
A look at the center of Albacete, Spain: the use of CNAE as a methodology in urban studies

Una mirada al centro de Albacete, España: el uso de la CNAE como metodología en estudios urbanos

Um olhar ao centro de Albacete, Espanha: o uso do CNAE como metodologia em estudos urbanos

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Abstract

This article is the result of research conducted by researchers and universities in Brazil and Spain. It involves methodological strategies in a comparative study of cities with very different socio-spatial formations. Against the backdrop of the role of commerce and services in contemporary cities, we used the National Classification of Economic Activities (CNAE) as a starting point for our methodology, enabling us to construct our own typologies of commercial and service activities. In this text, we discuss how the pedestrian streets of Albacete's city center have facilitated the hosting of a considerable number of commercial and service activities, revitalizing this area of the city. On the other hand, on the city's outskirts, new consumer areas have been built by private capital (Imaginalia and Albacenter), making the urban structure more complex.

Keywords: Medium-sized city; commerce, services, urban centrality, Albacete.

Resumen

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Este artículo es el resultado de una investigación realizada por investigadores y universidades de Brasil y España. Implica estrategias metodológicas en un estudio comparativo de ciudades con formaciones socioespaciales muy diferentes. Considerando el papel del comercio y los servicios en las ciudades contemporáneas, utilizamos la Clasificación Nacional de Actividades Económicas (CNAE) como punto de partida para nuestra metodología, lo que nos permitió construir nuestras propias tipologías de actividades comerciales y de servicios. En este texto, analizamos cómo las calles peatonales del centro de Albacete han facilitado la acogida de un número considerable de actividades comerciales y de servicios, revitalizando esta zona de la ciudad. Por otro lado, en las afueras de la ciudad, se han construido nuevas áreas de consumo por parte de capital privado (Imaginalia y Albacenter), lo que ha complejizado la estructura urbana.

Palabras clave: Ciudad media; comercio, servicios, centralidad urbana, Albacete.

Resumo

Este artigo é resultado de pesquisas entre pesquisadores e universidades do Brasil e da Espanha. Envolve estratégias metodológicas em um estudo comparativo, entre cidades de formações socioespaciais muito distintas. Tendo como pano de fundo o papel do comércio e dos serviços nas cidades contemporâneas, utilizamos como ponto de partida de nossa metodologia a Classificação Nacional de Atividades Econômicas (CNAE), para que pudéssemos construir nossas próprias tipologias das atividades comerciais e de serviços. Neste texto discutimos como as ruas de pedestres do centro da cidade de Albacete possibilitaram abrigar um número considerável de atividades comerciais e de serviços, dinamizando esta área da cidade. Por outro lado, nas periferias da cidade, novas áreas de consumo foram construídas pelo capital privado (Imaginalia y Albacenter), tornando a estrutura urbana mais complexa.

Palavras chave: Cidade média; comércio, serviços, centralidade urbana, Albacete.

Introduction

The redefinition of intra-urban centrality is one of the transformations underway in medium-sized cities and directly influences the social and economic division of space, as well as the interactions between the two. In this article, we seek to observe this process through the concentration and diversity of commercial and service establishments in Albacete, highlighting the pedestrian streets of the main

center and two private shopping centers, Imaginalia and Albacenter. From these new areas oriented towards consumption and leisure, we see the formation of concentrations of economic activities, that is, the creation of new central areas outside the main center.

The deconcentration-reconcentration of commercial and service activities, a notion established by Sposito (2001), redefines the urban structure, changing land uses and creating a more dispersed and complex city, in terms of the functions it performs and the flows it generates.

In this article, we focus on the methodology used and the analysis of preliminary results. Discussing commerce and services in cities requires the use of research tools to better understand the object of study. Our approach was based on the construction of a database of establishments found in our research area, which allowed us to compile an inventory of commercial and service activities in the study areas.

In this process, we used the National Classification of Economic Activities (CNAE) as the initial starting point for organizing the data, but not the only one. Subsequently, based on the CNAE structure, we created our own classification of economic activities. The results were represented in graphs and discussed using specialized literature on the topic.

Methodology

In this research, we used the methodological procedure of constructing a database of commercial and service businesses in three areas of the city of Albacete. We selected the following: Imaginalia, Albacenter, and the pedestrian streets of the city center. Data was collected from website visits in the first two areas, and from fieldwork in the third area. After identifying the establishments, we classified them using the National Classification of Economic Activities (CNAE).

