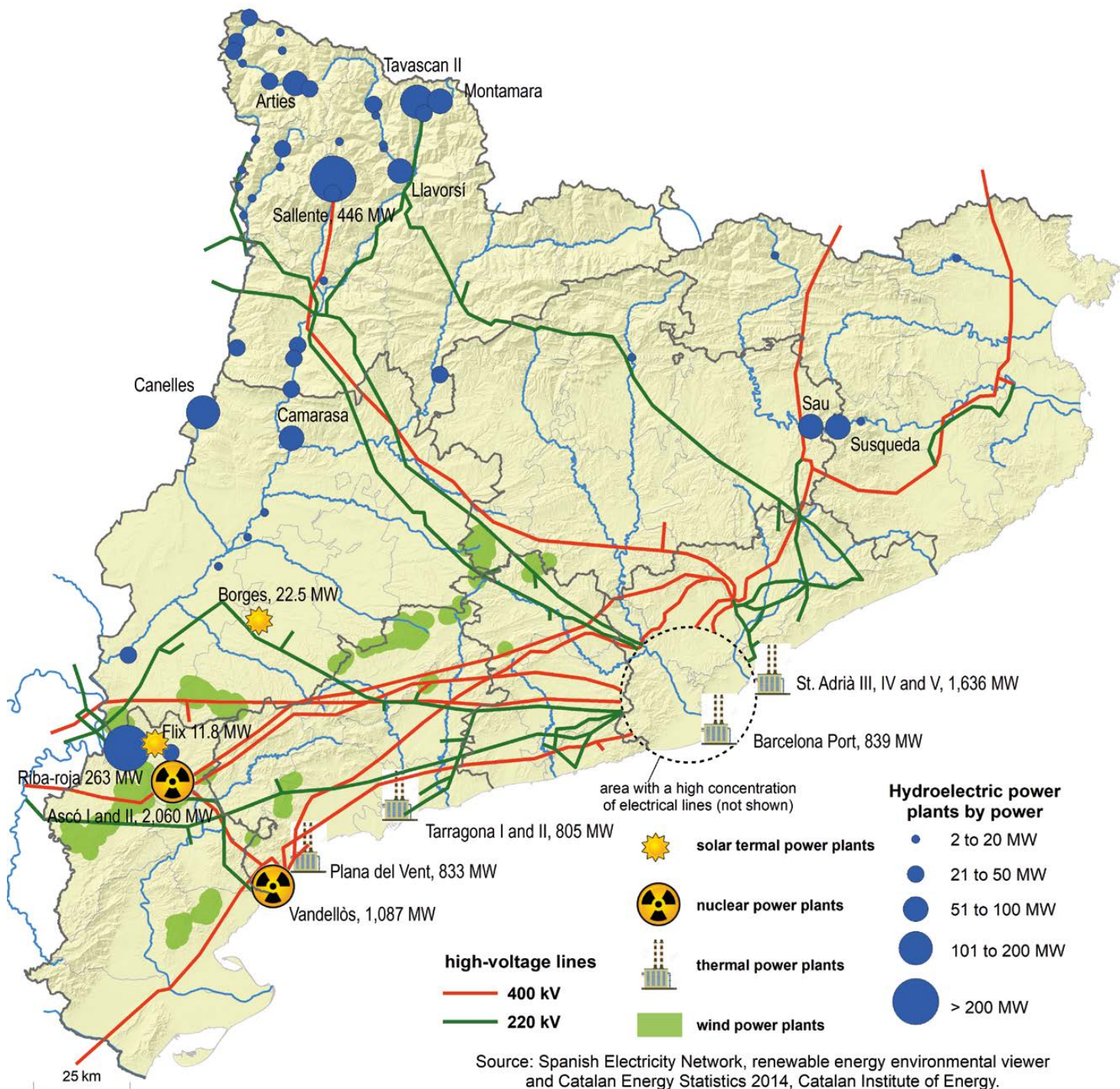


15 LANDSCAPE UNITS

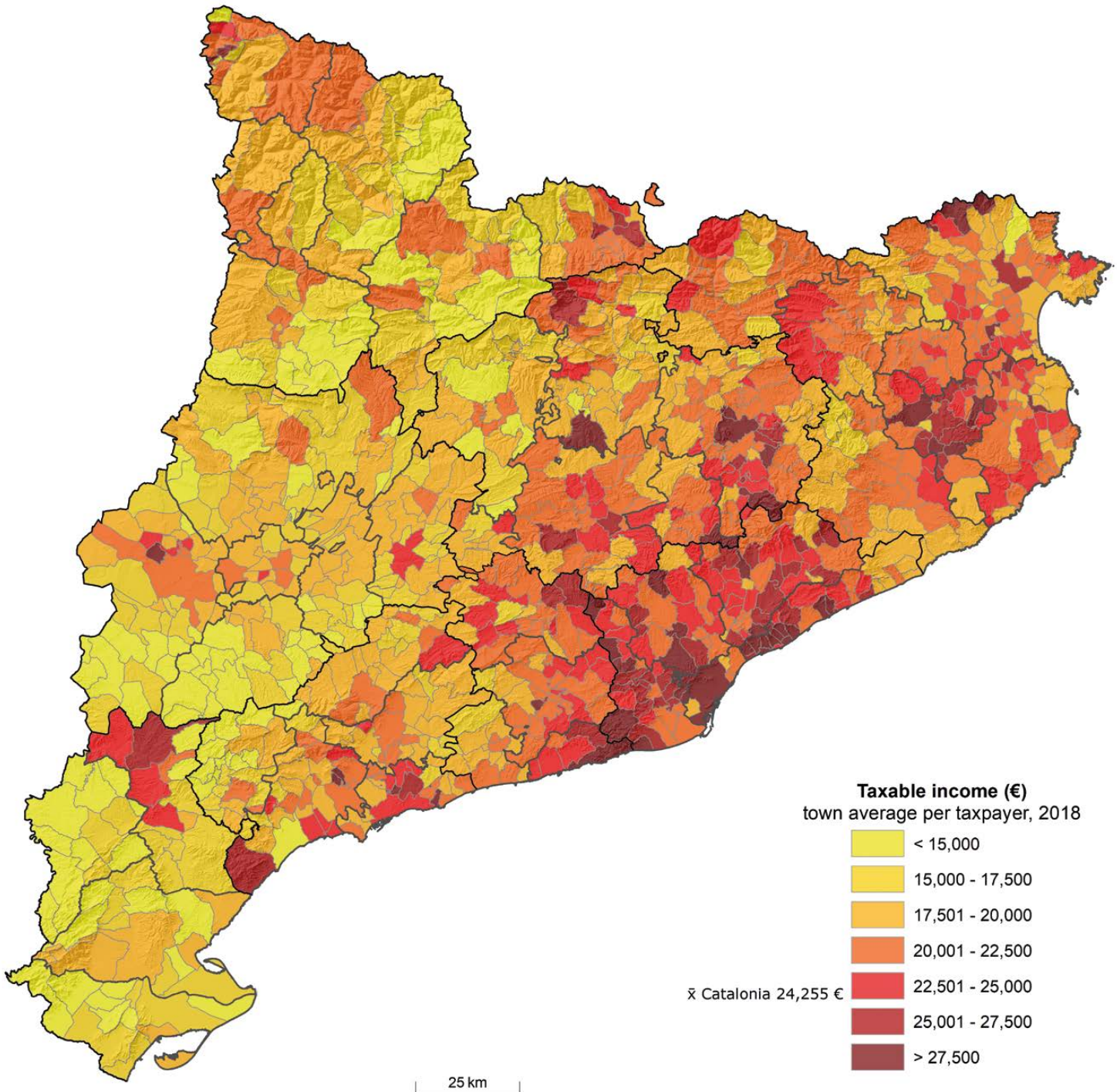




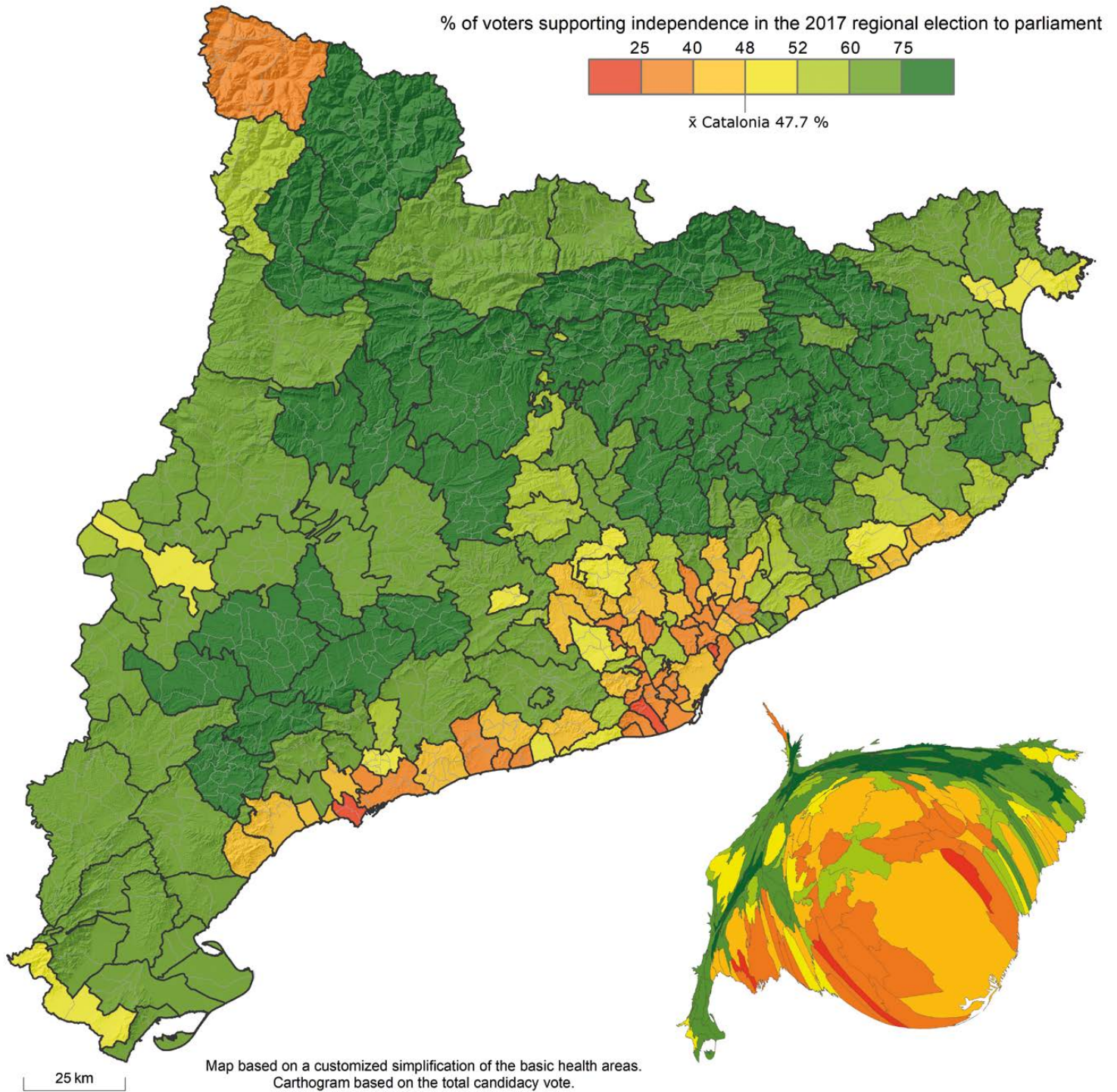
17 ENERGY PRODUCTION AND TRANSPORT



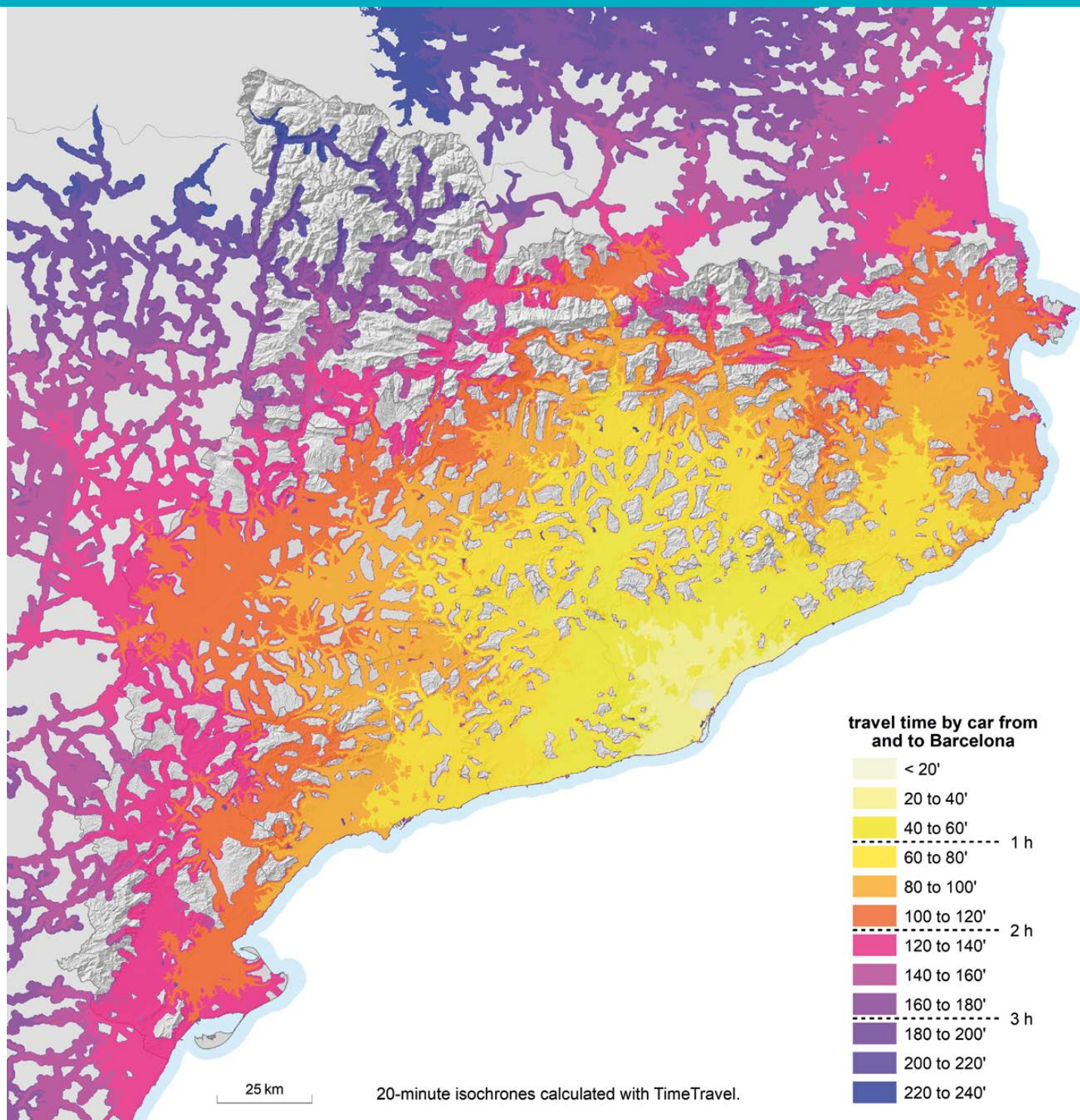
18 INCOME LEVEL OF TAXPAYERS: INCOME TAX



19 INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT



20 TRAVEL TIME IN RELATION TO BARCELONA



5

UNIVERSITY GEOGRAPHY
IN THE CATALAN LANGUAGE
DOMAIN TODAY



University Geography in the Catalan Language Domain Today

David Pavón Gamero
Rafael Giménez-Capdevila

As of today (2023), Geography is widely taught in the public universities of the Catalan language domain. All in all, there are nine universities in which undergraduate Bachelor's degrees (either the four-year *grau* or three-year *licence*) and Master's degrees are taught: five in Catalonia, two in the Valencian Country, one on the Balearic Islands and one in Northern Catalonia (see Map 1). While the other public universities of the language domain do not specifically offer academic degrees in Geography, they have geographers among their faculty members and teach Geography within other broader degree programs (including, the Humanities, Global Studies, History, and Geography and Art History). This is the case of the Open University of Catalonia and Pompeu Fabra University, both in Catalonia; Jaume I University, in the Valencian Country; and, the University of Andorra. Alghero, a Catalan-speaking city on the island of Sardinia, is home to the Department of Architecture, Design and Urban Planning of the University of Sassari, and this has geographers among its faculty. Yet, in contrast, Geographical studies are not taught at any of the private universities in this language domain.

The names of the different degree courses (see Table 1) reflect the emphasis placed on the links between geography, the environment, sustainability and spatial planning. This tendency has been strengthened over the last 15–20 years, highlighting the fact that Geo-

