



CITY AND CITY MODEL: VILLAVICIOSA AS A PROJECT-TERRITORY IN CENTRAL ASTURIAS

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ABSTRACT

The municipality of Villaviciosa has recently undergone significant infrastructural development, resulting in its full integration into the central urban region of Asturias, which is located at the north-eastern periphery of the region. This integration has given rise to various forms of tension, primarily stemming from increased territorial competitiveness, particularly in the domains of population attraction and retention, as well as economic activity. This dynamic and evolving context presents both opportunities for growth and challenges that demand specific actions and strategies. It requires novel, creative approaches to territorial planning that can safeguard the municipality's values while promoting comprehensive and sustainable territorial development. This development should be founded on three fundamental aspects: the utilisation of the landscape as a resource, the preservation of diversified economic activities sustained by endogenous resources, and the continuation of its integration within Central Asturias.

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1. Introduction: "Creativity" in Terms of Strategic Territorial Planning

The development of a strategic planning project as a creative tool for the comprehensive and sustainable advancement of a particular geographical area necessitates a multifaceted process, particularly in a context such as the present one, which is in perpetual flux. In such a scenario, global and local dynamics and transformations necessitate unceasing adaptation.

In this regard, Pinazo-Dallenbach & Tutistar-Rosero (2019) emphasise that strategic territorial planning should be conceptualised as a transformative, integrative and deliberative socio-territorial process that facilitates, in the medium term, This approach facilitates the long-term articulation of a given area in a coherent and coordinated manner, with the objective of facilitating decision-making and the selection of the most appropriate actions according to the expected impact from the point of view of future socio-spatial relations.

Fernández & Olay (2021) designate this category of strategic instrument a modality within territorial planning, distinguished by its indicative nature, i.e. non-binding. This characteristic is considered the most distinctive feature of this category. The instrument's most distinctive feature is the establishment of ambitious yet pragmatic objectives for the development of a territory, which are intended to be achieved through a series of recommendations structured according to an intervention strategy that allows for a response in accordance with the needs identified.

This planning approach, while not mandatory, is distinguished by its ability to proactively anticipate medium-term scenarios and streamline decision-making processes to achieve desired territorial models. It is pertinent to note that this approach is versatile and can be implemented across diverse geographical scales.

Another salient feature of strategic territorial planning is the scope and participation of the various actors within the territory. It is imperative that this planning be a tool that contributes to enhancing the quality of life of the population and fostering the progress of diverse societal sectors, thereby facilitating comprehensive development of the designated area (Farinós, 2010).

In light of these premises, it is imperative that any strategic planning project is founded upon a robust and exhaustive analysis, enabling the comprehension and discernment of the territory. Consequently, the optimisation of the utilisation of its intrinsic resources and potential is not merely an objective, but one that is accompanied by a concerted effort to mitigate or diminish any inherent vulnerabilities and threats. In summary, the objective is to minimise the negative aspects and maximise the positive ones, with sufficient capacity to favour local development and generate advantages over other territories through the design of specific actions and strategies based on new creative approaches to territorial planning. In this sense, Olmedo-Barchello et al. (2020, p. 62) argue that creative cities "reflect the need to design new models of more inclusive development, taking into account factors such as lifestyle, tolerance, infrastructure and technological advances that benefit everyday life".

In a similar vein, Krueger & Buckingham (2009) underscore the necessity for territories, and cities in particular, to cultivate a conducive ecosystem through effective local governance, leveraging urban planning policies that attract the "creative class".

The Villaviciosa Strategic Plan (Villaviciosa Town Council, 2019) was formulated during a period in which the municipality was required to make significant decisions regarding the direction to be pursued in various domains in the medium term. Among the decisions made was the matter of defining the municipality's role in relation to the regional Central Area, and the creation of a tool that would establish the guidelines for the development of the different economic sectors, the improvement of the quality of life and territorial balance, the optimisation of communication and transport networks, the attention to care, the protection and development of heritage, or the improvement of governance and administration.¹

In this particular context, the various local social agents were cognisant of the necessity for the municipality to adopt a strategic and creative approach, as outlined in the plan, in order to effectively address the challenges it was facing. They were also aware that the success of local territorial

¹ It should be added that the plan, as it was originally drawn up in 2019, and as a result of the health emergency resulting from the pandemic caused by COVID-19, had to be revised in 2020-2021 to adapt it to the new situation, this revision being focused on adapting the original document to the post-pandemic scenario (Villaviciosa City Council, 2021).

development was contingent upon the utilisation of the municipality's inherent resources through the formulation of an innovative, open and flexible document.

2. Villaviciosa and its Geographical Contexts

2.1. *The Central Urban Region of Asturias*

In view of the approaches offered by different researchers and projects and technical works on the central area of Asturias, it is currently difficult to find a single, precise definition of the regional Central Area as there are no clear criteria to establish such a delimitation. However, the existing literature agrees, in the absence of a more specific definition, in considering the Central Area as the territory between the main urban centres of the region, although, over time, some of them have been losing importance (demographic and economic), as in the case of Langreo and Mieres, compared to the strength of others, especially Siero.