In an Excel spreadsheet, we entered the information on the establishments we found to facilitate the classification process. This first step provided initial contact with the areas under analysis, but it was not sufficient. In fact, the data lacked better organization and systematization. Therefore, we searched Miyazaki (2013), Porto-Sales et al. (2014), Porto-Sales (2014), Bellet et al. (2015), Silva (2021; 2022a; 2023) tools to organize the establishments found.

In our initial research project, our objective was to make a comparison with the Brazilian reality; that is, we sought a way to approximate distinct socio-spatial formations (Santos, 1977). In fact, in this article, we prefer to focus only on presenting data from Albacete.

Regarding businesses and services, identifying a way to organize the data is the main obstacle we encountered. However, to address this issue, we establish the CNAE proposal as our first ordering criterion. We used the version organized by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), but we warn the reader that despite some differences with the organization of the Spanish CNAE, the data organization structures are very similar. In the National Electoral Code (CNAE), economic activities are organized into hierarchical levels, moving from a broader and more generic description to a more specific one. Economic activities are described in five levels: sections, divisions, groups, classes, and subclasses. These levels are arranged from the most generic to the most specific, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Composition of the National Classification of Economic Activities

Positions	Quantities	Coding
Sections	21	(capital letters from "A" to "U")
Divisions	87	(up to the second numerical digit)
Groups	285	(up to the third numerical digit)
Classes	673	(up to the fourth numerical digit + one check digit)
Subclasses	1.318	(+ two more numerical digits after the check digit)

Source CNAE; **Organization:** Victor Hugo Quissi Cordeiro da Silva y Francisco Cebrián.

In this research, we chose to classify establishments up to the fifth level of the CNAE, that is, to the Subclass position. The classification procedure is done

manually, and we must search for each establishment individually in the CNAE structure. In fact, the process is quite slow, but it allows us to obtain a wealth of information that we will explore in this text.

The result is an initial classification of the information, which, however, is very difficult to work with because it results in several classes and divisions that make it impossible to develop data presentation formats. Above, we can clearly see that at the fifth level, we have 1,318 options for classifying economic activities. Therefore, after classifying the establishments in the CNAE structure, we organized the data ourselves.

With the aim of improving the analysis and presentation of the information, we arrived at a division of commercial activities into eight categories (Table 2) and services into twelve (Table 3).

Table 2 – Structure of trade

Commerce	
Business Branches	Location in the CNAE Structure
I. Food Products A	47.1 – Non-Specialized Retail Trade
	47.2 – Retail Trade of Food Products, Beverages, and Smoking
II. Construction Materials B	47.4 – Retail Trade of Construction Materials
III. Computer and Communication Equipment C	47.51-2 – Specialized Retail Trade of Computer Equipment and Supplies
	47.52-1 – Specialized Retail Trade of Telephone and Communication Equipment
IV. Household goods and equipment D	47.53-9 – Specialized retail trade of audio and video appliances and equipment
	47.54-7 – Specialized retail trade of furniture, bedding, and lighting
	47.55-5 – Specialized retail trade of fabrics and bedding, tableware, and bathroom items
	47.56-3 – Specialized retail trade of musical instruments and accessories
	47.57-1 – Specialized retail trade of parts and accessories for household electronics, except for computer and communication equipment
	47.59-8 – Retail trade of household goods not previously specialized
V. Pharmaceutical and toiletries products E	47.7 – Retail trade of pharmaceutical products, perfumery, and cosmetics, and medical, optical, and orthopedic items
VI. Cultural, recreational, and sporting goods F	47.6 – Retail trade of cultural, recreational, and sporting goods

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VII.	Personal and clothing items G	47.81-4 – Clothing and accessories trade
		47.82-2 – Retail trade of footwear and travel goods
		47.83-1 – Retail trade of jewelry and watches
VIII.	Other H	47.84-9 – Retail trade of liquefied petroleum gas
		47.85-7 – Retail trade of used goods
		47.89-0 – Retail trade of other new products not previously specialized

Organization: Victor Hugo Quissi Cordeiro da Silva y Francisco Cebrián.