graphy is a living discipline, and echoing the concerns of the day and, in particular, those that affect the spatial dynamics and the challenges that society has to face. Clearly, here, sustainability is of critical concern,

Map 1. Location of the universities in the Catalan language domain where Geography is taught



Table 1. Public universities in the Catalan language domain teaching undergraduate Bachelor's degrees (either the grau or licence) in Geography

Location	University	Abbreviation	Name of degree (2022–23)
Catalonia	Autonomous University of Barcelona	UAB	Geography, Environmental Management and Spatial Planning
	University of Barcelona	UB	Geography and Global Change
	University of Girona	UdG	Geography, Territory and the Environment
	University of Lleida	UdL	Geography
	Rovira i Virgili University	URV	Geography, Spatial Analysis and Sustainability
Valencian Country	University of Alacant	UA	Geography and Land Planning
	University of Valencia	UV	Geography and the Environment
Balearic and Pityusic Islands	University of the Balearic Islands	UIB	Geography
Northern Catalonia	University of Perpignan Via Domitia	UPVD	Geography and Planning (Géographie et Aménagement)

since it is where social, environmental and economic variables converge. Gradually the syllabuses of these courses have incorporated different subjects and different goals, promoting a shift in our understanding of Geography. However, it continues to hold true to those defining features that have characterised it from the moment it was first institutionalised as an academic

and, hence, university discipline: that is, the spatial understanding and analysis of the earth's surface.

In this brief statistical analysis, we cast the spotlight on University Geography in the Catalan language domain by examining three variables for each of the nine universities listed in Table 1 and located on Map 1: the teaching faculty working in their Geography departments, the students currently enrolled on undergraduate Bachelor's degrees (both the *grau* and *licence*) and the students that have graduated with a Geography degree. The data are taken from EDUCABASE, a database maintained by the Spanish Ministries of Education and