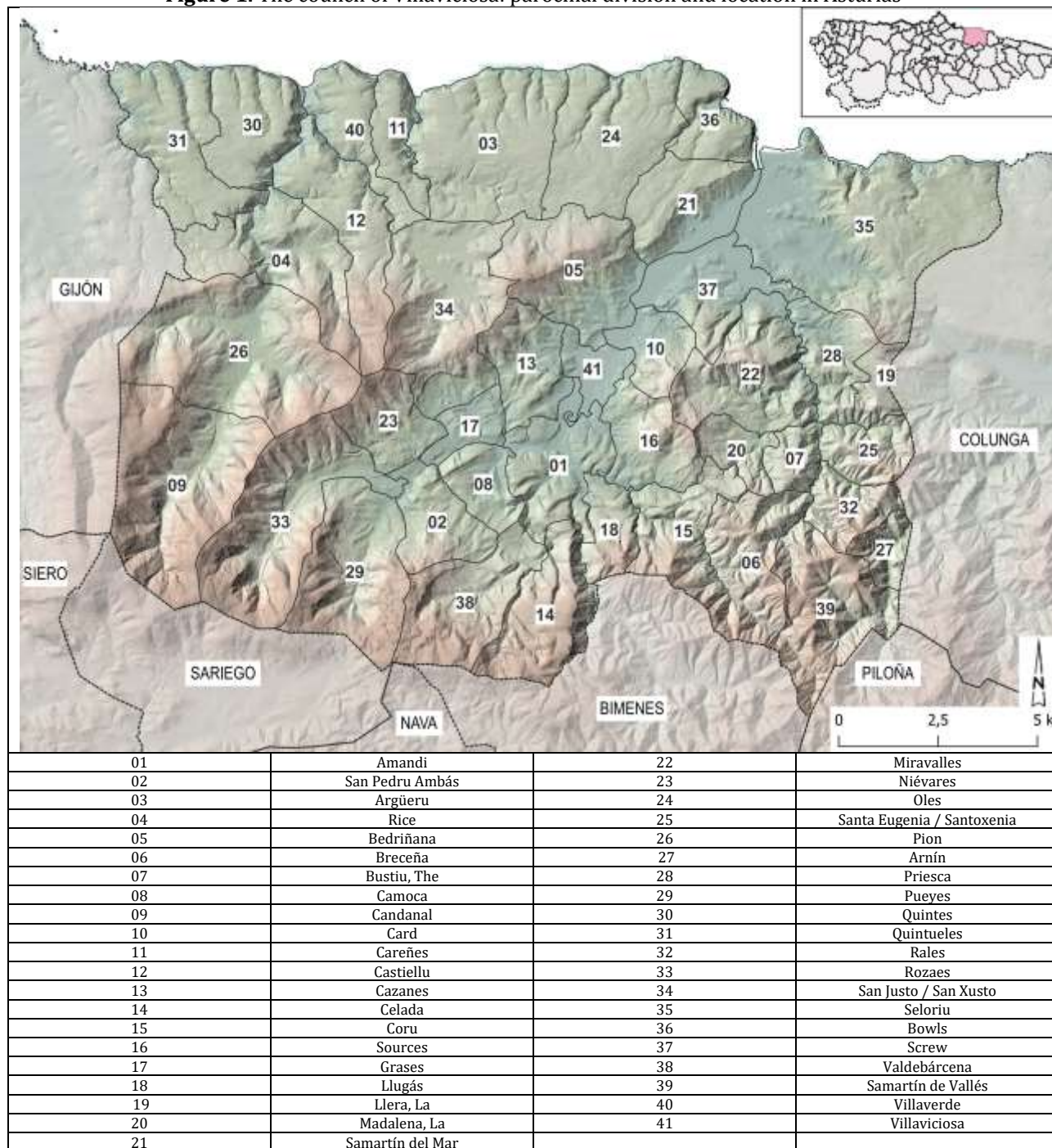
In this intricate territorial context, Villaviciosa is situated on the north-eastern periphery of the area, adjacent to the municipality of Gijón. This peripheral position inevitably places it within the zone of influence of the regional Central Area, in close proximity to the primary and most populous municipalities of the region, including Gijón (267,706 inhabitants) and Oviedo (215,167), which due to their demographic and economic magnitudes, as well as their marked urban character, would be on the first step within the regional urban network. Thus, following Avilés (75,877), Siero (51,792), Langreo (38,262) and Mieres (36,574), which would constitute the second tier, would be Villaviciosa (14,984), which, due to its size, would be in the second tier of the regional urban network. This tier, characterised by its socio-economic characteristics, encompasses municipalities of medium demographic size, exhibiting a certain diversification of their economy. In this tier, the municipal capitals, known as the "villas", function not only as regional hubs for surrounding municipalities but also as focal points for services and economic activity, particularly in the tertiary sector (Rodríguez et al., 2013).

The integration of Villaviciosa into the Central Area, understood as an expanding urban region, has been significantly accelerated by the construction of the Cantabrian motorway. The municipality's strategic location at the intersection of major transportation routes, including the A-8 and the A-64, has greatly enhanced its road accessibility. This facilitates efficient connections with Gijón and Siero within 20 minutes and Oviedo within 30 minutes. The construction of these rapid transit routes has precipitated a shift in Villaviciosa's status within the regional context, primarily due to the reduction in the time-distance factor when compared to the primary and most dynamic centres of population concentration, economic activity, service provision and regional employment. This predicament necessitates an adaptation of municipal development policies and plans. The optimisation of accessibility, facilitated by these connections, necessitates a novel conception of spatial interactions. It is imperative to comprehend this not solely as an opportunity for the comprehensive development of the municipality, but also as a catalyst for its competitiveness.

In addition to the aforementioned points, the high environmental standards and quality of life in the municipality are worthy of note. These factors contribute to the municipality's potential to attract population, both as a primary and secondary residence. This capacity enables the municipality to sustain its future growth, even in adverse scenarios. This is evidenced by the increase in the municipal population of 3.6% in just two years (2020-2022), from 14,470 to 14,984 inhabitants, which has occurred in the context of the situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This scenario presents a range of opportunities and challenges, stemming from the proximity to the Central Area, the existence of a notable heritage, a diversified economy, a positive demographic evolution sustained over the last few years, as well as a consolidated and growing urban fabric, in addition to more than optimal possibilities offered by road communications, in which the strengthening of the strategic position of the municipality in the context of Asturias, in general, and in that of its central urban region, in particular, must be understood (Rodríguez & Menéndez, 2010).

Figure 1. The council of Villaviciosa: parochial division and location in Asturias



Source: own elaboration.

2.2. Nature, Rurality and Urban Enclave as Keys to Diversity of Municipal Territory.

The current configuration of the territorial system and the landscape of Villaviciosa are defined by a series of factors, both physical and human, which have left their mark on the construction of the municipal space and which, in the present day, allow the identification of a series of explanatory keys with which to proceed to its interpretation, based on a more than evident natural differentiation between the coast (the marina) and the interior (the valleys and mountain ranges) and a social differentiation: the rural and urban areas of the town (Maurín & Maceda, 1992).

The coastline of the municipality is characterised by a 3-4 kilometre wide, east-west oriented, flat area known as the coastal plain. This area is bisected by a dense river network, which runs perpendicular to the coast, and is crowned on its northern edge by a succession of cliffs, interrupted

only at the mouths of the riverbeds, where beaches or coves are created. The degree of anthropization in this area is, potentially in conjunction with that of the capital, the highest in the municipality. Rural nuclei are characterised by a lack of discernible growth patterns, attributable to the high degree of dispersion with which the territory has been occupied. This results in a dispersed habitat. Distinct entities emerge, yet these represent a continuum in spatial utilisation, giving rise to a dispersed settlement pattern that initially developed along road axes and exhibits characteristics more aligned with a peri-urban residential model than a rural area. Furthermore, these nuclei are significantly distorted by new constructions and renovations carried out on traditional housing. This is due to the replacement of the traditional model of life, which was based on agricultural and livestock activities, by a residential model that is often seasonal in nature. This new residential model is combined with the introduction of activities and uses that are not traditional. The hotel and catering industry, many of which are linked to rural tourism, is a notable example of this.