Table 3 – Structure of services

Services	
Service Branches	Location in the CNAE Structure
I. Accommodation A	55 – Accommodation
II. Food B	56 – Food
III. Information and Communication C	J – Information and Communication
IV. Financial Activities, Insurance, and Related Services D	K – Financial, Insurance, and Related Services
V. Real Estate E	L – Real Estate
VI. Professional, Scientific, and Technical Activities F	M – Professional, Scientific, and Technical Activities
VII. Administrative Activities and Complementary Services G	N – Administrative Activities and Complementary Services
VIII. Public Administration H	O – Public Administration, Defense, and Social Security
IX. Education I	P – Education
X. Human Health J	86 – Human Health Care Activities
XI. Arts, Culture, Sports, and Recreation K	R – Arts, Culture, Sports, and Recreation
XII. Other Service Activities L	S – Other Service Activities

Organization: Victor Hugo Quissi Cordeiro da Silva y Francisco Cebrián.

We can say that one of the points of contention in studies of commercial activities and services is the ability to compare cities. Therefore, establishing a structure for organizing these data allows us to make comparisons, even with cities in other socio-spatial formations. We propose that the proposed typology may be appropriate for other similar studies, enabling further research.

Results and discussion

Albacete is a medium-sized Spanish city located in the autonomous community of Castilla-La Mancha. According to Cebrián, Sánchez, and Javier (2022), the service sector is the most prominent in the city, although we can identify traces of [Geopauta](#), *Vitória da Conquista*, **V. 9, 2025, e16747**



other economic sectors. Still according to the authors, Albacete plays an important regional role, reaching an area of influence of approximately 30 kilometers. Thus, the city plays an intermediary and structuring role in the surrounding territory, given its characteristics as a medium-sized Spanish city.

According to Cebrián (2007b), Albacete has a strategic location in relation to the network of Spanish cities. This assertion is justified by the presence of transportation and traffic facilities, such as railways and highways, which create a considerable flow of people and goods into the city. These elements help to understand Albacete's important regional role, as it connects more complex centers with surrounding cities, including cities in other provinces.

Beginning in the 1990s, urban sprawl began to develop intensively, linked to the construction of second homes or the transformation of agricultural land use into residential use, forming highly isolated areas. Cebrián and García (2015) highlight the widespread use of automobiles, which allowed for the occupation of areas further from the city center, expanding its territory. In addition to second homes, these areas were also preferred as the location of primary residences, including the occupation of hamlets and small towns around Albacete.

These new developments tend to homogenize the landscape, based on planning and architecture like that implemented in different countries. Based on these changes, Albacete is transforming from a compact city to a dispersed one. Cebrián and García (2015, p. 397) highlight the different approaches in the specialized literature regarding this process, including the various terms used: suburbanization, peri-urbanization, rururbanization, de-urbanization, etc. For the authors, there is a growing interest in incorporating the periphery into the urban grid: "The traditional precise boundaries of cities have shifted in favor of large, increasingly extensive urban areas, integrated into a functional, but also territorial, order, giving rise to different expressions of the city-region."

With a more extensive urban fabric and, consequently, greater distances to travel, the need arises to increase mobility. Cebrián and Jovel (2012) highlight the [Geopauta](#), Vitória da Conquista , V. 9, 2025, e16747



spread of automobile use as one of the main factors that enabled the increasingly peripheral incorporation of the city. With the rise of the car, the gap between the workplace and the home has widened.

Based on the reflections of Cebrián (2015), the main factors that explain urban sprawl in medium-sized Spanish cities are described, with an emphasis on Albacete. According to the author, these factors are: I – New consumption habits and societal values (more diversified and standardized); II – Declining fertility; III – Widespread automobile use (automobile society); IV – New high-capacity road infrastructure, generally located in urban areas; V – Growth in daily population mobility; VI – Preference for new housing types (higher environmental quality, greater privacy and space); and VII – Widespread use of new information and communication technologies.

Cebrián (2007a, p. 223), studying changes in the boundaries of medium-sized Spanish cities, highlights that while the separation between rural and urban environments was once quite evident, this distinction is no longer so clear today. In his words: "For some authors, it is a decentralization linked to changes in a scientific-technical-informational moment (Santos, M.) that make urban fragmentation possible."

The changes between technology and space can be empirically observed in the new means of movement of people and goods, such as roads and the widespread use of private vehicles. Furthermore, new information technologies also modify urban travel and can contribute to the shift in residential location toward the periphery. Homework or home-consumption-place relationships can occur over greater distances, given the greater density of the integration network between the city's spaces.