Photo 1. Casa dels Països Catalans, UPVD



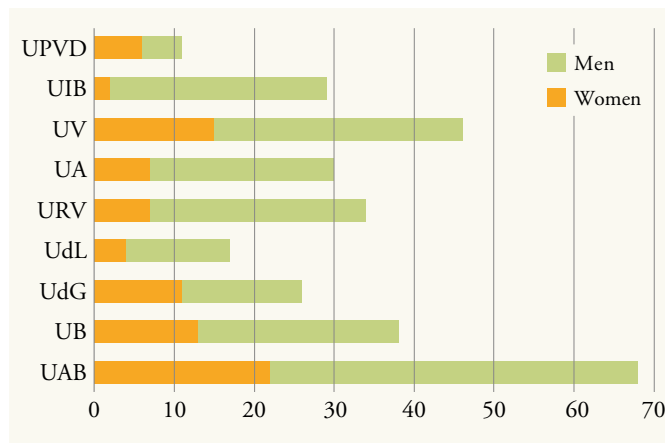
Vocational Training and the Universities, and from information provided directly by the UPVD. Finally, we list all the officially recognised research groups working in the discipline at these universities.

To complete the picture we would have liked to have considered the wide range of Master's degrees on which Geography faculty teach, but due to the sheer number and dispersion of these courses it has not been possible to summarise them here.

Geography Department Faculty Members

During the academic year 2022–23, the faculty of the Geography departments of the nine universities totalled 299 members, 29% (87) of whom are women. Figure 1 shows their distribution by university, with the UAB (68) and UV (46) running the largest departments.

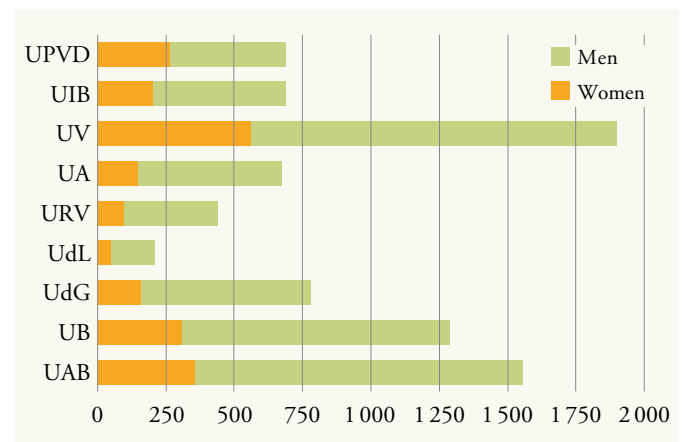
Figure 1. Faculty members (academic year 2022–23) by university and sex



Students Enrolled on Undergraduate Bachelor's Degrees (both *grau* and *licence*)

If we sum the number of students enrolled on both undergraduate Bachelor's degrees — that is the four-year *grau* and three-year *licence* (UPVD) — over the last seven academic years (2016–17 to 2022–23), the UV has the most Geography students, followed by the UAB (Figure 2). Female students account for 26% of the total, the proportions ranging from 39% in the UPVD to 21% in the UdG. During this seven-year period, the number of students matriculating each academic year presents a downward trend. Indeed, in the academic year 2022–23, 25% fewer students were enrolled than in the academic year 2016–17. All the universities suffer this trend with the exception of the URV.

