

TERRITORIAL ASYMMETRIES AND BORDER EFFECTS IN THE SPANISH AUTONOMOUS MAP. THE ASTUR-GALAICO COASTAL AREA

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The *Astur-galaico* coastal area is a territorial unit located between the autonomous regions of Asturias and Galicia, in Northern Spain. It is an intermediate coastal territory between the central metropolitan area of Asturias and that of A Coruña. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century the processes of concentration of the population and economic activity in the metropolitan areas, and to a far lesser extent, in the system of small and medium cities and secondary provincial capitals, such as Lugo. The rural areas were configured, in this traditional industrial model, as focal points of emigration and economic decline.

The beginning of the autonomous regions in Spain, in the 1980's, brought about that the new regional administrations bet on differentiated territorial policies, in general oriented towards territorial rebalancing, contributing criteria for public investment and the improvement of basic infrastructures. In this way, the territorial rebalancing is stated as the main objective in the Regional Directives of the Asturian Territorial Organization of 1991.

The problems of coordination and cooperation between autonomous regions has led to uneven processes of development that have been set in clearly differentiated dynamics between the Western Asturian coastal area and the coastal area of Lugo, in spite of their proximity and similarities. That is manifested even at their inter-regional border, the Eo river, qualified as a partial natural reserve on the Asturian side (even though it includes industrial, residential, and leisure activities) and without environmental protection on the Galician side, where they have opted for urban, port facilities and turistic growth around the village of Ribadeo. The criteria for territorial organization of the coastal area have been more restrictive for urbanization in Asturias (POLA) and contrast with the bid for growth of the second residence on the coast of Lugo, in many cases on the limit of the organization in force.

The Asturian coastal area has been characterized in the last twenty-five years for constituting a relatively backward territory, stagnant, less dynamic and in the process of rapid aging, with a deficient articulation of the transport system. The coastal area of Lugo

shows more dynamism, and has constituted itself in the territory as a provincial reference, along with the capital, located in the interior. The distance of the provincial capital, from the coast brought about a space with certain dynamism in this coastal area, where various small urban centres grow, without a dominant urban nucleus being formed between the centre of Asturias and the A Coruña agglomeration.

The delay in having commenced the modernization of the communication system, in the Cantabrian center between Asturias and Galicia along with the distance with respect to the two urban poles of national scope: those of the center of Asturias (Metropolitan Area of Asturias, also called by some authors, including myself, Astur city) and the agglomeration of A Coruña, has given rise to a longitudinal coastal space, of a great linear extension, without a defined urban hierarchy. On the contrary, this coastal unit has left a margin for growth and even of competition between a numerous group of small urban centres of a regional influence or simply municipal. In some cases reinforced by the location of industrial activities of certain importance.

The demographic and development indicators are still of a negative sign on the Asturian side, sensibly worse than those pertaining to the Lugo coastal area, though notably better, in both cases, than those corresponding to the Asturian and Galician municipalities located in the interior. The difference between births and deaths is very negative, also a cause of the progressive aging of the population that tends to reinforce an increase in deaths. All the municipalities, of the western Asturian and Lugo coastal areas, presently have an inferior number of births than deaths each year and therefore a natural growth of a negative sign, which goes back to the beginning of the eighties. In the Lugo municipalities this loss has been compensated by the arrival of immigrants, while the Asturian western coast has not reached that level.

In spite of the recent improved evolution of the coast of Lugo, the development indicators are still favourable to the Asturian coastal area. But its recent lethargy is particularly worrisome. The more dynamic evolution of the Lugo coastal area is noticed by a higher presence of immigrants and a flow of population to the villages, where the growth is concentrated. In the higher percentage than in the Asturian villages, more lethargic and stagnated. Although important movements have been ascertained in the ownership of urbanizable land, these have not yet been carried out in urbanistic activities of importance, that are very present, nonetheless, in the main localities of the Lugo coastal area.