This complex urban structure in medium-sized cities can be observed in different intensities and forms. The dynamic of incorporating new spaces into the urban grid is motivated, in addition to the elements presented above, by the benefits generated by changes in land use. In this sense, urban expansion is driven primarily

by real estate developers interested in "speculative urbanism" (Cebrián; García, 2015). According to the authors, changes in urban density and centrality, as dispersion is expressed by the occupation of peripheral areas discontinuous with the consolidated urban fabric and by the deconcentration-reconcentration (Sposito, 2001) of commercial and service activities. These alterations in the urban structure deepen socio-spatial differentiation, in addition to the shift and transition from the center-periphery logic to the fragmented logic of urban structuring. In discussing the topic of urban centers and centrality, we begin with Sposito's (2013, p. 73, our translation) definition: "Centrality (...) is not a place or an area of the city, but rather the condition and expression of centrality that an area exercises or represents." When addressing this topic, the author points out that these concepts must be understood as interdependent; that is, there is no centrality without a center, and there is no center that does not exercise a certain level of centrality.

Regarding the definition of central areas, we also follow Sposito (2013, p. 73, our translation), who completes his argument by saying: "Central areas are, thus, spaces that anchor the constitution of centralities, but are not the same thing as them." Therefore, we argue that the methodology used in this research allows us to develop a general picture of the characteristics and differences between central areas of the city of Albacete, with emphasis on the main center and private shopping malls. From the concentration, intensity, and diversity of commercial and service establishments, we can infer aspects of urban centrality, such as the ability to attract consumer flows.

According to Sposito (2010), central areas are points of geographic and social integration, confirmed by the flows that connect the city to the broader network, constituting networks of cities, and, at the same time, by the integration of different spaces in the city, in what we refer to in this text as intra-urban centrality. In fact, management at multiple scales is affirmed within the territory (Sposito, 1998), which is developed through the economic and spatial strategies of different economic

groups. In this text, we focus our analysis on intra-urban socio-spatial processes, although we cannot overlook the different scales that the phenomenon can assume.

The spatial form commonly referred to as the city center or main center is the expression of the process of spatial concentration of commercial and service activities. However, at the current stage of the urbanization process, it is not the only area that exhibits this characteristic. In other words, the main center, as in Albacete, does not exclusively exercise the attributes of urban centrality, such as the ability to attract the flow of people and goods.

Consequently, new spatial forms express the relocation of economic activities within the city, associated with the formation of new concentrations (Sposito, 2001). Thus, we see subcenters as diversified agglomerations of commerce and services, located outside the main center. As presented by Villaça (2001), the new concentrations seek areas that possess the attribute of accessibility; however, not in all cases will their spatial scope be able to encompass the entire city, as is the case with the main center.

Two economic-territorial dynamics contribute to our understanding of the process of redefining urban centrality in Albacete. When we observe the opening of new central areas, such as Imaginalia and Albacenter, on the city's outskirts, we can identify the development of two movements: deconcentration and reconcentration of commercial and service activities. Thus, we can identify two fundamental elements of this process: socio-spatial selectivity and differentiation.

The areas affected by reconcentration are selectively chosen and respond to a specific intention of economic agents. Furthermore, the formation of these areas also responds to the production of differences between the city's spaces. According to Sposito (2001), these dynamics occur through two-pronged initiatives, which occur simultaneously. The initiatives refer to the "emergence of new commercial and service activities and establishments outside the main center," combined with the "relocation, to new centers, of activities and establishments that were previously restricted to the main center" (Sposito, 2001, p. 236, our translation).

