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Governability and conflict in Pasaia bay (Gipuzkoa): press clippings as support for the understanding of a city-port interface planning problem

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Theme: Governance and port-city conflict through a historical and cultural approach to the territory.

Objectives: To analyse the trajectory of the port-city relationship, through the observation of the conflict between the different actors in the territory, assuming that the landscape and the local identity can be at the heart of a territorial revitalisation project.

Methodology: Using local press clippings as a source of information, the characteristics of the actors, their expectations and interaction processes are analysed and the intensity of the controversies is quantified according to the different episodes of conflict. Four possible situations are observed: consensus, if all stakeholders agree on a common objective; compromise, when the defence of the general interest forces some stakeholders to give up, with some possible compensation; abandonment of the project, with the risk of frustration of some stakeholders and the possibility of a new conflict on another issue; or, finally, the continuation of the conflict. These variations can be defined by a level of conflict intensity. From appeasement to judicial conflict, we can define three intermediate levels: polemic, when different positions are publicly expressed in the debate; tension, when one of the parties threatens with other actions to manifest their opposition; conflict, when these threats are carried out and the opposition is manifested by taking concrete actions. These arguments are constructed and defended at multiple scales ranging from the local level of a port site to the supranational level of a port complex of international dimension. These trends coincide with the evolution of political conflict. Thus, quantitatively and qualitatively, there is a fairly clear relationship between the municipal revenues allocated to the regeneration of the bay and the escalation of the conflict.



Main results: A crisis of port and urban governance is observed in the Bay of Pasaia (Gipuzkoa-Basque Country), mainly due to the growth of port, railway and road infrastructures leading to the hardening and clogging of most of the surrounding area. In this context, land-use planning conflicts arose around two different possible paths: the urban reconquest of the seafront and its reconversion, on the one hand, and the maintenance of the industrial character of the occupation of the coastal strip, on the other.

The paper discusses the effectiveness of the Landlord Port model, the conflict and the actors in the management of the territory. While traffic used to explain the wealth of the ports and the occupation of the waterfront in the past, the trajectory of the activities is now conditioned by the value of the port land. This change in the model of governance is important when it is a question of handing over land, because the Port Authority has no economic interest in relinquishing its domain, which has now become a resource of a spatial nature, and the problem of the port is, therefore, one of management and not of space. For their part, faced with the extraordinary urban deficit of green zones and existing facilities, citizens see the under-used port areas as a great opportunity to satisfy these needs, while at the same time valuing and conserving the historical and heritage elements. However, this apparent convergence between port disinterest and urban ambition for the waterfront does not translate into the implementation of a regeneration programme for the port areas in decline.

The main difficulty in resolving these differences lay in the plurality of actors and administrations involved and the lack of a clear leadership, around a strategic plan of action and an urban land use plan, which revealed a crisis of port governance.

Conclusions: A new territorial governance is needed to coordinate and articulate these decision-making processes and their impact on the territory through multilevel mechanisms, both vertically (from the local to the regional level) and from a horizontal and transdisciplinary perspective.

All actors involved in the conflict are legitimised to act, even though citizens are not in the decision-making spheres. The analysis, therefore, leads to the recognition that the main difficulty lies in the inability of the actors involved to consider the city-port interface as a common good and not as a potential resource.

To counteract the tensions, as this research shows, these must be achieved in a context of cooperation and dialogue. At the heart of the problem lies the fact of whether the port constitutes a common good or not. On the one hand, port functions of an industrial nature create a series of nuisances, particularly from an environmental and landscape point of view. On the other hand, these activities constitute sources of employment and economic development. It is between these two extremes where the compromise of the acceptability of the port is constructed, which undoubtedly passes through processes of mediation between different spheres: institutions, businesses and citizenship.

All of this leads to the conclusion that powerful public action that neutralises market failures, eliminates the problems generated by poor urban governance and resolves the coordination problem faced by private investors is required in order to prevent or reverse urban deterioration and, therefore, to lead to a necessary improvement of the landscape in its integral, urban, rural and natural sense as a formula also for social consensus and a contribution to resolving the conflict in the bay.

It can be generally observed that broad stakeholder participation favours the collective construction of a project and, thus, its assimilation and the involvement of all in its implementation. It is therefore assumed that conflict is anticipated and regulated within the framework of these concerted approaches. However, the power to debate, to confront, to reach consensus, is not necessarily the power to decide.

We can see how citizenship is not in the sphere of decision-making, which is the major interaction between the bodies of power. It is essential to take this into account.

Taking all these factors into account, we can say that the contribution of this research to the scientific literature brings, through the study of a small port, with a lesser degree of complexity, visible themes or phenomena on conflict, governance and the trajectory of the port-city relationship which occur in larger ports. In the end, the approach makes it possible to assess the state of social acceptability and its evolution over time. Social problems are not only the source of social conflicts, they constitute the basis of their solution.

In the port scheme, small ports play an important role in the distribution circuit (Short Sea Shipping), constituting a possible tool for bringing short circuits of goods and customers closer together. In the current



ecological context, it is important to create a network of small ports to bring cities closer together. Additionally, it is necessary to keep in mind a future economy based on R+D+i, betting on quality landscape and tourism.

The challenge lies in generating the necessary conditions so that the emotional aspects implicit in conflicts do not negatively influence the cognitive capacities of the actors in conflict so that they make erroneous decisions. Given that space, land or territory are limited assets and that their management and use condition the possibilities for future development, coherence must be sought in all the actions to be carried out on them, through dialogue and cooperation between all the agents involved, including citizen participation.