Figure 2. The rural-dominant coastal area: Quintueles



Source: Plan Nacional de Ortofotografía Aérea (PNOA, 2020).

The topography of the interior is characterised by a series of diminutive mountain ranges, with an elevation that does not exceed 700 metres, which are arranged in a north-south and an east-west sequence, alternating with diminutive interior valleys. The settlements are located in the valleys and mid-slopes, where they exhibit a compact morphology and grouped buildings that allow the outline of the nuclei to be delineated with a certain precision. These nuclei gradually lose size as one moves towards the municipal limits. It is precisely in these inland settlement units, with more unfavourable conditions and with less construction pressure, where the phenomenon of depopulation and population ageing has traditionally occurred with greater intensity.

Figure 3. The rural-dominant hinterland: Brezegna



Source: Plan Nacional de Ortofotografía Aérea (PNOA, 2020).

In the geographical centre of the municipality, and on a flat area adjoining the Villaviciosa or Puntal estuary and between the Cubera and Corona mountains, is the “villa”. The location of the villa is the result of a spatial logic of confluence of roads and fords of the estuary. This urban area is configured as a crossroads between the roads to Cabranes and Sariego, to the south, and to Gijón and Colunga (N-632), to the west and east, respectively. The capital's structural configuration can be characterised as a nexus of urban activity, centred on the aforementioned crossroads. This compact urban centre exhibits a radial structure, with two linear areas that extend in opposite directions. The first of these linear areas is oriented towards Amandi in the southern direction, while the second extends towards Selorio in the northern direction. Within this urban space, a wide range of city activities is conducted, with a notable presence of the service sector.

In contemporary society, where villas function as components of a larger urban framework, this specific urban space, which had 6,500 registered inhabitants in 2022, constitutes an autonomous functional entity. Notably, it exhibits significant economic diversity, with virtually all urban services and functions concentrated within its boundaries. This phenomenon is indicative of the profound influence exerted by the “villa” on the encompassing area, encompassing the parishes of Villaviciosa, Amandi, Carda, Fuentes, Bedriñana and Cazanes, despite the fact that the direct influence of the capital does not extend to all of these parishes, but rather to the area in closest proximity to the “villa”. With regard to the nature of the settlement, the “villa” features a combination of a purely urban settlement, characterised by medium-rise buildings (3-4 storeys), and a rural settlement that has been significantly distorted in some areas and retains residual areas that have remained outside the influence of the new urban developments.

4. Urban space: Villaviciosa



Source: Plan Nacional de Ortofotografía Aérea (PNOA, 2020).

2.3. Duality in the Settlement System: The Demographic Variable and its Projection on Urban Dynamics

As in the rest of Asturias, in Villaviciosa there is a duality in the settlement model, with a coastal area where there is the greatest construction pressure in the form of scattered single-family houses and a significant number of second homes (with greater intensity in the west of the municipality due to its proximity to Gijón), as opposed to an inland area characterised by a concentrated, purely rural population (Rodríguez & Menéndez, 2014).

In contrast to other municipalities within the Central Area, where significant reductions in vegetation could not be offset or mitigated by positive migratory balances, the population of Villaviciosa has exhibited an upward trend during the current century, with the exception of a decline between 2012 and 2019. The population increased from 14,211 in 2001 to 14,984 in 2022, representing a variation of 5.4%, and an increase in density from 51.4 to 54.7 inhabitants per square kilometre. Following an initial period of fluctuations between modest growth and decline at the turn of the century, the municipality experienced a period of sustained growth from 2004 to 2012, with annual population increases of approximately 90 to 100 inhabitants. However, this trajectory was interrupted from 2012 to 2019, with an average annual population decline of around 70 inhabitants. A slight recovery began in 2019 and was revitalised from 2020 as a result of the arrival of people in the municipality as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; this was the trigger for a part of this population, which had arrived in the municipality during the closure period, to decide to settle there permanently and become a resident population, which partly explains the recovery of the local population in the last three years, reaching values close to those of 2012.

The demographic structure of the population of Villaviciosa is markedly ageing. In 2022, 30.5% of the local population will be over 64 years old and only 10.2% under 15, with an old-age index of 281.1%, a youth index of 38% and a dependency index of 65.6%, and an average age of 50.26 years. A direct consequence of these data is the high mortality rate, which is almost four times higher than the birth rate and prevents a positive generational change from natural causes, resulting in a vegetative balance rate of -10.29 ‰ in 2021 (with gross birth and death rates of 3.6 ‰ and 13.89 ‰ respectively). In the

face of such an unfavourable scenario due to purely biological causes, it is migratory flows that have allowed the municipality to experience real population growth so far this century. Thus, and especially after the opening in 2003 of the section of the Cantabrian motorway (A-8) and its link with the A-64, which has brought Villaviciosa closer to the rest of the region in general and the central area in particular, these migratory flows have systematically shown a more or less positive balance each year, although at times this has not been enough to compensate for the losses suffered by the municipality as a result of a negative natural dynamic. These migration rates show a significant peak in 2020 and 2021 as a result of the situation caused by the pandemic, which increased the net migration rates to almost 40 ‰ in 2020 and 20 ‰ in 2021, which justifies the recovery of the local population in recent years.