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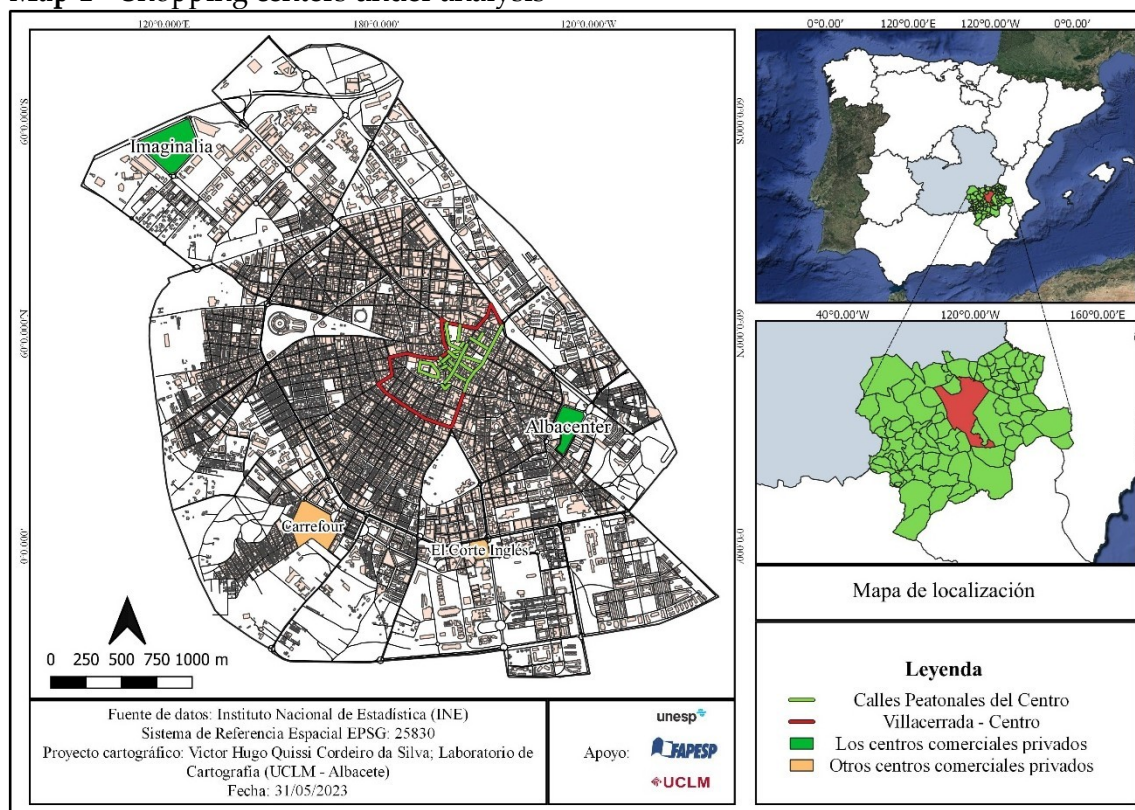
We must add to the debate the perception that the deconcentration of commercial and service activities does not occur anarchically within the urban fabric, because, in parallel, new concentrations are forming outside the main center. Therefore, we can characterize the new urban structure, in terms of intra-urban centrality, as multiple and polynucleated.

By referring to these expressions, we are going back to the definition formulated by Sposito (2010, p. 205, our translation), who states that "if we observe the existence of more than one center, we have a multicentrality. We observe different levels of specialization and importance among these centers; we are facing a polycentrality."

The increase in the number of central areas transcends the monocentric structure, authorizing the affirmation of intra-urban centrality in a multiple sense. On the other hand, regarding its polycentricity, we should note a qualitative change in relation to the uses and frequency of consumption and retail spaces. We believe that the methodologies used in this research do not allow us to perform a qualitative analysis of central areas because the database is eminently quantitative and descriptive of the activities existing in the areas under study.

In Map 1, we can see the location of the city of Albacete in southwestern Spain, in the autonomous community of Castilla-La Mancha. Furthermore, the red lines indicate the limits of the city center, and the green lines indicate the streets that have undergone pedestrianization. It was on these pedestrianized streets that we conducted our fieldwork and surveys. We also highlight the private shopping centers Imaginalia and Albacenter as new central areas, outside the main center.

Map 1 – Shopping centers under analysis



Source: *Instituto Nacional de Estadística – INE (National Institute of Statistics).*

The pedestrianization of downtown streets aims to achieve two main objectives: reducing car dependence and making the central area more attractive. Environmental concerns and the debate surrounding sustainable cities have influenced urban planning policies in Spain, leading many city governments to shift their cities toward reducing fossil fuel emissions. Consequently, many downtown streets have been pedestrianized, encouraging residents to walk (Figure 1). The main idea is to make the 15-minute city possible, where people can complete their main daily activities without long commutes. In short, these urban planning modifications would allow for a city that uses fewer fossil fuels and is therefore more sustainable.

Image 1 – Pedestrian street in the center of Albacete.