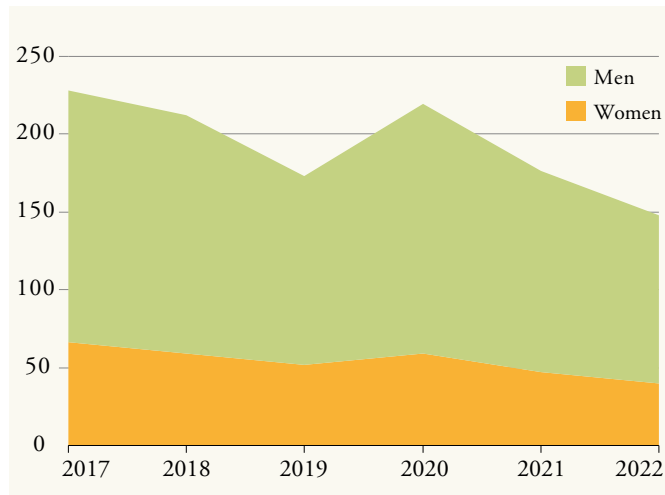
Figure 2. Total number of students enrolled on undergraduate Bachelor's degrees – four-year grau and three-year licence (UPVD only) – between 2016 and 2022, by university and sex



Geography Graduates

The number of new geography graduates also fell in the period analysed. Figure 3 shows that while in 2017 a total of 228 students graduated in Geography, 29% (66) of whom were women, five years later this number had fallen to 148, with even fewer women, 27% (40).

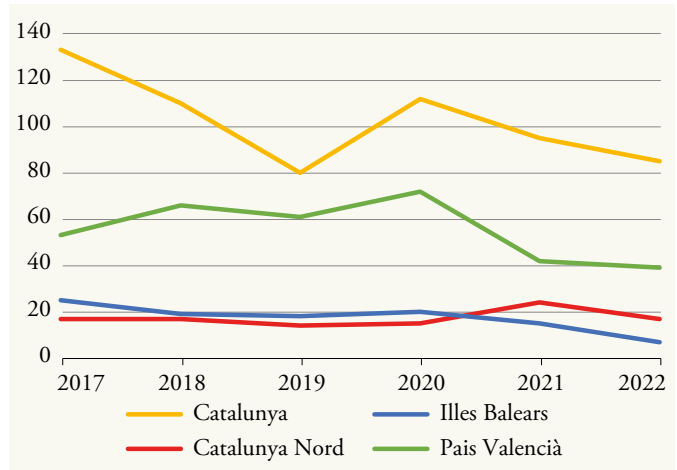
Figure 3. Evolution of the number of graduates in Geography (2017–2022) from the nine universities, by sex



The evolution of the number of graduates has varied across the language domain (Figure 4). The most marked fall in this period has been recorded in the Balearic Islands (-72%) followed at some distance by the universities of Catalonia (-36%) and the Valencian Country (-26%), while in Northern Catalonia numbers have remained largely stable.

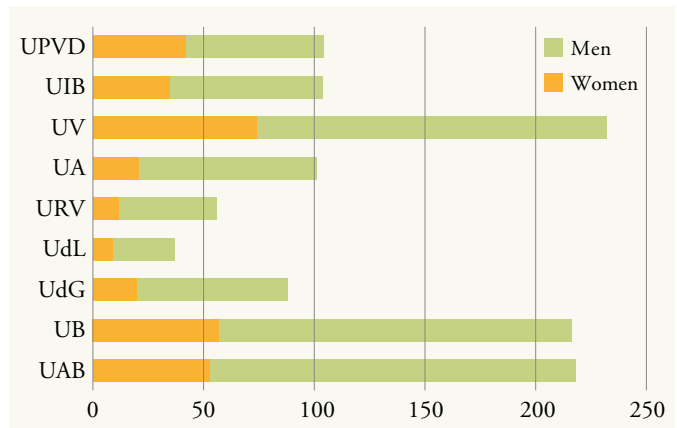
If we examine the number of graduates by university (Figure 5), the UV (232), the UAB (218) and the

Figure 4. Evolution of the number of graduates in Geography (2017–2022), by area of the Catalan language domain



UB (216) account for 58% of the total number in the language domain. The highest number of female graduates is recorded by the UPVD, with 40%, while the UA and the URV record the lowest, at just 21%.

Figure 5. Total number of graduates in Geography (2017–2022), by university and sex



Research Groups

In the nine universities of the Catalan language domain, we have identified a total of 50 research groups, distributed by university as shown in Table 2.

Table 3 lists all 50 research groups, indicating the name of the group, the university to which it is affiliated, its line(s) of research and website address. The groups were identified, in the first instance, by reference to information contained on the webpages of each of the Geography departments and, subsequently, via the research groups' own websites. All the groups thus identified are included, regardless of the level of recognition afforded to them and their activity.

The list provides a good profile of the research currently being conducted in the universities of the Catalan language domain. From a variety of different perspectives, Catalan Geography addresses a wide range of issues, highlighting the versatility of our discipline and the breadth of research interests. Moreover, each group clearly organises itself according to its own specific interests, preferred approaches and research goals.

Catalan Geography thus extends its research arm across fields that include the physical environment, both coastal and mountain areas; geomorphology; the landscape; climate and climate change; natural resources; energy; cartography; the use of GIS technology, remote sensing and drones; migrations; the gender perspective; governance and local development; sustainability; social and urban policies; global change; economic geography; tourism and socio-territorial dynamics; natural and cultural heritage; geographical thinking; critical geography; the pedagogy of geography and a long etcetera. All these topics are studied and analysed by at least one of the research groups mentioned.

Table 2. Number of research groups by university

UA	5
UAB	16
UB	10
UdG	3
UdL	1
UIB	6
UPVD	2
URV	2
UV	5
Total	50

Table 3. Research groups, lines of research and websites

Name of research group	University	Research line(s)	Website
Actors, Resources and Territories in Development [<i>Acteurs, Ressources et Territoires dans le Développement</i> (UMR 5281 ART-Dev)]	UPVD	Interfaces between the dynamics of territories and their development	https://art-dev.cnrs.fr
Antarctic, Arctic and Alpine Environments (ANTALP)	UB	Research in the Antarctica, Arctic and Alpine regions aimed at understanding current environmental dynamics from a multidisciplinary perspective	https://www.ub.edu/antalp/

Name of research group	University	Research line(s)	Website
Mountain Areas and the Landscape (GRAMP)	UAB	Environmental historical geography of mountain areas	https://twitter.com/gramp_UAB
Critical Spaces	UB	Theoretical development and discussion of the literature aimed at rethinking concepts and theories to address global change	https://espaiscritics.org/
Studies of Landscape and Heritage (ESTEPA)	UV	Water heritage and landscapes, local development and regional studies, landscape studies and analyses of environmental impact	https://www.uv.es/uvweb/departament-geografia/ca/investigacio/grups-investigacio/-estepa-estudis-territori-patrimoni-/presentacio-1285858445673.html
Critical Geographies	UAB/UB	Critical spatial thinking. Cities and urban theory. Radical geographies	https://www.uab.cat/en/geography/geografies-critiques
Coastal Geomorphology	UV	Coastal geomorphology	https://www.uv.es/uvweb/departamento-geografia/es/investigacion/grupos-investigacion/geomorfologia-litoral/presentacion-1285858446014.html
Local Sustainable Development and Governance (GDLS)	UV	Innovation and knowledge transfer in local government based on new territorial governance practices	https://www.uv.es/oferta-cientific-tecnologica/ca/grups-investigacio/linies-investigacio/grup-investigacio-govern-desenvolupament-local-sostenible-1286225405503/GrupsInves.html?id=1286220656842
Demographic and Tourism Studies Group (GEDITUR)	UIB	Population geography, migration, security and health; tourism and local development	https://www.uib.cat/recerca/estructures/grups/grup/GEDITUR/
History of Cartography Study Group (GEHC)	UB	Maps as geohistorical documents and as cultural products that reflect the evolution of art, science and technology	https://www.ub.edu/gehc/