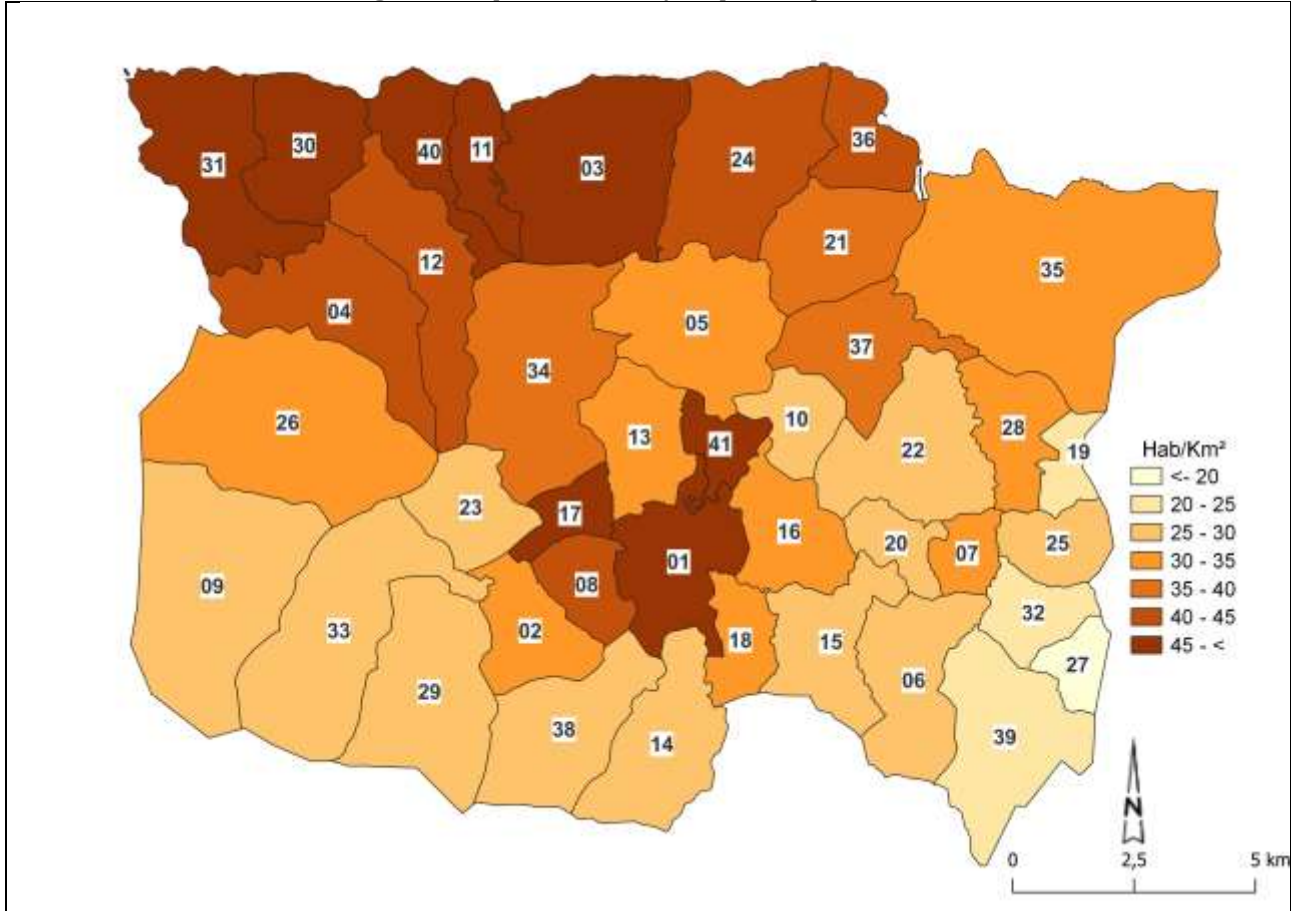
Following this brief contextualisation concerning demographics, a reduction in scale of analysis allows a glimpse to be had of a highly disparate internal municipal reality, far removed from that offered by overall data, which usually conceals notable imbalances.

In order to understand this disparate local reality, it is first necessary to outline the internal organisation of the municipal territory, which is divided, as it appears in the Nomenclature of Population, into 41 parishes² which in turn encompass a total of 385 singular entities, which are classified into different categories: places, hamlets, hamlets and neighbourhoods; and a single urban "villa", the capital. Despite the distribution of these population entities being dispersed throughout the municipality, it is not homogeneous, with the largest entities being located in the area close to the municipal capital, as well as in the coastal area (especially in the area of influence of Gijón). The most important and densely populated areas are located in the valley bottoms and mid-slopes, exhibiting optimal orientation. Conversely, as one traverses towards the interior and the periphery of the municipality, the population density and importance diminish, attributable to the physical environment's less conducive characteristics for population settlement and economic activity development.

The positive, albeit modest, demographic evolution of the commune noted above reinforces an internal reality in which the number of inhabitants has fallen in 31 of the 41 communes, which means that a process of abandonment of the interior is already underway, as opposed to growth in the "villa" and on the coast. Thus, between 2001 and 2022, the behaviour of the capital, with an increase of 1,527 inhabitants, and the coastal communes to the west of the estuary, with a positive balance of 655 inhabitants, has not only made it possible to compensate for the demographic dynamic, but even to reverse it. In this sense, the municipality of Villaviciosa was home to 34% of the local population in 2001, a percentage that will increase to 43.2% in 2022, while the coastal areas accounted for 16.6% and 20.1% respectively in the same period, the sum of both reaching 50.6% of the local population in 2001 and 63.3% in 2022, these areas, due to their demographic weight, being the ones that save the municipality from depopulation similar to that occurring in the less populated areas of the region.

² The 1981 Statute of Autonomy of the Principality of Asturias identifies the parish as the traditional form of coexistence and settlement of the Asturian population, stating categorically that the Autonomous Community is organised territorially into municipalities, which will receive the traditional name of councils. Nominal maintenance of a territorial reality of deep tradition that is assumed by the National Institute of Statistics, insofar as it respects the denomination and delimitation of the parishes, as collective entities of population, defining them as the grouping of singular entities that make up a population settlement with its own personality, intermediate between the singular entity of population and the municipality (QUIRÓS, 1993).

