

Recent territorial changes in the port of La Plata, Buenos Aires. Argentina

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This paper makes reference to a current research project conducted in an industrial port-urban environment which is located in the South bank of the Río de La Plata estuary, 10 km away from the Capital city of the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina. According to the proceedings from the TAG (Territory, Actors and Governance) Team we aim to make an useful academic scientific contribution to institutions and societies involved in the Territories and places described above.

Therefore, we will attempt to provide some contributions in tune with the Territorial methods set in the heart of the Red Territorios Posibles (Possible Territories Net), *Territorii* Method, regarding research and intervention.

From a conceptual territorial basis, although it is not excluding, we complement this overview of the issue with some contributions and tools from other disciplines -either from the social, economic, environmental or other fields. We aim to investigate the space comprised by La Plata port jurisdiction, where we will approach the recent Territorial Transformations (planning of uses and functions, uses of the land, investments, etc.) in the Places selected in this area with that purpose; and particularly, the logics displayed by the involved (social-political-economic) actors who are involved in these places or the patterns of occupation and appropriation. (Santos, M: 1996; 2000) (Karol, J: 2004)

The resulting dispute for space use and appropriation between the different activities (productive and non-productive), distinct uses that act in some cases as gaps between many of them, stresses the complex superposition of jurisdictions and the subsequent superposition of organizations with possible competences. This is the reason why there exist long-standing conflicts in this area due to the complex net of actors and subjects who develop their different logics by displaying them in the space. There are also long-established processes and a territorial history that make the analysis in the referred field more complex as we are dealing with a complex interaction and construction of the territory with power struggles for space. So we could find traces of events in the territory that have taken deep root in the identity and social imagery of the regional population; like the port history, the meat-packing plants, the working-class neighborhoods, etc., to name just a few.

For this purpose, we consider appropriate to work with the notions of Real, Lived, Thought, Legal and Possible Territories. We shall intend to record how we could identify the Territorial dimensions mentioned above in this object of study, how we regard them in the different methodological stages, where they show more descriptive, perceptive, explanatory, prescriptive and propositional readings. (Bozzano, H; 2003, 2005, 2009)

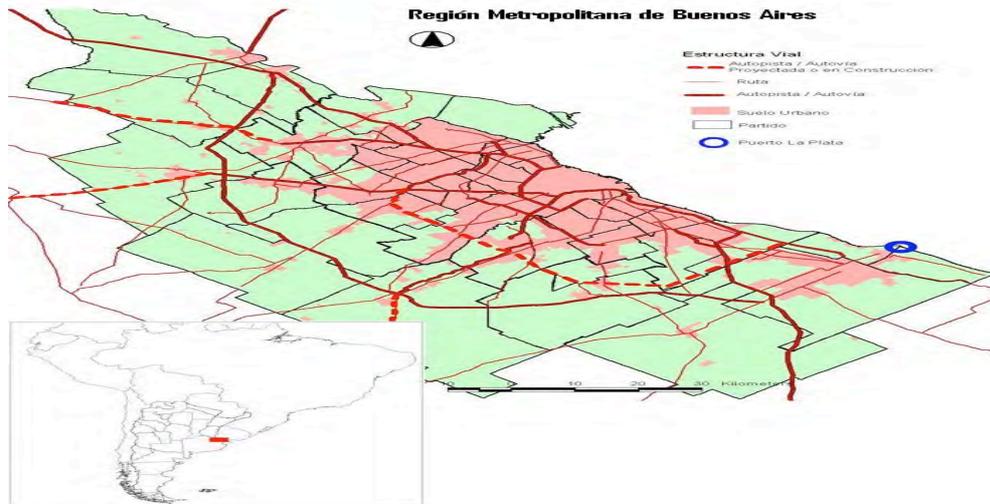


Image 1. Localization of the area of research with regard to South America and Argentina.

Notions about Territory

The debates, regarding the concept of **Territory** and the concept of the phenomenon of **globalization** as well, have been revitalized now more than ever because of the complex and dynamic reality that the world political-economic scenario is going through. In view of these changes, the social disciplines have given rise to different explanations of the historical moment and the way social processes have occurred in a certain territory. Although this paper incorporates these notions, it is under a design phase, so we are reviewing the studied theoretical axes.