Name of research group	University	Research line(s)	Website
Research Group on Population (GEP)	UAB	Historical demography, fertility and families	https://www.uab.cat/ca/geografia/grep-ced
Research Group on Energy, Territory and Society (GURB)	UAB	Interrelations between territorial dynamics, energy consumption and public policy	https://gurbuab.com/
Tourism, Mobility and Regional Planning Research Group (GITMOT)	UIB	Study of the interrelation between tourism, mobility and regional planning from the perspective of spatial and geographical analysis.	http://gitmot.uib.es/
Research Group on Water, Territory, Tourism and Sustainability (GRATTS)	UAB	Analysis of the territorial and environmental dimensions of resources and risks such as those derived from the hydrological cycle	http://geografia.uab.es/grats/
Geography and Gender Research Group (GGG)	UAB	Urban and rural studies from a gender and intersectional perspective	http://geografia.uab.cat/gener/
Research Group on Inclusive Governance and Territorial and Coastal-Marine Sustainability (INTERFASE)	UAB	The study of socio-environmental changes in space and time and the sustainability of environmental and spatial policies	http://geografia.uab.cat/interfase3/
Mediterranean Eco-geomorphological and Hydrological Connectivity Research Team (MEDhyCON)	UIB	Eco-geomorphology, hydrology and natural hazards in Mediterranean environments	http://medhycon.uib.cat/
Methods and Applications of Remote Sensing Research Group (GRUMETS)	UAB	Theory and methodologies of Geographic Information Science and Technology, particularly as manifest in GIS and remote sensing	https://www.grumets.cat/
Water Resources and Global Change Research Group (GLOWATER)	UIB	Water resources and water economy in tourist areas, hydro-climatic interactions and fluvial ecology in Mediterranean environments	http://glowater.uib.es/pagina-de-inicio/
Climatology Group (GC)	UB	Analysis of climate variability at a scale ranging from decades to several centuries, including climate change	http://www.ub.edu/gc/

Name of research group	University	Research line(s)	Website
Territory and Society Research Group	UdL	Knowledge and analysis of physical and socioeconomic transformations in intermediary cities and low-density spaces	https://dgha.udl.cat/ca/recerca/Grups-de-recerca-consolidats/territori_soc/
Mediterranean Environmental Research Group (GRAM)	UB	Analysis of the concept of landscape, as a geographical, historical and social totaliser	http://www.ub.edu/gram/
Territorial Analysis and Tourism Studies Research Group (GRATET)	URV	Impact of tourist and recreational activities on landscapes and how these actions generate new forms of development at different geographical scales	https://www.gratet.urv.cat/ca/
Centre for Climate Change (C3)	URV	Research, outreach and knowledge transfer in the fields of climate reconstruction and analysis	http://www.c3.urv.cat/
Research Group in Environmental and Territorial Analysis and Planning (APTA)	UdG	Analysis of territorial and urban structures and dynamics, cross-border cooperation and the analysis and management of local development	https://www.udg.edu/ca/grupsrecerca/APTA
Territorial Analysis and Regional Development Research Group (ANTERRIT)	UB	Geographical knowledge of Catalan territory adopting dual basic and applied research approach	http://www.ub.edu/anterrit/
Socio-Environmental Change Research Group (SAMBI)	UdG	Analysis and interpretation of the processes of socio-environmental change that affect today's societies	https://www.udg.edu/ca/grupsrecerca/sambi
Climate and Spatial Planning Research Group	UA	Theoretical and practical aspects of climatology, natural hazards and the relationship between extreme events	http://rua.ua.es/dspace/handle/10045/21835
Research Group in Education and Geography of Perception	UIB	The mental map as a tool for analysing geographical literacy	https://blocs.uib.cat/educacioipercepcio/
Applied Geography Research Group	UAB	Quality of life, biodiversity, sustainability and risks	https://portalrecerca.uab.cat/en/organisations/grup-de-recerca-geografia-aplicada/

Name of research group	University	Research line(s)	Website
Economic Geography Research Group	UAB	Research in many different fields of economic geography	https://webs.uab.cat/economicgeography/
Landscape Analysis and Management Laboratory Research Group (LAGP)	UdG	Landscape analysis in its broadest sense	https://www.udg.edu/ca/grupsreerca/lagp
Landscapes and Palaeoenvironments of the Mediterranean Mountains	UB	Dynamics, temporal evolution, recognition and description of ancient environments and landscapes of the Mediterranean mountains	http://www.ub.edu/paisatgeipaleo/
Territory, Population and Citizenship Research Group (TERRIPOC)	UB	Social processes in the urban area, centred on the structure and the social and territorial inequality of urban areas	https://www.ub.edu/terripec/
Territory, Tourism and Climate Change Research Group	UB	The impact of climate change and global change on the territory and human activities, from a geographical perspective	https://www.ub.edu/portal/documents/4439448/10495034/TTCC/3d012d9d-9e1a-d371-0b3c-e18b1eab5c71
History and Climate	UA	Natural disasters, science, technology and popular religiosity in modern Spain	https://cvnet.cpd.ua.es/curriculum-breve/grp/es/grupo-de-investigacion-en-historia-y-clima/524
History of Prehistoric Man [<i>Histoire Naturelle de l'Homme Préhistorique</i> (UMR 7194)]	UPVD	Study of the biological and behavioural evolution of hominids over time, in the chronological, environmental and climatic context of the different geographical areas	https://hnhp.mnhn.fr
Immigration and Social Integration (INMIX)	UAB	Processes of socio-cultural integration of immigrants and their descendants, interculturalism and ethnicity	https://webs.uab.cat/inmix/
Innovation and Local Development (INNODES)	UV	Economic geography, territorial planning and regional development	https://www.uv.es/innodes/
The Environment, Society and Landscape (MedSPal)	UA	Integrated study of the landscape from a diachronic perspective considering both natural processes and human intervention	https://cvnet.cpd.ua.es/curriculum-breve/grp/es/medio-sociedad-y-paisaje-(medspai)/485#capacidades

Name of research group	University	Research line(s)	Website
Human Migration and Sustainability	UAB	International migration and migration in Europe, within a global context	http://geografia.uab.cat/migracions/cat/index.htm
Mobility, Transport and Territory (GEMOTT)	UAB	Effects of territorial dynamics on mobility	https://mobilitat.uab.cat/ca/inici/
Standards of Life, Health and Food (NIDES)	UAB	Population, food, living standards, economic modernisation, 19 th and 20 th century Spain	https://www.uab.cat/ca/geografia/nides
Landscapes and Natural Resources of Spain	UA	Territorial diagnoses of the structural and formal components of rural landscapes, with special attention to their evolution	https://rua.ua.es/dspace/handle/10045/30195?locale=ca
Palaeogeocology, Natural Hazards and Environmental Management (PaleoRisk)	UB	Fluvial variability, climate and land use interactions in alpine environments	http://www.palaeo.org/
Planning and Sustainable Management of Tourism	UA	Planning and sustainable management of tourist destinations, international mobility and residentialism in tourist areas	https://cvnet.cpd.ua.es/curriculum-breve/grp/es/pl
Social and Urban Policies (URGOCIS)	UAB	Local urban governance networks, urban and social policies	https://urgocis.net/
Sustainability and Territory (GIST)	UIB	The territorial transformation undergone by the Balearic archipelago since the second half of the 20 th century	https://www.uib.cat/recerca/estructures/grups/grup/GIST/
Tourism and Socio-territorial Dynamics (TUDISTAR)	UAB	Critical analysis of tourism from the dynamics established between the different actors present in the territory	https://tudistar.com/
Tourism and Territory	UV	Integrated tourism development and strategic territorial planning in tourism	https://www.uv.es/uvweb/departament-geografia/ca/investigacio/grups-investigacio/turisme-territori/presentacio-1285858445445.html

EPILOGUE



Epilogue

Oriol Nel-lo

Geography in Turbulent Times

We are living in turbulent times. An interrelated set of crises combine to reveal the weaknesses, yet also the rich potential, of contemporary societies. The environmental emergency and the climate change process show that the impact of human action on the environment, accelerated in an extraordinary fashion over the last two centuries, is exposing the world population to unprecedented risks and uncertainties. In parallel with this, the persistence of inequalities in the distribution of wealth, between the Global North and South as well as within each country, condemns a large part of humanity to extreme conditions of vulnerability and precariousness.