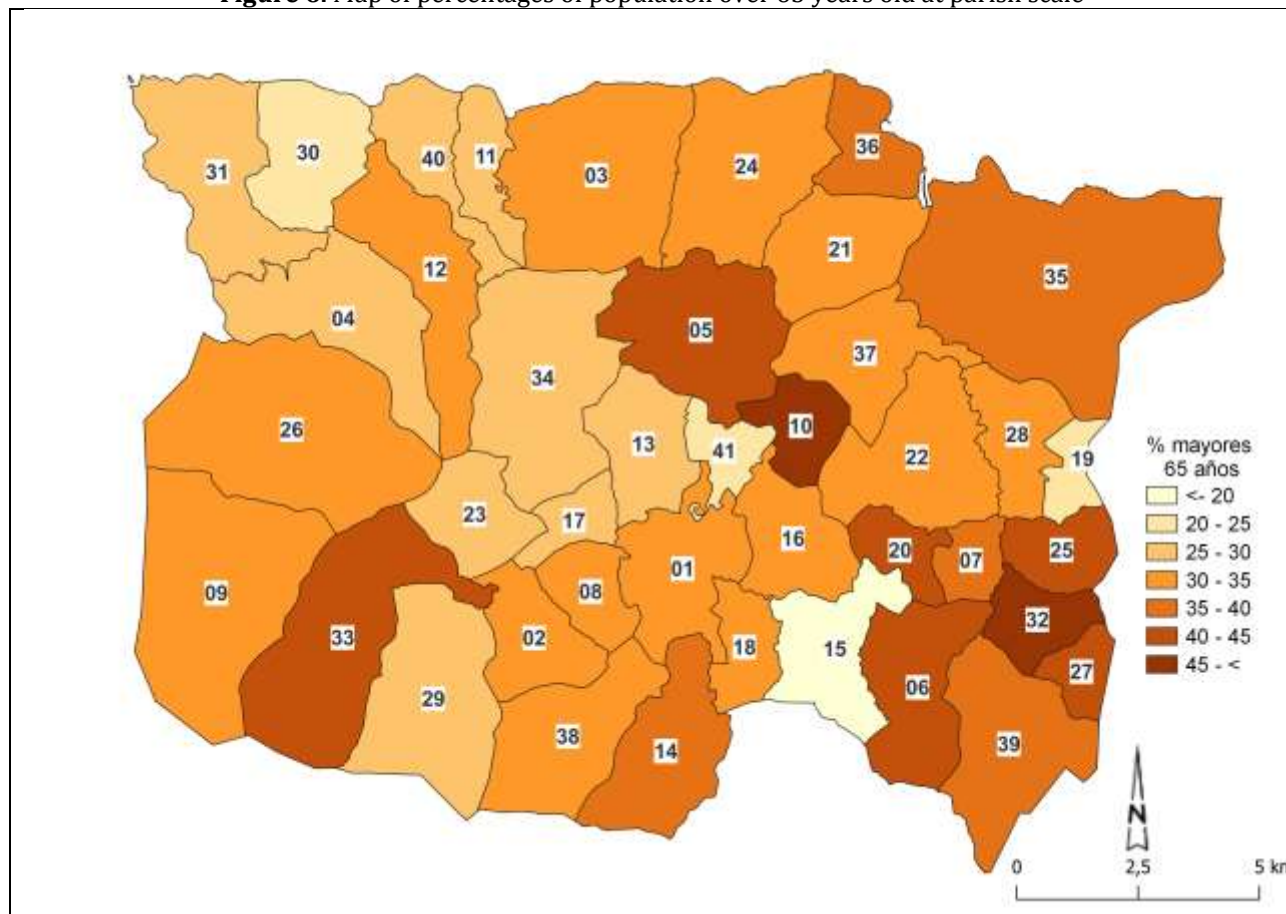
Figure 5. Population density map at the parish scale



Source: Nomenclátor de entidades de población (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2023)

As with the evolution of the population, it is possible to recognise different degrees of intensity in the process of depopulation. Similarly, it is also possible to detect intensities of occupation in the distribution of the population, which translate into densities that, if we consider the parish scale, are contrasted. In Villaviciosa, the density is not uniform across the 41 parishes of the municipality, as there are large differences between them. For instance, the capital of Villaviciosa exhibits a density of approximately 3,318 inhabitants per square kilometre, which is notably the highest within the municipal boundaries. Conversely, the neighbouring parish of Amandi exhibits a significantly lower density of 87.5 inhabitants per square kilometre. The coastal parishes of Quintes, Quintueles and Careñes, which enjoy the closest and best transport links with neighbouring Gijón, have population densities of 87.4 and 67 inhabitants per square kilometre, respectively. Conversely, the parishes with the lowest population density are located in the south of the council. Arnín (5.6 inhabitants per square kilometre) and La Llera (6 inhabitants per square kilometre) are particularly noteworthy in the extreme south-east. The topography is not conducive to population settlement, resulting in the emigration of the population from these parishes and the subsequent depopulation and ageing of the parishes. The other group of low-density parishes, with values between 10-20 inhabitants/km², are concentrated in the southwest of the municipality, and have part of their territory on the mountain range whose southern limit is the culmination of Pelapotros. Like the previous ones, they do not have land that is very suitable for retaining a high number of inhabitants.

Figure 6. Map of percentages of population over 65 years old at parish scale



Source: Nomenclátor de entidades de población (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2023)

The proportion of individuals over the age of 65 registered in the capital is notable for its relatively low values, with 24.9% of the total population falling within this age bracket. This figure has exhibited a downward trend in recent years, a development that may be attributed to the influx of younger demographics, which contribute to the revitalisation of the capital's demographic structure. It is noteworthy that 12% of the population is considered to be elderly, and the parish data, in conjunction with the general register of the municipality (30.4%), mirrors the ageing of the population in the municipality. This phenomenon is further accentuated when old age indices are taken into consideration, where the most favourable values, which are already high in themselves, are those of the urban area of the capital. 201.6‰, as well as the coastal parishes of Quintes and Quintueles, close to Gijón and with indices in which the elderly are more than twice as old as the youngest. Although these indices are high, they are clearly lower than those of most of the municipalities in the interior of the municipality, especially in the south-east, with values above 300%.

With regard to residential development, this has not exhibited a parallel trend in terms of the number of dwellings to that observed in the demographic evolution. Consequently, and in contrast to the reduced increase in population, there has been a substantial growth in the housing stock, increasing from just over 9,028 in 2001 to over 11,000 in 2011 and 13,256 in 2021, representing a percentage increase of 46.7% so far this century and 19.7% in the last decade.

Table 1. Dwellings in Villaviciosa by type (2001-2021)

Year	Type of dwelling	No. of dwellings
2001	Main dwellings	5.279
	Non-main dwellings	3.749
	Total dwellings	9.028
2011	Main dwellings	6.220
	Non-main dwellings	4.850
	Total dwellings	11.070
2021	Main dwellings	6.749
	Non-main dwellings	6.497
	Total dwellings	13.246

Source: Viviendas según tipo (Sociedad Asturiana de Estudios Económicos e Industriales, 2024).

A pivotal factor in elucidating the robust proliferation of residential dwellings pertains to the escalating demand from the urban population, predominantly concentrated within the centre of the region, particularly in Gijón, for secondary residences, encompassing both urban and rural areas. Since the late 20th century, this trend has resulted in an augmentation of the local housing stock, exhibiting distinct behaviour and characteristics depending on the geographical location and, within these locations, the coastal or inland status.