We think the contribution made by **Milton Santos** in this respect turns out to be clarifying: *"...The world has turned into world for many reasons. One reason is the fact that human intelligence has been able to create a set of techniques which are hegemonic regarding information (a family of techniques), which have a planetary dimension; secondly, that there is information with planetary vocation and thirdly, that the world of business, in its highest expression, is also planetary, global. Therefore, it means that places do not lose their characteristics completely and the world settles everywhere..."*¹

When it comes to geographical space, Milton Santos summarizes his theoretical proposal in terms of an indissoluble, supportive and also contradictory set of systems of objects and systems of actions that make up the space.² Both systems interact, the systems of objects determine the way actions develop while the system of actions leads to the creation of new objects or to the resignification of preexistent objects. (Santos; 2000:54-55).

The territory (terra torium) is not society in action; neither is it nature, the physical natural and/or constructed substrate; it is in a broad sense nature and society in dialectic interaction. The territory is a place of varied scale where subjects -currently from the State, the market and the citizenship- open the interaction of systems of actions and systems of objects, constituted by a myriad of techniques -natural and artificial

¹ Interview to Milton Santos: Bulletin from the Alexander Von Humboldt Educational Center n° 4. 1998

² Bozzano; H. pp175: 2003. Book: Pensar la plata

hybrids- which are identifiable by particular events -in time and space- and with diverse degrees of integration in the local-meso-global relation³ (Bozzano: 2000; 2003)

From what has been stated above, there arises the Coexistence of **occupations and possessions** of lands with different legal precepts of permit, usufruct or use, by companies, organizations and institutions that emphasize the complexity of the area when it comes to making an integrated plan of management and control. For instance, when it comes to making the Master Plan and Port Zoning according to the records in the Provincial Administration of Ports it can be quoted here that there existed a total of 107 permits of use; from Industries themselves to development, sport, professional, educational, recreational, private, among other, institutions.



Image 2. Satellite Image corresponding to the port area of La Plata. The **Port Jurisdiction** appears shadowed. Source: Puerto La Plata webpage

Territorii method

As Bozzano (2009) suggests, this is a geographical method to be incorporated in interdisciplinary investigations. It constitutes a territorial overview of projects that, like the current one, are not exclusively of a territorial nature; therefore, the complementation with other methods and tools from various disciplines turns out to be meaningful in order to give an integrated contribution or overview of the territory. We shall try to do a methodological exercise for the case of the territorial transformations in the Port of La Plata; in the case we are dealing with, the incorporation of operational concepts explains the selection of **real, lived, thought, legal and possible territories**; these summarize the **descriptive, perceptive, explanatory, prescriptive and propositional stages and readings of the territories** respectively, to a large extent and regardless of the theoretical conception that each investigator³ may choose and need. (Bozzano, H; 2009)

Taking all that has been presented into account, we have decided to select methodologically 2 places which are considered emblematic in order to contrast the objectives and hypothesis devised for the current case of

³ Territory and management: endogenous and institutional development. Analysis of cases Prof. Dr. Horacio Bozzano. Seminar of Investigation "Experiences of Territorial Planning and Local Development". Department of Geography, Faculty of Humanities and Educational Sciences from the National University of La Plata – Faculty of Human Sciences, Institute of Geography, National University of La Pampa. August, 4th and 5th, 2005. CD. pp. 9

study, as a result of the above mentioned complexity and the richness of cases to be explored. The two sites selected for this purpose are:

§ Case Barrio Campamento Neighborhood, Ensenada. Residential - urban pattern.

This neighborhood has a historical cultural value associated with the development and growth of the port area; this is why we consider that it represents an outstanding cultural capital and patrimonial value, although we should not forget to point out that we are dealing with urban sectors at socio-environmental risk, as we will observe later. It finds itself in an extreme situation, in its industrial port environment, there stands out a Petrochemical complex, an oil distillery and similar industries in scale and international investments.