To these permanent, systemic crises, we have to sum other disruptive events that are becoming increasingly more frequent. On the one hand, the capitalist economy, while capable of promoting technological advances, is exposed to periodic crises, which –like the financial crisis of 2008– hit the most disadvantaged hardest. On the other hand, the pressure on the world’s resources –energy, food, water, forestry– results in changes to the environment that, among other problems, facilitate the spread of epidemics, the most significant of which, COVID-19, has been responsible for nearly 7 million deaths. Finally, geo-

political tensions, closely related to this set of upheavals, lead to an aggravation of systemic crises and an increase in armed conflicts, with resulting devastation and suffering.

Paradoxically, these crises coexist with feats that are indicative of enormous potential. Despite the extraordinary growth in the world’s population, which has tripled since the middle of the last century, humanity manages, somehow or other, to feed itself. Likewise, despite the fact that evident injustices persist, collective action has led to progress –uneven, obviously, but significant– in promoting the rights of women, children and workers. Moreover, technological advances and digitalisation enable an unprecedented level of exchange of information and knowledge. The reduction in transport costs also greatly facilitates the mobility of goods and people and interrelations between different cultures. We should also not forget that humanity has never had such a large number of active scientists and that their work results in a constant stream of discoveries, in the fields of genomics, physics, medicine and the material sciences, to name just a few.

All in all, the simultaneous presence of crises that put the future of humanity at risk and yet which offer unprecedented potential in so many fields characterises the critical moment of global change in which we find ourselves. A moment in which “the old world is

dying, and the new world struggles to be born”, in the words of the Italian philosopher.

Against this backdrop of change, space, far from being a passive stage of ongoing processes, constitutes a crucial factor in our evolution. The forms of production and distribution of wealth, and the social relations that result from them, depend on the resources made available by the environment and are embodied in the organisation of space. The spatial structures inherited from the generations that have preceded us constitute, in turn, both a point of departure and a limit for the development of our societies. In this way, space, on the one hand reflects the functioning of society and, on the other, conditions it: hence, the crucial importance of its study; hence, the relevance of Geography.

The aim of this publication is to demonstrate the contribution made by Catalan Geography when describing, analysing, interpreting and governing ongoing social and spatial transformations. As we have seen, the book comprises five chapters. Rather than summarise them here, I prefer, by way of an epilogue, to comment on the reasons why its content constitutes, in my opinion, a good sample of the potential (and also of the limitations) of Geography for understanding the evolution of contemporary societies.

The Catalan Society of Geography and its Emblematic Trajectory

The history of the Catalan Society of Geography (SCG), as told by Enric Bertran in the first chapter of this book, is an excellent example of the interrelationship between the evolution of the practice of Geography and the vicissitudes of the society it seeks to study.

If the development of all science is heavily dependent on the conditions of the socio-economic and political environment, this has been particularly true of the history of Catalan Geography. This is reflected, as we have seen, in the upheavals experienced by the SCG throughout its nearly ninety years of existence.

Founded in the mid-1930s, as the Second Spanish Republic (1931–1939) ushered in the hopes of democracy, the learned Society was born as a meeting place for those who, in the first decades of the 20th century, had taken the first steps of modern Geography in Catalonia. The SCG was from the outset affiliated to the Institute of Catalan Studies, the Catalan academy for both language and science, promoted by the autonomous government of Catalonia. However, in 1936, shortly after its foundation, Civil War broke out following the uprising led by General Franco, supported by Hitler and Mussolini. Many of the organisation’s members were directly involved in efforts to counter the fascist uprising, giving their support to the legitimate government and contributing to various initiatives, including the establishment of a new administrative division of Catalan territory. The contributions of a number of Catalan geographers during the Republic —most notably Pau Vila and Gonçal de Reparaz— constitute invaluable examples of geographical practice placed at the service of society and the democratic cause.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that with the victory of General Franco in 1939 and the establishment of his dictatorial regime, the Society entered into a state of apathy. The new regime suppressed the institutions of self-government in Catalonia, banned both labour organisations and democratic parties and persecuted the Catalan language and culture. Many of

the most prominent members of the SCG had to go into exile and those who stayed in Catalonia saw how the Institute of Catalan Studies was obliged to suspend its public activities. This meant that during the 1940s the meetings of the members of the Society had to be held in virtual secret.

In the early post-war period, despite the laudable maintenance of some of its activities, the life of the

SCG was quite subdued. However, from the end of the fifties, a certain liberalisation of the political situation allowed various initiatives to be resumed. For example, the earlier project—first muted in the 1920s—of providing Catalonia with a series of regional geographical monographs, in keeping with French possibilist geography, could be reinitiated. This facilitated the writing and publication of the *Geografia de Catalunya* [*Geography of Catalonia*], edited by Lluís Solé Sabarís, in the course of the sixties and the first half of the seventies. At the same time, a renewal and institutionalisation of university Geography took place, which also served to rejuvenate the discipline. Thus, the paradox arose that, just as the *Geografia de Catalunya* was being published, new methods and concepts were beginning to be disseminated in geographical practice—theoretical-quantitative, radical approaches—which to a good extent would overcome prevailing geographical traditions.

The Society was not to let this opportunity escape. From the end of the seventies, abetted by the return of political democracy, the restoration of self-government in Catalonia and the full recovery of the Institute of Catalan Studies, the SCG resolutely relaunched its activities. Finally, it was able to enter a phase of normalisation, organizing lectures, courses and regular field trips, which have very much set the tone for the last four decades. In 1984, the SCG began publishing its journal, *Treballs de la Societat Catalana de Geografia*—issue number 95 appearing in June 2023—and which has established itself as a point of reference for Catalan geographers. The Society, which today has nearly 500 members, has organised two Congresses of Catalan Geography—in 1991 and 2008—and this year, 2023, it has been recognised as a corresponding member of the International Geographical Union.

Estudiant, fes-te de la SCGeografia!



Rebràs:
 Revista *Treballs de la SCG* + un llibre anual +
 una publicació de la SCG a escollir +
 descomptes en les activitats organitzades +
 informació dels actes + carnet de la Biblioteca de Catalunya...