In the municipal capital, construction is dominated by multi-family housing, where the typologies characteristic of any urban space proliferate. These include enclosed, medium-density block buildings (three-four storeys and ground floor), with or without commercial ground floors. There are three formulas for activating the construction dynamic on urban land: The most paradigmatic case is that of the developments in the northern sector of the city, in the area known as El Pelambre; the generation of expansive processes in the city itself, as is happening to the west, thanks to the construction of new development areas such as La Barquerina, and finally, through the replacement of old houses with new buildings in consolidated areas in the interior of the urban land. To a lesser extent, there are also some residential developments within the urban land with single-family homes as the main feature, as is the case to the northwest of the urban area, at the exit of the city to the north along the N-632.

In relation to the dynamics of construction in rural areas, the greatest proliferation of housing is observed in the coastal strip, where 47.9% of new building permits granted between 2010 and 2020 are concentrated. An increase in building pressure is evident the closer it is to Gijón, generating a diffuse growth in these areas. This traditional habitat, which has existed in the rural environment of the municipality, has undergone significant changes in recent decades due to the proliferation of single-family dwellings. This phenomenon, known as peri-urbanisation, is particularly evident in the coastal area and can be interpreted as an extension of the residential uses of the city. The occupants of these dwellings are predominantly the urban population who are employed in the cities of the Central Area. They elect to establish their first or second residence in the rural environment, while maintaining their daily contact with the urban environment from which they originate (Fernández & Alonso, 2008; Alonso, 2008).

2.4. The Local Production System: The Keys to a Diversified Economy

It is evident that throughout the history of the municipality, two fundamental economic activities have been instrumental in establishing the current territorial model: agriculture and livestock farming. Although the changes produced in this productive model and their socio-economic and territorial repercussions were minimal for centuries, it was from the 1960s that relevant transformations began to take place, especially linked to a change in the productive orientation of the cattle herd towards a model of milk production, as a result of the growing demand for dairy products from urban areas. Concurrently, a significant migration towards urban areas commenced, resulting in the abandonment of farms located in remote, high-altitude areas. These farms were converted into scrubland or repopulated with allochthonous tree species.

With respect to the foundations of the local manufacturing sector, whilst Villaviciosa was formerly a municipality that boasted a notably diversified industrial activity, it was from the beginning of the 20th century that an important revival took place, owing to the establishment of industries based on the transformation of agricultural products. These constituted the agro-industrial base that currently survives in the municipality, albeit with the processing of only two main raw materials: apples and milk.

The legacy of that once powerful agro-industrial activity is currently a network of agri-food companies, with a certain diversification of their activity and with production processes in which there are also notable spatial differences in terms of the degree of mechanisation. In this context, the companies with the most significant economic and employment impact are those dedicated to the production of cider, a market that operates at all levels, including local, regional, national and, in the case of some, international. The most notable examples are the companies "El Gaitero" and "Mayador", which market products derived from apples, such as natural and carbonated cider, juices, vegetable preserves, among others. These companies with the highest turnover are supported by a network of smaller enterprises within the municipality, whose turnover is significantly lower and is restricted exclusively to the production of natural cider.

The second pillar of industrial activity in Villaviciosa has traditionally been linked to the dairy sector; however, this activity has experienced a significant loss of weight following the cessation of activity of the company Corporación Alimentaria Peñasanta (C.A.P.S.A.) in 2012, as well as the relocation, planned for the end of 2024. This will result in the relocation of the I.P.L.A. (Instituto de Productos Lácteos), a research centre that is dependent on the Ministry of Science and Innovation. This centre is engaged in the knowledge and study of dairy products with the aim of improving the health and wellbeing of the population.

Despite this, the local dairy sector maintains a certain degree of significance, primarily attributable to the company "Industrias Granderroble S.A.", a manufacturer of dairy products including cheeses, cream, cakes, ice cream, and more. This is complemented by the presence of smaller enterprises that utilise milk as their primary raw material, such as "Los Caserinos", a company specialising in the production of artisanal dairy products.

The aforementioned social, economic and territorial changes have had a considerable impact on the "villa", resulting in an increased demand for greater diversity in the local commercial and service sector, which is currently the most significant in terms of employment. In this respect, the tertiary sector presents a hierarchical structure in terms of its presence according to the population entities in terms of the provision of public services and facilities. At the apex of this tiered structure is the capital, which houses a preponderance of services and activities that are characteristic of an urban area and which constitute this sector. These services are not only provided from the "villa" to the rest of the municipal area but also extend and cover neighbouring councils such as Colunga, Sariego and Cabranes.

Outside the urban sphere, existing activities in the service sector are primarily concentrated in the hotel and catering industry and, more specifically, in the increasingly developed tourism sector.

3. From the Territory to the Project "Creativity": Villaviciosa as an Integrated Territorial Development Strategy

3.1. Villaviciosa Strategic Plan: Nature and Methodological Approach

The socio-economic context, in conjunction with the previously defined aspects —namely, a rich and varied heritage and the municipality's location in relation to the regional Central Area— establishes the basis for the formulation of a strategic plan. The implementation of an appropriate methodology enables the identification of not only the strengths and opportunities, but also the weaknesses and threats. Consequently, a strategy for the medium and long-term integral development of the municipality can be delineated. Moreover, a significant potential of this planning paradigm is the facilitation of citizen participation, conceptualised as the collaborative engagement of diverse actors present within the territory, each contributing different yet complementary perspectives. This collaborative process enables the development of a "creative" project with which the local population, administration, business community, and other relevant stakeholders can identify.

In accordance with this intention, the Villaviciosa Strategic Plan has been formulated, taking into account both issues. The intended objective is to achieve this through the implementation of a

methodology based on an integral and global approach, with the aim of adapting the strategy to the specific characteristics of the local territory, thereby seeking to enhance the synergies between the various sectoral policies. The methodology is meticulously adapted to the contents of the European Territorial Strategy, thereby distancing itself from the compartmentalised analyses of reality offered by strictly sectoral analyses. Instead, it proposes a model of future development for the locality through an integral intervention strategy.

In light of the aforementioned issues, the plan was meticulously organised into three distinctly separate phases, each with its own distinct purpose and procedure. However, it should be noted that these phases were complementary to each other within the overarching methodology of the plan. The three phases were as follows: diagnosis, citizen participation and elaboration of the intervention strategy.

