

# COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LOCATIONAL CONFLICTS: THE CASE OF POBLATS MARÍTIMS (VALENCIA, SPAIN) AND THE SUD-OUEST DISTRICT (MONTREAL, CANADA)

**Luis del Romero Renau**

Departament de Geografia, Universitat de València,  
luis.romero@uv.es

## I. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

In this paper we analyze the proliferation of conflicts in two districts in two completely different cities in order to advance knowledge about the causes and dynamics of these conflicts: why they occur, where they emerge, how they arise and which relationships have with the socioeconomic characteristics of the neighborhood or territorial area where they emerge.

The case study will be two working class and industrial districts within two cities belonging to very different geographical contexts: Valencia in Spain and Montreal in Canada. With this comparative analysis we aim to demonstrate that the conflict dynamics is comparable in very different urban contexts, such as Montreal and Valencia, as they are two cities that share the same capitalist informational mode of development (Castells, 1997) and that there are clear links between the emergence of conflicts and the socioeconomic characteristics of the place where they arise.

From the eighties the first locational conflicts began to be studied, not only within the logic of the class struggle as a conflict generator mechanism, but incorporating as well in the analysis postmaterial values of the «new social movements» such as welfare, environmental demands and justice or local identities. In this context the term locational conflict and NIMBY and LULU attitudes was coined (Brion, 1988; Wolsink, 1994; Lober, 1995; Alberdi, 2002): conflicts that arise due to an opposition to a specific unwanted land use because of a potential negative social and / or environmental effect. From the late 90s the academic interest to the phenomenon of citizen protests linked to land use conflicts increased in Spain, coining the term of «territorial conflicts» (Cruz, 2010: 208), with Nel-lo (2003), as one of the first authors to start to speak of «spatial conflict» whose common denominator is the «use of land and its management» (Nel-lo, 2003:11). This is the basic concept of conflict that has been followed in this work, defined as confrontational situation between at least two

categories of actors (different actors or actors of the same type together, for example between local administrations) whose interests diverge with respect to the management of the city or a more limited space, especially when planning new land uses (Nel ·lo, 2003; Aznar et al, 2006). This is a spatial view of the conflicts, that rather than opposed to other visions from the field of urban sociology, anthropology or politics, is a complement, as it focuses on conflicts related to the planning and management city as a clash of interests between territorial actors (Cruz, 2010:65).

The methodology used for the study of territorial or locational conflicts differs from the traditional approaches used so far to study such phenomena (Muñiz, 2012), as it moves away from the classical techniques of social research through interviews and surveys and enters the field of quantitative techniques using GIS statistical and geospatial analysis. The quantitative methodology used here to study conflict was initially developed by Janelle and Milward and later adapted by Trudelle (Janelle and Millward, 1976; Janelle, 1977; Law & Mercier, 1980; Joerin, 2005). It has recently been successfully used to analyze the dynamics of conflict in two case studies, one in Spain (Del Romero and Trudelle, 2011, Del Romero and Trudelle, 2012).

The primary source of data has been both the newspaper archives of two newspapers for every city studied, as yearbooks news. To cover as much information as possible, we chose to collect printed news from two local newspapers with different ideological orientations (*La Presse* and *Le Devoir* in Montreal and *El Levante* and *Las Provincias* in the case of Valencia) and also omitted from the database character all editorial news and opinion articles. In these sources we searched for articles and news that made reference to territorial conflicts developed between January 1, 1995 and December 31, 2010, covering a total of 16 years in both study areas. A total of 58 conflicts were identified in the study area of Montreal and 40 in Valencia. For each of these conflicts we also collected information about its intensity (measured considering the duration in days of the conflict and the number of words), the actors involved (associations, administrations, companies, professionals), the strategies employed etc. as well as economic and social indicators from the 2001 Population and Housing Census, in order to analyze together location and intensity of conflicts with socio-economic data at the section level (unemployment rates, socioeconomic status, educational level etc.).

## II. STUDY AREAS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study areas (Sud-Ouest Montreal and Valencia Poblat Marítims) are two districts with similar population size (about 70000 inhabitants in both cases), with a significant percentage of immigrants residing in them and a socioeconomic low status. Also in both cases the urban parts that historically have lived relatively isolated from the central city, which have developed a certain identity based on their proletarian condition in their neighborhoods. As a secondary study areas, the set of districts surrounding each district were chosen. In both cities, most of these districts contain neighborhoods of the middle-high or high classes in the city, another striking similarity.

In total between the two cities 1392 press articles relating to conflicts were added to this base. 30 conflicts were collected in the district of Montreal Sud-Ouest (28 more in surround-

ing districts) and 26 in the district of Poblats Marítims (14 more in surrounding districts). The most intense conflicts were related to inner urban reform projects (Griffintown in Montreal or Valencia Avenida Blasco Ibáñez plan) and the expansion of major equipment and infrastructure (highway Turcot in Montreal and construction of the port of Valencia logistic area). Both in the case of Montreal Sud-Ouest and in Valencia Poblats Marítims, the number of territorial conflicts appeared between 1995 and 2010 was much higher in these districts than in the surrounding districts, especially if we compare the population. This is a significant amount of conflicts for two districts of just 70,000 inhabitants.