The barrio Campamento neighborhood is one of the first neighborhoods of the city, which was born as a result of the construction of the Port of La Plata in the year 1890. This neighborhood has a historical cultural value associated with the development and growth of the port area; this is why we believe that it represents an outstanding cultural capital and patrimonial value. This residential area constitutes, on the one hand, a barrier to an adequate railway network with the Free trade zone and Astilleros Río Santiago shipyard and, on the other hand, an obstacle to the development of the port operating procedures area (future stations).

Situation of the Barrio Campamento neighborhood in the urban context

- It constitutes an enclave located in the middle of activities which are not compatible with housing because of its level of pollution, disturbances and dangerousness.
- There are serious problems of environmental degradation because of air, soil and water contamination that affect the health of the population.
- There are deficiencies in the infrastructure of urban services which add another negative factor to the lack of healthcare in the environment.
- Lack of enough public recognition of the historical-environmental and architectural value, and of the urgent social emergency of the zone inhabitants

As a result of this, it has been proposed to study the socio-economic feasibility of taking the Barrio Campamento neighborhood (5 blocks) and incorporating this zone into the area of port operating procedures as one of the work hypothesis in the Master Plan and Port Zoning. One of the proposals revolved around the Refunctionalization and relocation of 5 blocks, over a total of 9 blocks that the neighborhood currently has, there will be 4 left.



Image 3. La Plata Port. View from Río de La Plata river towards the Cuatro Bocas channel (center of the image) and Petrochemical pole (Repsol YPF distillery). On the right, city of Ensenada, on the left, city of Berisso. Source: Puerto La Plata webpage

§ Santiago Este (Paulino) Island, Berisso. Mixed pattern: conservation, recreation and tourism, to a lesser extent: agro productive (intensive).

Nowadays it is a space in transition, where a dynamism in terms of a process of valorisation of the area becomes evident, conflicting views of the future are discussed, and this raises different questions, between those interests claiming to incorporate this area into the port operating procedures (business logic), given its importance due to its location in front of the access channel to the Port, and those struggling for a development that could include the area natural resources and the fact of being a protected landscape, given its environmental and patrimonial characteristics. They have a productive development (coast wine) and a recreational-tourist one.

In short, they are activities that turn out to be incompatible, logics of occupation and appropriation. Conflicts among different uses of the land in the coastal riverbank area.

The most common uses of the land in the area of study are listed below, their superposition and interaction characterize a space with serious conflicts regarding its **environmental quality**, which has generated and generates incompatibilities of uses, vulnerability and disruptions in the population's quality of life and health deterioration.

§ Petrochemical Industry with residential use

§ Proximity between Environmental Preservation areas and Petrochemical Industry

§ Port-related activities and Petrochemical Industry with Tourist recreational activities

§ Petrochemicals with sport ports

§ Port development and Petrochemical Industry with fruti-horticultural/ fishing activities

The **coast wine** is a regional product that in the middle of the 20th century was sold in the domestic market, favored by the boom of meat-packing plants and by the popularity that the product had acquired among the working-class sectors linked with those industrial establishments.

As a result of the need for port operating procedures and the subsequent adequacy to the master plan proposal, a series of mega works have been developed in different implementation stages and development states.