In order to prepare the diagnosis, an exhaustive analysis was carried out of the different variables considered relevant. This analysis was undertaken to show, in a synthetic way, the main indicators and characteristics of the municipality.

This initial phase was succeeded by the second phase, the participation phase, which was structured in three parts: meetings with key agents in the municipality organised on an individual basis; organisation of sectoral roundtables; and, finally, a consultation process open to all citizens. The principal purpose of this participation process was to complete, complement and contrast the information worked on by the drafting team in the different stages of the project.

The final phase involves the formulation of an intervention strategy tailored to the municipality's specific context and requirements. This stage entails the implementation of bespoke actions, the efficacy of which is instrumental in progressing towards the accomplishment of the overarching objectives. The strategy is designed to facilitate comprehensive municipal development, addressing a wide range of concerns, including: (1) the promotion of economic development to attract companies; (2) the promotion of industrial land; (3) the support of companies in the creation of employment; (4) the enhancement of the value of environmental, tourist and cultural resources, in terms of territorial quality and in a global perspective; (5) the support of integral sustainable development in urban and rural areas; (7) to consolidate and improve basic infrastructures, with special attention to the sanitation network; (8) to provide a general project-framework that facilitates updated urban planning; (9) to advance towards territorial balance and sustainability; and (10) to favour citizen participation processes and democratic quality.

3.2. The City Model Through the "Co-Creative" Participation Process: Citizen Participation

The exchange of information and perspectives among the various stakeholders within the designated territory, in conjunction with the drafting team, is recognised as a pivotal element in the development of an innovative and creative project. This approach is founded on the principles of shared leadership and the collaborative engagement of the stakeholders, with the overarching objective being the realisation of an optimal economic and social model (Molina, 2015). In this context, strategic territorial planning envisions direct communication between all stakeholders within the territory as a crucial element for the attainment of the established objectives. This approach is embedded within a sufficiently broad chronological framework, extending beyond the implementation process, thereby ensuring the openness and flexibility of the project, allowing it to adapt to various circumstances. The dynamic nature of this planning method necessitated a review of the initial document just a year and a half after its approval, in response to the post-pandemic environment.

In the context of territorial planning projects, citizen participation assumes particular significance, particularly in the realm of strategic planning. This is due to two fundamental reasons. Firstly, the knowledge that civil society possesses regarding the characteristics of the planned territorial area is of paramount importance. Secondly, the consequences, both positive and negative, of the territorial model and policy adopted for the territory will have a direct impact on its development. The objective is to foster a sense of engagement among key stakeholders in the formulation of the strategy through a process of "co-creation" and co-participation.

The participation process was designed with the clear premise that public participation should occur during the initial phases of strategy development, as opposed to a posteriori involvement. Consequently, the objective of public participation is not the validation of a pre-existing document, but rather an

integral component of the strategy development process. The programme of participation sessions is informed by the draft report prepared by the drafting team. These sessions have two objectives. Firstly, they seek to contrast the conclusions drawn by the drafters with new information that is not available from official sources. Secondly, they aim to gather the vision of the future of the territory, the problems and the solutions proposed by the key agents. This is one of the main novelties of the strategy. The drafting team is tasked with the analysis of this information, the design of a logical structure for the strategy, the avoidance of collisions in the interests of the various agents involved, and the completion of measures deemed appropriate by the team. The result is therefore a strategy designed in a participatory and "co-creative" process. To this end, the methodology applied was organised into three areas of work: meetings or interviews with key informants, sectoral roundtables, and the participation of citizens in general.

In relation to key informants, and as a priority, face-to-face interviews were carried out in order to obtain direct information from agents linked to strategic areas and sectors in the municipality.

In terms of the sectoral roundtables, the overarching objective was to procure direct information from representatives of various groups or sectors within the municipality. This was done so that these individuals could share their characteristics, concerns, needs, proposals and vision for the municipality's future. In this regard, the roundtables were organised according to the different themes and the relevance of their participation in the preparation of the final strategic document.

The third area to be addressed was that of public participation, encompassing the consultation of organised groups and the general public. Given the considerable number of individuals who may be involved, two consultation methods were employed: firstly, direct consultation through the use of questionnaires, surveys and other electronic documents; and secondly, the so-called Citizen Participation Council, which is defined as the body responsible for regulating and coordinating relations between the municipal administration, federations and local associations. This council is comprised of various associations operating within the municipality, including neighbourhood associations, cultural associations, sports associations, women's associations, social-educational associations, and sectoral-business associations. The council is to be consulted on projects, plans and programmes of general interest at the behest of the Mayor's Office, the municipal Plenary, or the Participation Council.

In the course of this participatory process, a number of key ideas emerged, including the necessity to strengthen various sectors of activity, notably tourism and agro-industrial pursuits, as well as the primary sector. Other ideas included the enhancement of services and fundamental local infrastructures, the enrichment of the cultural offer, the conservation and promotion of heritage, and the fortification of the municipality's strategic position within the broader context of the Cantabrian axis and within the central urban region of Asturias.

This participatory process, in which the various actors present in Villaviciosa are actively involved, aligns with the concept of "creative class" proposed by Florida (2010), a geographer and expert in economic development. According to Florida, the economic, social and cultural dynamism of a specific territorial area is the result of the ideas, technologies and content created and contributed by the diverse segments and profiles, both human and professional, within society.

In relation to the concept of "creative cities", it is important to note the contributions made by the participatory process, as highlighted by Correa (2010), cited by Olmedo-Barchello et al. (2020, p.57). According to Correa, the notion of a creative city, which can be extended to other scales, is associated with tourism and cultural assets. This formula is of vital importance for "development while preserving the identity of peoples".

3.3. Strategic Focuses

The relevance and the strong links between land use planning and territorial development, regardless of the scale of the work, make it advisable, once the phases described above have been completed, and taking into account the considerations expressed during the public participation process, to tackle the second part of this methodology, that of drawing up an intervention strategy to serve as a guide for subsequent action processes.

In this respect, five interrelated focal points of action have been identified, which establish, through a tree structure, the guidelines to advance towards an integral territorial development of Villaviciosa in the medium-long term. In this way, the intervention strategy is articulated in axes that are progressively

specified in strategic lines, measures and finally in specific actions. The axes, of a broader nature, are responsible for covering all relevant aspects for the development of the municipality. This process allows for a precise definition of the intervention strategy, progressing from general ideas to concrete actions

3.3.1, Axis 1. Economic Activity and System.

