TERRITORIAL CONFLICTS AND CITIZENS' MOBILIZATION. SOME REFLECTIONS ABOUT THE CURRENT FORMS OF TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE

Helena Cruz Gallach
Departament de Geografia
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Even if the governance paradigm bets for a new opening scene and a major pluralism during the elaboration and implementation of the public policies, in practical terms not always it represents a fluent dialogue among citizenship and public administration or better participation spaces during territorial policy-making. The proliferation of conflicts related with the use and management of the territory appear as a proof of it. The emergence of these conflicts together with the appearance of new social mobilisations shows the lack of enough channels of implication and participation of the citizenship during the process of planning. The article proposes to analyse some of the new problems of the current forms of territorial governance through the study of the causes both of the increase of territorial conflicts and the rising of social mobilization.

I. THE ROLE OF URBAN PLANNING IN TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE

The theorization of the new paradigm of government —the governance— establishes new institutional and procedure mechanisms that not necessarily must be fostered by the top-down model but can accept bottom-up initiatives (Ballart and Ramió, 2000, cited by Parés, 2006). Rhodes characterizes the governance as interorganised and autoorganized networks (Rhodes, 1997) since the State abandons the hierarchical model of government and relocates its government capacities below (Blanco and Gomà, 2002). In this network model, the State becomes another actor that have multilateral relationships with other actors (Parés, 2006). In this new scenario, the traditional divisions among government tiers or among private and public lose its sense.

Public decision-makers do not govern unidirectionally, hierarchically or monopolistically towards the other actors since new actors emerge: new lobby groups, community groups, NGO's, etc. As consequence, it is necessary that public policies are drawn up through a

continuous negotiation among the different actors of the network (different public and semi-public institutions, different departments, different government tiers, different private actors and, sometimes different community groups).

Regarding urban planning, traditionally, before the diversity of opinions, interests and objectives of the different actors that participate in territory management urban plan has been considered as a consensus document. During its making process that contrasts and divergent interests were brought to agreement situations. Therefore, before the generalization of governance paradigm the conceptualization of urban planning integrated intrinsically the consensus character. Hence, we could hypothesise that the appearance of the governance paradigm should emphasize even more its cluster character. In order to develop this consensus exercise, the legislation has foreseen the introduction of debates about urban plan objectives and criteria, public exposition of plan proposals and publications in order to facilitate the discussion (Esteban, 1999). However, the proliferation of disputes regarding the localization of public services or infrastructures questions what changes experimented urban planning that nowadays it is not able to reach the consensus aim. Nel·lo (2003b) argues some ideas about. The lack of regional planning, the juxtaposition of sectorial policies or authoritarian methods have not contributed to a conflict prevention framework.

Moreover, the emergence of strategic urban planning since nineties has also contributed to move the consensus character away from urban planning itself.

II. THE EMERGENCE OF TERRITORIAL CONFLICTS

The phenomenon of local oppositions tied to the use and management of the territory is a *spectre* that prowls around, since long time ago, all the developed countries. From its global connotation we can deduce that this phenomenon answers to general changing dynamics of contemporaneous societies. One of the most distinctive elements of the general tendencies of contemporaneous societies is the called «revival of local» (Castells, 1997; Harvey, 1990; Bobbio, 1999; Nel·lo, 2003b). It has often been analysed by the studies about the Globalisation and the polarisation global-local.

The progressive disappearance not only of physical borders, but also of administrative and communication borders, due to the process of Globalisation, the development of new technologies and the forms of production is configuring more integrated territories. The facility of movement entails a territory each time more inter-related, but the specific characteristics of each place become more important. As a result, local singularities are reborn as an incentive to attract flows of investments and to strengthen its competitive specificities.

Local oppositions and the explosion of many conflicts are closely related to the break-in of local identities that born conflicting to the tendency of control of global flows. In front of the perception that the economic and territorial integration entails accelerated and uncontrollable changes, the locality becomes a refuge, a place that transmits security. The proliferation of territorial conflicts obeys to the growing preoccupation of inhabitants about quality of life, resources and security of living place.

On the other side, the conversion of environmental paradigm into a consensual value shared between the public opinion in general (Lewanski, 1997) facilitated the emergence of

environmental movements.. Likewise, nobody feels legitimized to maintain explicitly to let continue the process of degradation of environmental resources.

In third place, the lack of territorial policies is an important element in the territorial conflicts whereas the existence of supra-municipal directives is necessary for municipalities to frame their own town planning actions. Therefore, a general disorder in the articulation of urban systems, open spaces and infrastructures is created and the coordination between municipalities is not promoted. As consequence, territory is planned fragmentally and without coordination. At this point, the seed for a growing conflict is sowed. This tendency becomes more serious when, since as it has been said previously, the territory more and more is integrated and interrelated, and therefore a supra-municipal logic becomes more necessary.

In this framework of territorial integration, local vindication and non-coordinated planning we could argue that a territorial governance approach would be even more necessary. It should take into consideration the different existing territorial policies and the different voices present into the territory.

Apart from this reasons, many conflicts appear because of decision making planning process. Often, territorial conflicts appear because the decision has been taken without a participation process and has been restricted inside of the administrative space. Therefore, when the decision becomes public, the citizens that should receive the project show their disagreement. The localisation of a unpleasant installation has more probabilities to develop a conflictive situation but often it is because the promoters do not establish an adequate dialogue with the citizenship before the approval of the project.

III. TOWARDS NEW FORMS OF LESS CONFLICTIVE TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE

The paper showed that the conflict is an inherent component of the planning process, especially in a community with actors that posses different interests and opinions. However, often, the protest and the conflict emerge as (the only) alternative for citizens in order to express their opinions, desires or interests. At this point, it seems that planning is not able to answer to the territorial disputes although one of its traditional functions has been the management of the different interests, in order to reach a consensus for a model of the future city.

If planning could develop this objective, there would not exist such a multiplicity and variety of territorial conflicts in our country. In this sense, it is necessary to intervene in the territory not only with adequate technical criteria but also with a certain capacity to hear the citizens' problems and worries. At the same time it is necessary to learn from daily experiences from urban agents. Public administrations should take in consideration that many decisions they should take —and that affect social interests— can present important technical consensus but they will be difficult to implement if debate is not open, if costs and benefits are not shared with the whole society. Citizenship will accept and share decisions if they consider the decision-making process has been lawful (Subirats, 2006, 404).

The appearance of disputes regarding the use and management of territory should become a learning environment in which to *learn* how decision-making process can be developed collectively. Therefore, the key is that public institutions create transparent spaces to innovate, to participate in order that politics takes up again the capacity to involve.

In this sense, it is necessary that new forms of territorial governance try to detect the conflict in its latent stage. Public administrations should understand that a conflict is emerging before it is visible, in order to act on its causes.

The paper proposes that new forms of governance should give back to planning its consensual character in order to be able to collect the different sensibilities of urban actors. Likewise, a new governance style -more democratic and transparent- could recognize the citizenship both as another actor of public policies network and that its interests and organizational forms –that can not be ignored- have space in the making process of territorial policies.