La Societat Catalana de Geografia és una filial de
 l'Institut d'Estudis Catalans. Organitza nombroses activitats
 d'interès acadèmic i divulgatiu i vol aplegar totes les persones
 interessades en la geografia

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In parallel with the normalisation of the work of the SCG, the last forty years have witnessed a remarkable flowering of geographical studies in the territories of the Catalan language domain. As the last chapter of the book documents, Catalonia, Valencian Country, the Balearic Islands and Northern Catalonia today boast a total of nine universities that teach Geographical studies. Some 300 faculty members from the various branches of Geography are involved in these courses and, in the last five years, they have seen in the region of 200 students graduating each year. These universities, moreover, are home to 50 research groups in all areas of geography and offer dynamic training on PhD programs. At the end of the 2022–2023 academic year, to cite just one example, 72 students (62.5 % women and 37.5 % men) are enrolled on the doctorate program in Geography at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, 63.8 % of whom come from abroad.

One of the main characteristics of the practice of Geography in recent years has been its internationalisation, a trait that is also evident in the large number of studies published by Catalan geographers in international journals. In the Catalan language domain the following journals stand out in terms of their impact and longevity: *Cuadernos de Geografía de la Universitat de València* (published since 1964), *Documents d'Anàlisi Geogràfica* produced by the Departments of Geography of the University of Girona and the Autonomous University of Barcelona (first published in 1982), the University of Alicante's *Investigaciones geográficas* (1983), the aforementioned *Treballs de la Societat Catalana de Geografia* (1984) and *Scripta Nova. Revista electrònica de Geografia y Ciencias Sociales* (which appeared in 1997 as the continuation of the *Geocrítica*

series, coordinated by Horacio Capel at the University of Barcelona since 1976).

Catalan Geography Facing a World in Transformation

The evolution of Geography in Catalonia as a whole, and that of the Catalan Society of Geography in particular, highlights, as we have seen, the connection between the evolution of the discipline and the society that hosts it. This book, however, is not limited to simply detailing this evolution, but, rather, in its second and third chapters, it documents the contributions currently being made by Catalan Geography to the description, analysis and governance of ongoing social and spatial transformations.

In common with its neighbours, over the last two decades, Catalan society has had to face a series of global economic, health and environmental crises. In the third chapter of this book, Valerià Paül and Rafael Giménez-Capdevila, in summarizing the contributions of a collective monograph published by the SCG, explain how these crises have materialised in Catalonia according to specific traits and characteristics. Thus, in Catalonia the crisis that hit the world economy in 2008 deepened inequality and exacerbated the conditions of much of the population, so much so that in 2011 more than one in five people found themselves in a situation of poverty. The “austerity” measures adopted as a result—at the European, Spanish and Catalan level—further aggravated the social impact of the crisis and undermined the provision of many public services, with lasting consequences.



When the impact of the economic crisis had not yet been fully overcome, Catalan society was hit by the COVID-19 health crisis. Between February 2020 and May 2022, the virus was responsible for 27,386 deaths in Catalonia and the complete disruption of life, clearly evident in the 11.4% fall in Catalan GDP, a figure that was higher than the European average. The largescale roll-out of vaccines was instrumental to limit the impact of the pandemic, while the economic measures adopted by the authorities—quite distinct from those employed in the 2008 economic crisis—managed to contain the social consequences. However, the epidemic hit the most disadvantaged sectors of society hardest, both in terms of the infection rate and social hardships.

The third global crisis that has hit Catalonia in recent decades has been the environmental emergency, as manifest most clearly in the processes of climate change. Given its dependence on energy and other resources, as well as its geographical position in the Mediterranean, Catalonia is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. For example, in the *Tercer informe sobre el canvi climàtic a Catalunya* [Third Report on Climate Change in Catalonia], it was estimated

that between 1950 and 2014 the air temperature rose at a rate of 0.23°C per decade and precipitation rates fell by 1.2% per decade. The future scenarios point to a continuation of this rise in average temperature, as well as to an increase in the irregularity of precipitation, with recurrent episodes of severe drought. At the same time, rising sea levels are already having a considerable impact on the Catalan coast, most clearly evident in the regression of the Ebro Delta.

As in so many other areas of the planet, the concurrence of economic, health, environmental and resource crises has been accompanied, in Catalonia, by an increase in geopolitical tensions. In the Catalan case, these have mainly manifest themselves in a powerful political and civil movement in favour of independence from the Spanish State. This movement was sparked by the Spanish Constitutional Court's rejection of key articles of the new Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, which the citizens of the country had endorsed in 2006. The conflict came to a head on 1 October 2017, with the holding of an unofficial referendum on independence that was forcibly repressed by the State's security forces. Since that date, evidence of the unviability of independence in Europe as it stands today, the action of the State and the rifts in the independence movement itself have calmed the situation. However, the fundamental problem remains, that is, the difficulty of fitting Catalonia within the Spanish institutional order, and large sectors of the Catalan population continue to aspire to a modification of the current *status quo*.

In recent years, Catalan Geography has devoted much of its efforts—as both Burgueño and Oliveras and Paül and Giménez-Capdevila explain in this book—to the analysis of the relationship between



spatial dynamics and the crises which I have just outlined. Thus, geographers have paid particular attention to the socio-spatial impacts of the economic crisis—most notably, the difficulties faced by increasingly larger sectors of the population to access housing. Various studies report in detail how the increasing financialisation of the housing market—which, in fact, was at the root of the 2008 crisis—is leading to a concentration of property and a notable rise in prices. This situation, together with restrictions on borrowing, have excluded the most vulnerable sectors—the young, the low-income population and single-parent households—from the housing market. In a context in which social housing represents just 2% of the total housing stock, these sectors have had to turn to the free rental market, which is also under considerable pressure because, among other reasons, of the demand

for tourist accommodation. The outcome has been a marked increase in the difficulties faced by the young to emancipate themselves, an increase in residential mobility and an escalation in the number of evictions. Catalan geographers have monitored these worrying trends not only in published studies but also by supporting the institutions and social movements that seek solutions to the problems arising from the housing situation.

A second far-reaching phenomenon, linked to the evolution of the economic situation, has been the increase in residential segregation. Recent decades have been characterised, on the one hand, by the increase in income inequality and, on the other, by the tensions in the housing market. In this situation, the tendency of social groups to segregate themselves spatially has become apparent in function of their ability to choose a