The municipality of Villaviciosa has an economic structure based on a high number of assets in the tertiary sector and a V.A.B. that is the one that contributes the most value among all the economic sectors to the total of the municipality. This is largely due to the important tourist and leisure offer based on its coastal location, a high environmental value and a remarkable heritage. The municipality's strategic positioning is further bolstered by its well-developed road infrastructure, which facilitates enhanced accessibility to the Asturian Central Area. It is imperative to acknowledge the significance of the municipality's specialised industrial sector within the agri-food sector, characterised by its substantial asset base and substantial contribution to GVA. The primary sector, which boasts an illustrious tradition and a notable degree of implantation, is also worthy of recognition.

This economic diversification is the foundation for the establishment of a dedicated axis, comprising four strategic lines. Of these, three align with the distinct economic sectors (primary, secondary, and tertiary), while a fourth line focuses specifically on enterprise and employment, providing a transversal dimension across all sectors.

3.3.2. Axis 2. Quality of life and Territorial Rebalancing.

As in other regions, since the mid-20th century, there has been a progressive migration of the population from rural to urban areas in Villaviciosa.

This phenomenon has resulted in a series of internal imbalances within the municipality, manifesting as an uneven distribution of the population across parishes with disparate demographic profiles, particularly in areas under the influence of neighbouring Gijón and along the coastline. These regions, characterised by their superior accessibility to urban centres, bear the greatest population density, with the exception of the capital, Amandi. The ease of access to major roads in certain municipal sectors has, in turn, generated a more fragmented scenario, increasing the imbalances between less populated, older inland areas and the more dynamic demographically and economically "villa" and coastal parishes.

The potential of rural areas as heritage and landscape assets, and as tourist destinations, as well as their attractiveness as places to live, whether as a primary or secondary residence, must be complemented and reinforced through attention to housing needs, as well as issues related to basic services and population care, and basic quality infrastructures. The aim is not only to fix population decline, but also to attract people to live in these areas.

3.3.3. Axis 3. Communications, Transport and Logistics.

Improving accessibility and mobility is imperative to invigorate and revitalise the municipality, from both a demographic and an economic standpoint. This is because it facilitates the establishment of new markets and accelerates relations with other areas of the region, particularly the Central Area. This enhancement signifies a pivotal opportunity to augment the competitiveness of Villaviciosa, as it fortifies its position within the urban context of Asturias. The municipality stands to significantly bolster its standing through the implementation of suitable communications infrastructures and the establishment of an efficient transport system, one that is capable of catering to the requirements of both the population and commercial enterprises. In addition, the strategic advantage of Villaviciosa's location at a pivotal nexus of logistical and passenger transport networks should be capitalised upon to enhance mobility.

The role of information and communication technologies (ICT) is also key to the economic and social progress of the municipality. Their importance is crucial in the "villa", but they are even more important in rural areas, facilitating the population's access to a wide range of services and contributing to boosting and strengthening economic activity.

3.3.4. Axis 4. Heritage and environment.

Villaviciosa is distinguished by its extensive array of heritage elements and resources across diverse domains, including culture, art, landscape, environment, and ethnography. These elements can be considered strategic resources for the municipality's advancement.

These elements are not only representative of the municipality's identity but also possess significant potential to function as catalysts for economic development, particularly in service sector activities. Their utilisation should be guided by sustainability criteria as a key development resource.

Similarly, landscape and environmental quality must be recognised as a resource with significant potential for development. Consequently, the implementation of actions within the intervention strategy should not only be focused on preserving these assets, but also on utilising them as a catalyst for economic growth and local employment. In summary, the municipality's abundant and diverse natural and cultural heritage is presented as a pivotal factor for development and dynamisation. Moreover, it is a distinctive and differential factor when compared to other municipalities in the Central Area.

3.3.5. Axis 5. Governance, administration and "co-creative" citizen participation.

The fifth focus of action is centred on management by the local administration and its relations with other supra-municipal administrations, as well as citizen participation in "making a municipality". Aspects addressed include urban planning, administrative simplification, municipal management and citizen participation, in the terms of "co-creativity".

4. Conclusions

The impact of the physical environment on economic and demographic development has always been significant. However, in today's globalised world, the comparative advantages offered by existing resources alone are insufficient for the economic and social development of a given area. Instead, the generation of competitive advantages through the introduction of innovations and knowledge applied to the territory is required (Vázquez & Rodríguez, 2015). From this standpoint, strategic territorial planning, as it is currently conceptualised within the European Union, is derived from the extensive availability of strategic documents that, for decades, have been formulated by the Union. These documents share a common denominator: the commitment to a territorial approach as opposed to a sectoral one. This approach is regarded as a formula for the integrated and balanced development of the different territories, irrespective of the scale of analysis.

Thus, and under the protection of the need to implement innovative and creative solutions for the development of territories, Farinós & Olcina (2022, p. 25) point out that this type of strategic planning "introduces new dimensions (...) as well as new dynamising elements (...) promoting the mobilisation and commitment of the actors of the territory".

The specific case of Villaviciosa, as is the case in many other areas, is a territory of contrasts, with a clearly urban and a rural area, with opposing dynamics and great divergences in terms of demographic developments, economic activities, connectivity, the existence of basic services, among other factors.

The passage of time has not served to reduce these contrasts; rather, it has served to exacerbate them, leading to the emergence of profound internal imbalances. The rural environment, with the exception of the coastal areas, particularly those in proximity to the Gijón area of influence, is characterised by a gradual decline in population and an increase in age demographic. In contrast, the urban environment, though also experiencing an ageing population, exhibits a propensity towards rejuvenation of its demographic structures. These disparities extend to the economic sphere, where the primary sector and its associated activities (e.g. agro-industry) were historically the foundation of the local economy. However, in recent years, the primary sector has exhibited signs of fatigue in the face of an increasingly robust service sector that is firmly established in the urban area.

In light of these coexisting realities in Villaviciosa, strategic planning is proposed as a mechanism to disrupt or, at the very least, mitigate these stagnant trends. The reduction of these contrasts and imbalances is sought through the search for and implementation of creative formulas capable of reversing or alleviating the negative dynamics. Simultaneously, these formulas should allow the consolidation and even favouring of other positive aspects or those with room for improvement. This

can be achieved through coherent, flexible and realistic planning oriented towards an integral local development which reaches all segments of society and economic sectors.

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