Specialist Sessions: Identity Politics and the Construction of the Metropolitan Region: European and North American Perspectives

URBAN RENEWAL POLITICS FROM A "MODERN CITY- STATE": A CORUNA METROPOLITAN AREA IN NW SPAIN

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Urban policies in USA and UK in the 1980's have developed "strategic" planning aiming to revitalize urban economies by intensifying their links to global flows. Cities compete at generating advantageous milieus in order to attract investors. Every town demand public investment for urban renewal operations: eithertey develop transportation and data transmission infrastructures, making some areas suitable for new tertiary activities, building culture and leisure installations, linked -if possible- to the new informational technologies (Borja & Castells). Ability of municipal corporations in promoting public-private partnership becomes more and more important. But at the same time the very idea itself of urban planning is in crisis (Hall). Distrust on zone planning, together with a growing success of neoliberal paradigm leads to breaking down public agency in a series of isolated urban projects, looking for sponsors among private actors. An "Italian pattern" puts the emphasis on morphological and meaning aspects, illustrated by "hit" projects around "design buildings", a certain kind of miniaturized theme parks.

In the middle 1980's, as Spain emerged from crisis and joined European Union, new democratic municipal corporations faced up to such problems as unemployment, urban deterioration and lack of installations, making use of those town-planning powers guaranteed by a new Constitution. In the 1990's many Spanish towns undertook the drawing up of redevelopment plans leading to urban renewal. The story of Bilbao in the Basque Country, is well known: on the basis of a program designed on a metropolitan scale the town renewed its communications system, it moved its harbour outwards and, following the example of Glasgow, replaced obsolete industrial installations by another ones linked to leisure and culture. Hall has argued the importance of such urban renewal programs be coordinated to regional planning, particularly now that European Union policies are promoting "euro-regions". And, regarding to it, Balchin & Sykora have explored the incidence of political and administrative structure of a given state –either federal or centralist-.

As an interdisciplinary group of historians, sociologists, anthropologists and architects, we have developed research on A Coruna "Metropolitan" Area in the seaboard of NW Spain, where 340.000 inhabitants live spread on nine municipalities. 240.000 inhabitants gather in the municipality of A Coruna, a significant administrative and services centre from the XVIIIth century onward, where heavy industry, implanted by Franco regime in the 1960's has been in crisis from the 1980's.

Urban renewal policy applied by A Coruna town council all along the last twenty years, on the basis of a mix of experiences –particularly those taken out from "Bilbao model"-, and thanks to skill at collecting public financial support –either from regional "Xunta de Galicia", Spanish State or European Union- seems to be related to continuity of a mayor and his staff all along the last two decades. Populist politics, based upon exaltation of "A Coruna" urban identity over class and party divides, have made this mayor win every council election by a vast majority, and consistently such a popular support has invested him with authority in order to negotiate with regional government and state. But outstanding questions also emerge from such populist politics, and not only because social problems related to urban renewal arise and are not dealt with. Politics of "A Coruna" identity exaltation seem to involve explicit and haughty disdain of neighbouring municipalities, even calling the town a "modern and self-sufficient City-State", what makes difficult to tackle on a metropolitan scale such questions as housing, traffic and

transportation, health and educational services, or handling of domestic and industrial waste. There's particularly a lack of cooperation on urbanization planning, between A Coruna "core" and another next municipalities that "de facto" are an essential part of the central town. **We suspect that some research on history of urban processes in the area also has lacked of such an overall view: a question that, perhaps, is related to the political economy of social science.**