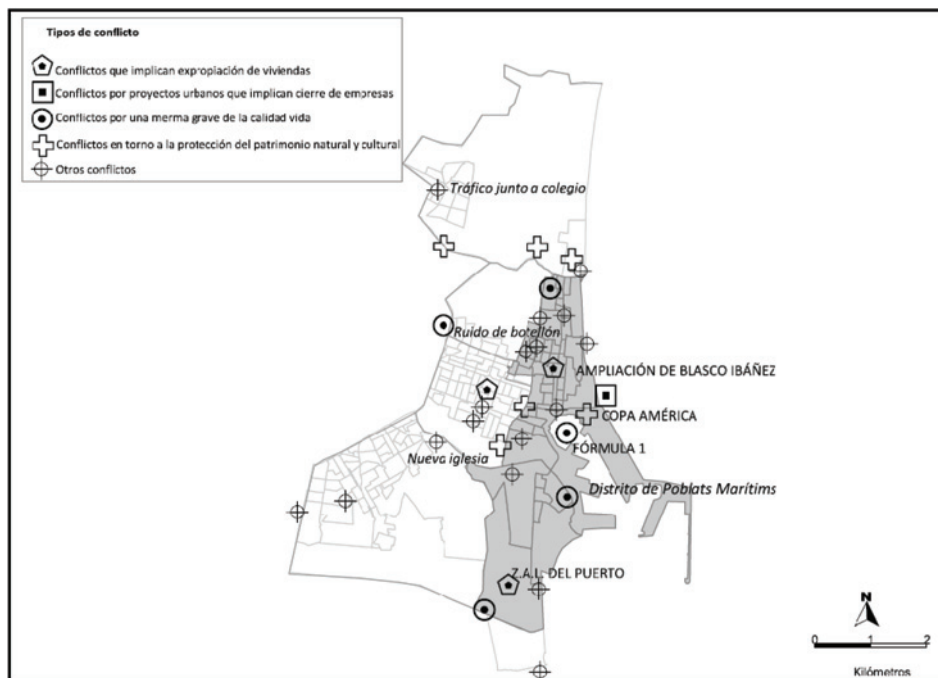
Looking at the results of the Chi-Square test in the Annex, we can see how there is a significant statistical link in the two cities between the distribution of conflicts on the one hand and the population density, the presence of civic associations, the unemployment rate and education variables (in Valencia uneducated population and in Montreal people with university studies). At this point, it is clear that in the two study areas of the two cities there are more conflicts in neighborhoods with low population density (industrial areas, ports, historic neighborhoods with fewer homes per acre than the city average or more empty homes) and in the neighborhoods with civic associations, which shows the importance of these actors in the emergence of territorial disputes. The hypothesis of increased proliferation of con-

Figure 1

CONFLICTS IN MONTREAL –SUD-OUEST. PENTAGONS: CONFLICTS WITH HOUSE EVICTIONS; SQUARES: CONFLICTS WITH LOSS OF JOBS; CIRCLES: CONFLICTS DUE TO IMPACTS IN LIFE QUALITY; CROSS: CONFLICTS DUE TO ENVIRONMENT OR HERITAGE DESTRUCTION; CROSS-CIRCLE: OTHER CONFLICTS



Figure 2  
 CONFLICTS IN VALENCIA-POBLATS MARÍTIMS. PENTAGONS: CONFLICTS WITH HOUSE EVICTIONS; SQUARES:  
 CONFLICTS WITH LOSS OF JOBS; CIRCLES: CONFLICTS DUE TO IMPACTS IN LIFE QUALITY; CROSS: CONFLICTS  
 DUE TO ENVIRONMENT OR HERITAGE DESTRUCTION; CROSS-CIRCLE: OTHER CONFLICTS



licts in poor, urban neighborhoods are revealed as very likely as there are more conflicts in neighborhoods with low college-educated population in the case of Montreal and in the case of Valencia appear in areas with significant concentrations uneducated population. Furthermore, in the case of Montreal is found as this conflict proliferation is greater in areas with higher unemployment rates.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

Both the district of Sud-Ouest in Montreal and Poblats Marítims in Valencia share the characteristics of being neighborhoods that have experienced in the recent past an urban boost, contain large contingents of poor, working class population and numerous territorial disputes. From the development of a database on urban conflicts and statistical analysis between the distribution of specific conflicts and socio-economic variables is possible to conclude first that conflicts do not occur randomly in the territory, secondly that they are concentrated in poor areas, and thirdly that these conflicts arise in reaction to major transformation projects involving dispossession mechanisms of living space or quality of life. Therefore it can be interpreted as an expression of struggle and resistance against the way that the city is managed and planned.

On the one hand the inhabitants of these districts want to maintain a certain level of life quality or increase it. They defend a right to the city and the protection of neighborhood life and its built heritage and the environment. On the other hand various economic and institutional actors push to «renew» and «revitalize» these neighborhoods to improve the city's image abroad and generate more wealth through ambitious urban projects hardly affordable for the resident population, which would imply a replacement of the medium-term population of these districts by population with more resources in a gentrification process. This is what in the words of Harvey is an example dispossession of living space and quality of life of the working classes in the city by the bourgeois elites, a dispossession for the sake of accumulation in this new phase of global capitalism.