Western Asturias has pioneered the changes in the rural worlds, in the stage that has seen the end of the rural migratory process, whose negative role has been substituted, with unusual force, as we have seen, by the low birth rate, aging and the isolation, as a basis that explains the present demographic decline. The pioneering role has given way to real cooperation processes between counties, open to the participation in programs of rural development and European initiatives: the Oscos-Eo rural development program, promoted by the government of Asturias, continued later on the by the Communitarian Initiative LEADER in seven counties. And the PRODER in the Navia-Porcía valley, in the coastal area as well as in the interior.

The formation of regional cooperation in Western Asturias starts from these initiatives and not from the regional administration's attempt at regionalization (Regional Law, Regional Directives of territorial ordination, DROT, of 1991...), that had no relevance

whatsoever in the cooperation between counties, but yes in the localization of equipments and public services, of great importance for the organization of the territory and for territorial dynamism.

The effects of the relative isolation of the coastal area, because of disastrous communications until very recently, by road and rail, has originated a growth within and a distancing, real or perceived, with respect to the nodes closest to the Spanish Urban net. And this favoured the slow growth of the small urban nodes of the coast of Lugo and of the western Asturias. And a stagnancy of those the begin to occupy a disadvantaged position. The dynamics of the coastal area in the last three decades has seen the adjustment and modernization of the traditional cattle activity, with a rapid descent in the number of explotations and of employment, an increase in the size of those that continue and production maintenance. Also the slow reinforcement of the tertiary activity around the villages and their commercial, residential and turistic function.

The dislocation of the Cantabric nucleus has historically and up to the present induced a stagnation on the expectation of the coastal area and a delay in its integration into the peninsular urban net, in which it is still defined as a territory with low connectivity. The railroad carries out a residual role, inefficient in the transport of passengers at medium distances between cities and limited to the transport of goods. The new transportation infrastructures will favour, at the end of the present decade, an improvement in the accessibility towards A Coruña and the Asturian Metropolitan area. And a definitive emergence of the Cantabric centre as the main channel of communication in the peninsular net, a role which it has not exercised till now.

The recuperation of the Asturgalaico coastal area as a dynamic centre opens important challenges when defining criteria of territorial organization, in a scenario of cooperation between the two autonomous regions and municipalities. That has to adapt to the criteria contained in the diverse regional plans, where the ordination plan of the Asturian Coast (POLA) and the respective regional policies of territorial organization. The role that will be played by the general urban organization plans of each municipality is seen as fundamental for the urban development of the villages, so as to put in order the growth of the rural centres, particularly in the flatlands and to the support sustainable development processes, suited to the resources and possibilities of the environmental. For this we have to begin from the basis of the existing population, avoiding the recourse of agreements and disarticulated urbanizations of the village net and rural centres. And decidedly promote the growth of the villages, reinforcing their current scant urban fibre, without losing its character and «quiet city» scenary. But always from the perspective of growth, in a positive scope, without forgetting that the territories that do not grow, that do not bet on their future, are doomed to decline and to the processes of regression, with its social after-effects: depopulation, aging, low birth rate, dependency.

The dissymmetry, to one side and the other of the regional borders, should induce to reflexion on if the regional policies have been the most adequate and on the reorientation of the same for the near future from the view of territorial cooperation.

In an original territory that has to consolidate its characteristics before the centralist regional structures, from the perspective of territorial marketing and of the regional cultural identity that trespasses the new frontiers. The comparison of the recent evolution of the

western Asturian coastal area with Lugo coastal area should serve to carry out an approximate criticism and a valuation of the strategies carried out in the last decades. Also to face up to many prejudices and localisms in the debate between conservation and development and on the future of the rural world.

The regional administration's policies, the leadership role of the local administrations, the expectations and dynamism of the local society and the direction and interests carried out by the association movements should reflect on the reorientation of the actions and future projects towards sustainable growth based on the organization of the territory, from an inter-regional point of view, opening channels of continuing communication between the autonomous regions and the municipalities, avoiding unnecessary obstacles on development and stagnation in comfortable situations as in the present, but that close the future for the younger generations. It is necessary to favour open participation of the local population in the processes of local development and recuperate the social and economic point of view of sustainable growth, starting from a more objective perception of the present reality and of the potentials of existing development. As a starting point for an in depth change of the negative indicators, particularly those, such as birth rate, that indicate a higher degree of distrust in the future of this territory.