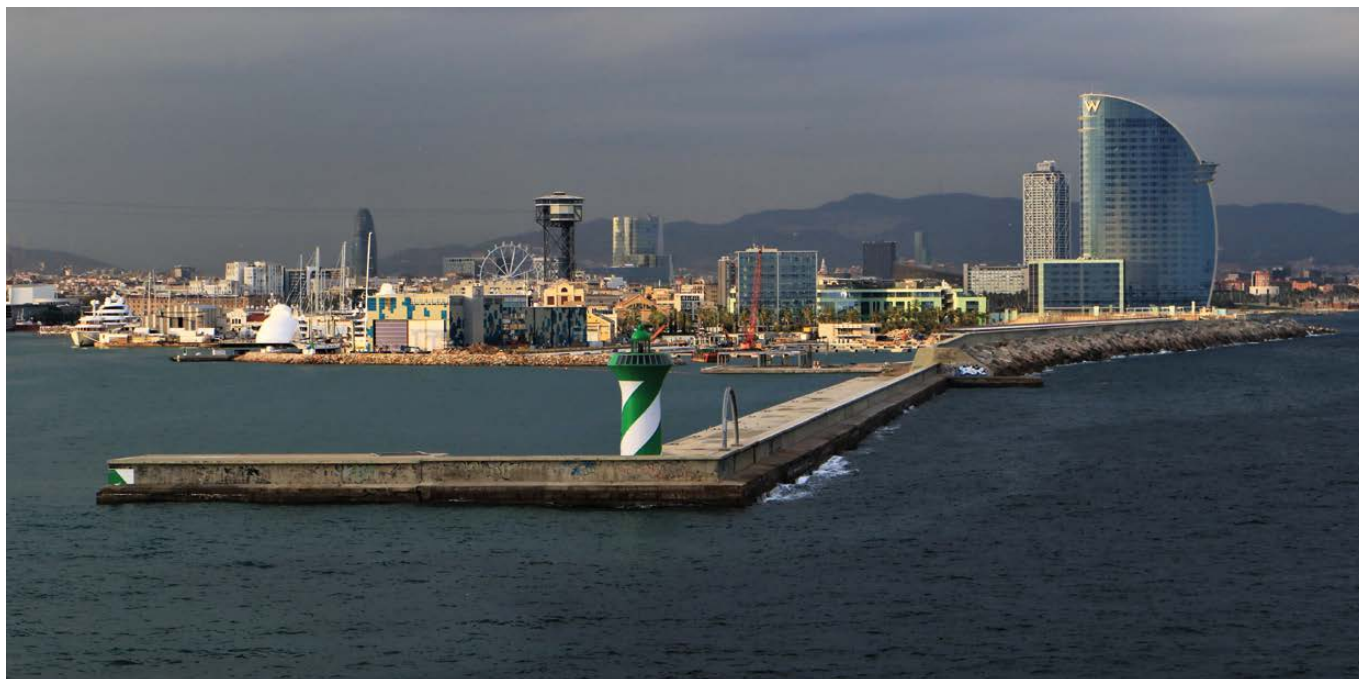
place of residence. Catalan Geography has devoted its undivided attention to the causes and consequences of these dynamics, highlighting that while segregation is a structural phenomenon of our society, it is currently acquiring relatively new features. On the one hand, with the expansion of urban areas, segregation is now apparent at the metropolitan scale, so that what becomes socially marked is not, as in the past, the streets or neighbourhoods of each town or city, but municipalities and, often, entire metropolitan axes. On the other hand, segregation increasingly affects all social groups and is the result not only of the confinement of the most disadvantaged groups in neighbourhoods where prices are lower, but also of the desire of the most prosperous social groups to separate themselves from the rest. These circumstances contribute to the fact that residential segregation, far from being a mere reflection of inequalities, is today a key factor in its maintenance and reproduction.

Meanwhile, the health crisis has contributed to bringing to the fore another classic concern in geographical studies: the relationship between areas of high and low population density, or, if you prefer, between urban and rural areas. Studies of urban geography in Catalonia showed how, from the last quarter of the 20th century, the urbanisation process underwent a marked inflection. At this point in time the spatial concentration of population and activity, which had been predominant since the beginning of the industrial revolution, gave way to a new stage characterised by a tendency towards the expansion of urban areas, spatial integration and the dispersion of urbanisation. In this new context, the densest and most populated urban areas tend to lose relative weight and the country as a whole finds itself becoming increasingly inte-

grated, in such a way that the old distinctions between city and countryside become obsolete. However, with the advent of the pandemic, dense urban areas became associated with greater risks of contagion. This negative perception has been further reinforced by the challenging conditions in which their residents had to spend the lockdown. This, associated with concerns about climate change and access to resources, has reopened the debate on urban forms and the settlement system. It is not surprising, then, that in recent years Catalan Geography has produced a good number of contributions on the processes of urbanisation, internal migrations and the new realities of old rural areas.

The health crisis has also highlighted the importance of the provision of care in our society, in terms of access to public and private services as well as family and interpersonal support practices. Catalan Geography has a long tradition of studying the distribution of social infrastructure and services as key elements in the configuration of spatial structures. In recent times, the study of the relationship between social inequalities and public services (schools, healthcare, commerce,





culture and leisure) has attracted increasing research interest. At the same time, Catalan Geography has also conducted a good number of studies focused on time use, the distribution of tasks in the home and the care economy, all stressing their, often hidden, importance for the functioning of our society. This interest forms part of the introduction of gender studies and the gender perspective in spatial studies, in which Catalan geographers have often played a leading role in Spain.

While the contributions made by Catalan Geography to our understanding of the spatial implications of the economic and health crises have been notable, the field that has attracted the most research in recent times has been that of the spatial causes and consequences of climate change. This is not surprising

given that in this crisis the relationship between society and the environment—the quintessential concern of Geographers—lies at the heart of the matter. Thus, Catalan Geographers have made an outstanding contribution to studies on the evolution of the climate, sitting on some of the most important national and international panels. Equal importance has been attached to studies of land cover changes, in which, in Catalonia, a remarkable increase in urbanised areas is combined with the staggering growth in areas dedicated to forests, to the detriment of agricultural land. In the field of energy and resources, geographical studies have focused especially on the issue of spatial and social equity in accessing these resources. The contribution of Catalan Geography to

mobility research has also been remarkable, both in terms of quantitative studies —with the preparation and exploitation of periodic surveys— and in terms of the study of its environmental, social and gender consequences. Finally, mention should be made of the work being undertaken to catalogue and manage the landscape, a field in which Catalonia has exercised a certain degree of leadership within Europe, above all since the foundation of the Landscape Observatory of Catalonia in 2004.

To conclude this overview of the latest contributions made by Catalan Geography, mention should be made that in recent years there has also been a flourishing of studies of a geopolitical nature —as Paül and Giménez-Capdevila explain in their chapter. These range from research on the spatial distribution of collective action to electoral studies. Particularly recurrent have been, since the beginning of the present century, analyses of territorial conflicts, which have given rise to multiple studies and even to the publication, during a number of years, of a yearbook on this subject. Less attention had been paid, on the other hand, the institutional crisis over self-government and the independence movement that resulted from it. Indeed, despite the acute political turmoil that Catalonia has suffered during this period, articles about this subject in Catalan (and Spanish) geographical journals have, for much of the conflict, been quite rare. However, this situation has to some extent been corrected in recent years, with the publication of a number of studies on the evolution of the conflict over the independence of Catalonia and its territorial implications. To a certain extent, studies in this field are linked to a traditional concern of Catalan Geography, which, throughout the last century, had as one of its main subjects of interest

the debate on the territorial organisation of public administration in Catalonia.

Conclusions: Tradition and Innovation, Relevance and the Social Commitment of Geographical Studies in Catalonia

We have seen how within Catalan Geography, which is honoured to host the 9th EUGEO Congress, tradition and innovation have combined. On the one hand, geographical studies in Catalonia boast a long history, reflecting the evolution of our science and providing evidence of the link between the practice of Geography and the evolution of Catalan society over the last few centuries. On the other hand, Catalan Geography is today characterised by its capacity for innovation and by the vigour of its presence both in academia, as well as in public administration and in public debate.

The capacity of Catalan Geography to innovate and intervene publicly is captured, first and foremost, by its internationalisation, the organisation of the EUGEO Congress being a good example of this. It is also reflected in the contribution of Catalan geographers to international publications and research projects, as well as the growing presence at Catalan universities of foreign students on postgraduate programs in Geography. Second, the innovative nature of Catalan Geography is seen in the breadth and relevance of its fields of study and in its interrelationship with the other natural and social sciences. Finally, the practice of Geography in Catalonia is specifically characterised by the desire to involve itself in public debates and to incorporate critical thinking —on environmen-

tal, social and gender issues– so as to generate useful knowledge for society.

This book, despite the limitations of the format, has been designed to facilitate understanding and dialogue between Catalan geographers and their collea-

gues from all over Europe and the world. Hopefully, it will contribute to strengthening existing collaborative links and enhancing the contribution of Geography to our understanding of the world in these turbulent but expectant times.

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