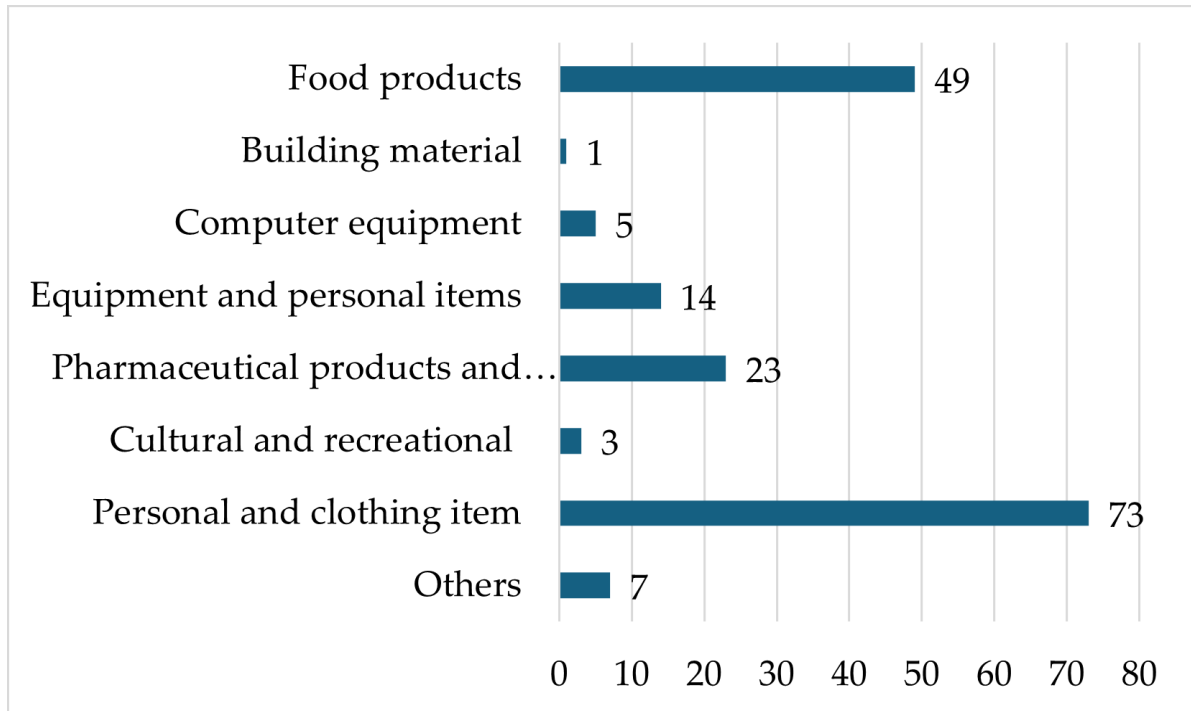
Source: Victor Hugo Quissi Cordeiro da Silva.

On the other hand, the pedestrianization of the city center aims to attract more consumers and make the area more attractive. With the expansion of the city and the creation of private shopping centers, fewer people are seeking shopping or leisure activities in the city center. Several bars, restaurants, cafes, and other shops were affected by this decline. However, the pedestrianized streets managed to facilitate a greater flow of people, especially for nightlife, as the new streets brought greater safety and attractiveness to the city center.

Through fieldwork and visits to the websites of the areas analyzed, we arrived at the following figures: in the Pedestrian Streets of the City Center, we found a total of 312 establishments, of which 125 are commercial and 187 are service-oriented (Charts 1 and 2). At the same time, in the private shopping centers of Imaginalia and

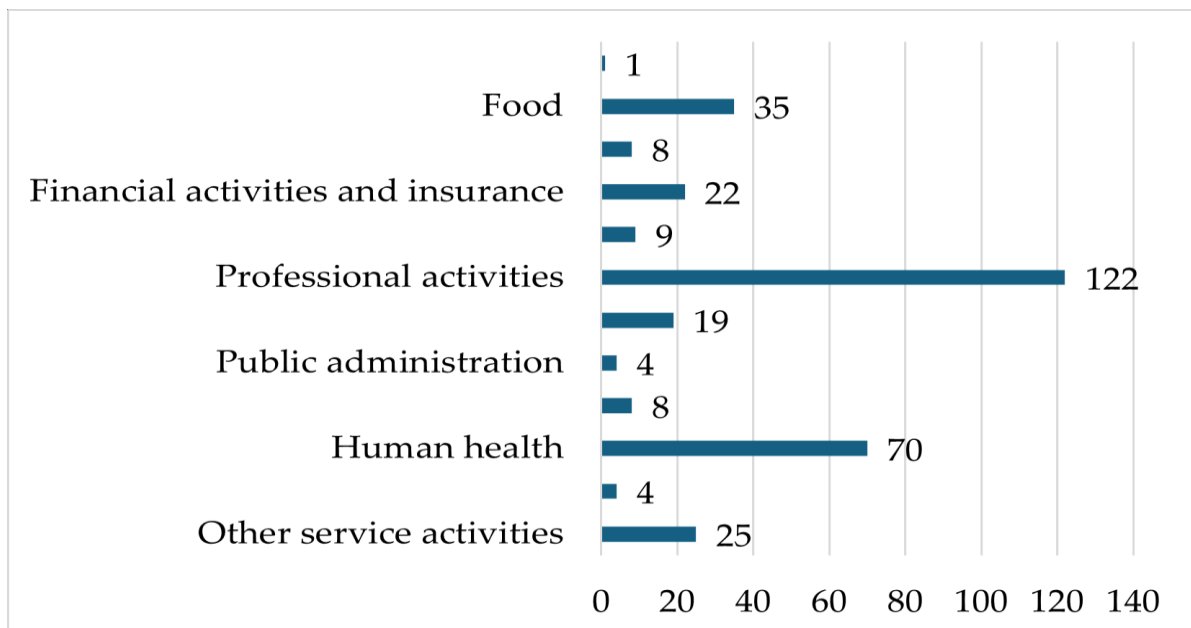
Albacenter, we have located 101 establishments, of which 63 are commercial and 38 are service-oriented (Charts 3 and 4).