<p>Case Study</p> <p>Main features</p> <p>Territories</p>	<p><i>Territorial transformations in the Port of La Plata</i></p> <p>La Plata Port jurisdiction (has 2,249 ha.) located in the Buenos Aires municipal districts of Ensenada and Berisso (along with the municipal district of La Plata they make up the so-called Region of Gran La Plata) - located at the south east of the Metropolitan Region of Buenos Aires (RMBA), Argentina, and constitutes an urban-industrial complex that has a total surface of 1,160 Km² and a population of 702,449 inhabitants. Three important cities: La Plata, Berisso and Ensenada.</p> <p>Master Plan and Port Zoning, developed from the Consortio de Gestión del Puerto La Plata (Management Consortium of La Plata Port) (non State public entity)</p>
<p>Real Territories</p>	<p>We refer to a more descriptive moment regarding the object of study– intervention. The real territories refer, among others, to the site conditions and position of the port area in general and to the 2 selected places.</p> <p>a- Barrio Campamento neighborhood, Ensenada: it is one of the first neighborhoods of the city; its historical cultural value is associated with the development and growth of the port area, so we consider that it represents an outstanding cultural capital and patrimonial value.</p> <p>b- Santiago Este (Paulino) Island, Berisso: it is a space in transition, where a dynamism in terms of a process of valorisation of the area becomes evident, conflicting views of the future are discussed. It is characterized by the region, the location of the port area, on the one hand, and the infrastructure, economic activities, functions, uses of the land and actors, institutions and organizations, on the other had.</p>
<p>Lived Territories</p>	<p>The lived territories, among others, involve inquiring about perception, in the places selected with this purpose and by involved societies, State, Market and Citizenship subjects:</p> <p>The features of identity, the social capital they possess in connection with the events identified in the process of occupation and organization of the Territory.</p> <p>The needs and ambitions of the different actors, in accordance with the changes occurred as a result of the processes of political decentralization and State Reforms promoted by the National State, its territorial impact at the local and municipal level. The idea of link – communication and sense of belonging as a result of the implementation of the Master Plan and Port Zoning (Management Consortium of La Plata Port).</p>
<p>Thought Territories</p>	<p>We shall intend to arrive at an explanatory stage, where we will make use of the <i>Real, Lived Territories</i>, along with the processes and logics that allow us to get closer to the explanation of the object. With this aim we will investigate the systems of objects and the systems of actions which prevail in the region (Santos, 2000), as well as the occupation and appropriation logics; patterns of territorial occupation and appropriation, basis for the definition of places.</p>

<p>Legal Territories</p>	<p>We relate the Port Jurisdiction itself under the administration and exploitation of the Management Consortium of La Plata Port (2,249 ha) with the analysis of criteria indicating the different uses and signs that may territorialize or not in the area of study and constitute a mosaic complex of uses and functions, many of which are opposed: urban-residential, industrial, fruit, recreation, protected areas, coast zone and islands, etc.</p>
<p>Possible Territories</p>	<p>It is the aim of this work to move forward in this propositional stage, considering them as desired Territories, taking into account a synthesis stage of the previous ones and reflecting the participation, the reached agreements with the possibility of guaranteeing the Territorial sustainability of the places. One of the main premises focuses on the planning, zoning, refunctionalization and participation in the decision-taking process by the actors involved with that purpose.</p> <p>We refer to the concept of Governance, related to a wide shade of interrelations between the civil society, the market and the State. Social collective search conducive to reaching agreements, (not exempt from conflicts and contradictory, complementary and contrary positions) intended for the satisfaction of joint needs (transformation)</p> <p>Legitimacy means considering the idea of an order based on the contract, that is, the individuals giving the political power to their representatives in the State by means of the exercise of their citizenship rights .</p> <p>It is at this stage where the processes of territorial transformation, planning, refunctionalization, etc. are deepened for the purpose of the case of study.</p>

Conclusions

As preliminary results we can draw the following conclusions:

From the creation of the Management Consortium of La Plata Port, a strategy of commercial positioning and services provided in the above mentioned port has been consolidated along with a real vocation at the regional level, on the one hand, and the planning of uses and functions in the port area, on the other hand. Despite the above mentioned, the great challenges are still signing the management agenda: the territorial dimension that exceeds the scale of the local government and it positions itself in a continental and/or world scale, and the existence of long-standing conflicts due to the complex net of actors and subjects who develop their different logics by displaying them in the space.

The complex superposition of jurisdictions and competences sets itself up as one of the main obstacles when we think of the implementation and deepening of the integrated management and control plan of the area; mainly according to the conflictive relations with the residential uses and the poor quality of life of the local population, which is the historical result of a regional environmental deterioration.

The Reactivation and appreciation of the area are being developed under the new paradigms of the port stations; which is considered today as a "second-generation" port and finds itself in transition towards a

“third-generation” one. This implies acting as an integrated transportation center and logistical platforms for international trade. This reactivation can be assessed by statistics and works developed as a result of the Master Plan implementation.

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