Chart 1 – Shops on pedestrian streets in the center



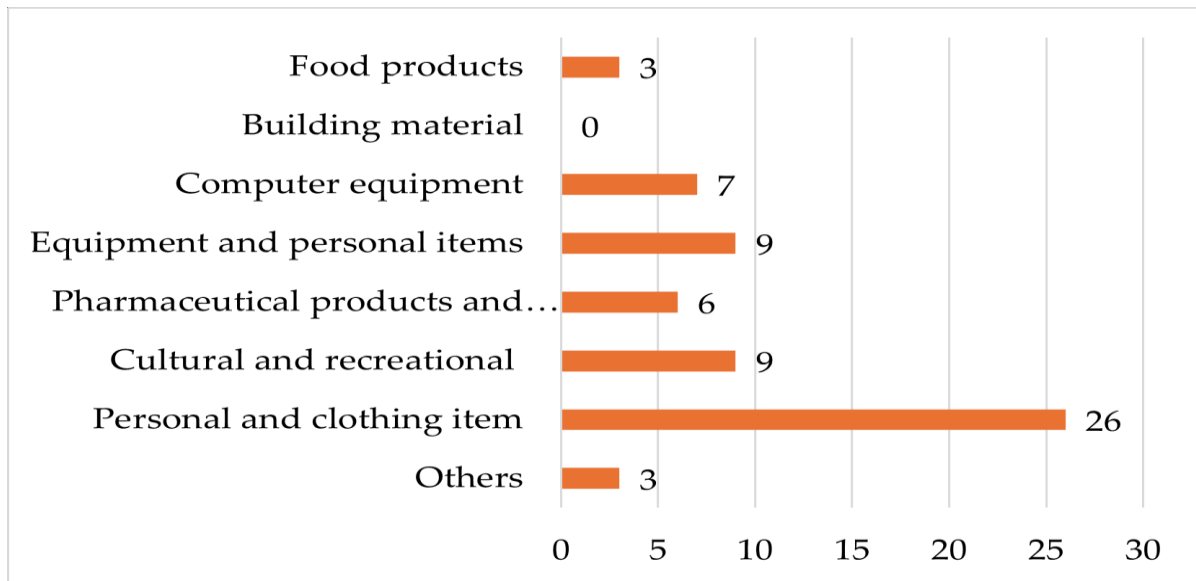
Source: Victor Hugo Quissi Cordeiro da Silva y Francisco Cebrián.

Chart 2 – Services in the pedestrian streets of the center



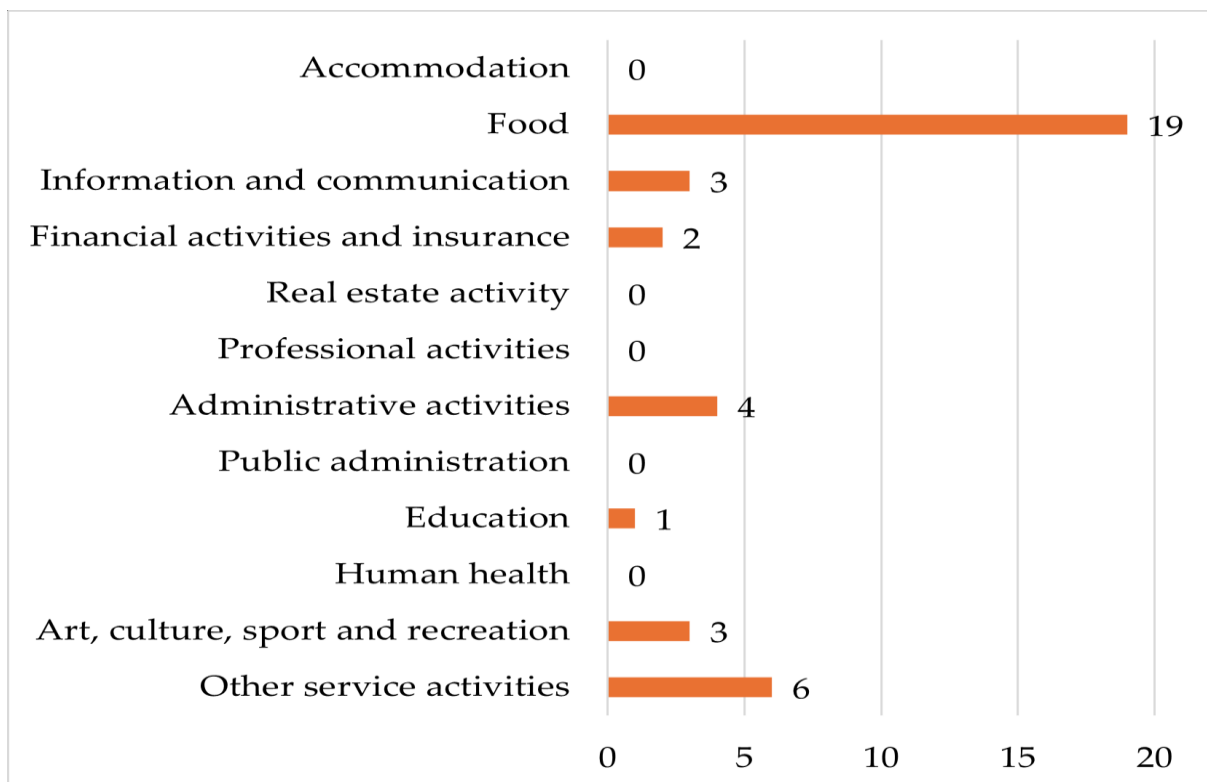
Source: Victor Hugo Quissi Cordeiro da Silva y Francisco Cebrián.

Chart 3 – Shops in private centers: Imaginalia and Albacenter



Source: Victor Hugo Quissi Cordeiro da Silva y Francisco Cebrián.

Chart 4 – Services in private centers: Imaginalia and Albacenter



Source: Victor Hugo Quissi Cordeiro da Silva y Francisco Cebrián.

The concentration of businesses allows us to infer the attractiveness of the flow of people and goods to and from these areas, as demonstrated by the work of

Silva (2022b; 2022c). In addition to quantity, the diversity of activities also plays an important role in structuring the spatial reach of these areas, attracting a greater variety and complexity of audiences. In this sense, we can see in the graphs above the distribution of the data reached, allowing us to affirm that in the pedestrian streets of the city center, there is a plurality of commercial and service activities that exceeds those found in private centers, indicating that the center remains an area of great importance in the urban structure, despite the new central areas on the city's peripheries.

As we can see from the graphs, in the pedestrian streets of the city center, the most important activities are the sale of personal items and clothing, and food products. Regarding services, the most prominent are professional, scientific, and technical activities (including law offices, for example), human health, and food. In the private centers of Imaginalia and Albacenter, the emphasis is on personal items and clothing, and in the services sector, food.

In addition to the greater number of service businesses in the former group, we must highlight the greater variety of activities, indicating a more diversified consumption in the center. If we are looking at areas with qualitatively different structures of complexity, with their respective capacities to generate and attract the flow of people and goods in the city, we can glimpse hierarchical relationships, in which the centers of Imaginalia and Albacenter play a secondary role in the intra-urban centrality of Albacete, while the main center continues to exercise primacy over the city's flows.

Final considerations

The redefinition of intra-urban centrality is a trend that can be observed in the city of Albacete, stemming from the formation of multiple central areas, especially on the city's peripheries, generating new spatial content and practices on the urban fringes. In this city, we perceive the combination of old and new within the urban

structure, creating a context in which, despite the persistence of the main center as the area with the highest concentration of commercial and service activities, other areas of the city emerge as new concentrations, even though these do not match the former in terms of density and diversity.

Considering the results achieved, we can affirm that the territoriality of commercial and service activities can be learned from the analytical pairing of deconcentration-reconcentration. This description demonstrates that, despite the diffusion of economic activities within the urban fabric, it occurs in such a way that new concentrations are formed.

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Author 1. Theoretical analysis, discussion of results and revision of the text

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