

# FROM PREDATOR STATE TO SUSTAINABLE REGION<sup>1</sup>

*Effects of political and administrative decentralization  
on the environment in Spain*

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## Summary

In the maturity of the Industrial Society, the states of Europe acted as agents in the service of the large industrial groups. That model was later to be applied, and to a great degree is still being applied, in developing countries. The term *mode de production étatique* coined by Lefebvre, expresses this style of behavior very accurately. In so far as environmental management is concerned, we might denote it as the predator state.

Between the end of the 50's and the mid 70's the Spanish state acted in this manner, setting itself up as an instrument of legitimization (or when legitimization was impossible, of imposition) of large-scale industrial and infrastructural actions vis-à-vis

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local communities. Thus the first environmental movements in Spain found themselves in confrontation with the State -- to a greater extent even than with the enterprises promoting nuclear power plants, motorways, and other schemes with major impacts.

There was nothing exceptional about the Spanish situation. While the lack of essential freedoms in Spain acted as an added constraint, this same type of situation held in most industrialized European countries. Put simply, territories and their use had to be managed structurally and hierarchically according to the priority goal of GDP growth. There thus arose a centre-periphery dialectic, with the peripheries becoming zones of extraction of resources and supports for the metabolism of development.

In reality, this was not another stage in development, but the climax of a process that had taken two centuries to reach maturity. There were direct antecedents in the constitution of the modern State as an instrument to serve the interests of the industrial classes (according to the definition of Saint Simon).

The civilizatory crisis that had its openings in the 70's, and of which the economic crisis would only be a prologue, was to be the initiation of the burial rites of the Industrial Society, its ideologies and its organizational structures. With respect to the management of the territory and the environment, the synchrony of this crisis in Spain with the decadence of the Franco dictatorship and the transition to Democracy would allow the setting in motion of an imaginative process of economic, administrative and political decentralization under the constitution of the new Estado de las Autonomías (State of Autonomous Regions)<sup>3</sup>, which has transferred protagonism to the Administrations most closely linked to the localities.

In reality, this has meant the passage from a structuralist, fordist and centralized planning of territory to a new organic, decentralized planning based on the concept of network rather than on structure.

The present work analyzes the case of one of the 17 Spanish autonomous regions, Extremadura, whose space had been organized for decades according to national requirements. On that basis, there had been projected the installation of several nuclear power plants, paper mills, reforestation with rapidly growing species, amongst other environmentally harshly aggressive actions. Currently, however, only 30 years after those projects, this region is one of the European paradigms of weak but sustainable development, based on strict environmental protection. To attain this situation, the emerging regional government had to opt in the 80's for a clear definition vis-à-vis the planner State, making a claim for the self-government of its environment. To a greater or lesser degree, this process has also been taking place in other European regions.



<sup>3</sup> A model that was later imitated by other European countries such as France, Italy, or England. Recently, there has been a profound national debate opening up in Portugal concerning the benefits of following the Spanish model of Autonomic State. After a referendum in spring 1999, the result was the continuation of the model of Napoleonic State.

In this sense, the hypothesis that is verified in this case is that decentralization favours the protection of the environment.

# 1. The development of the modern state as an instrument of the industrial revolution

As against the declaration of the Constitution as the defense of citizens against any attack whatsoever, the State that becomes consolidated after the French revolution was rather to be based on a Constitution that "convenes the guarantee of the rights of the citizens and the guarantee of the interests of the State" (cited in Jouvenel, 1977:153). I.e., the interests of the State are placed at the same level as the rights of the citizens.

Historical reality has shown us that this State has not solely been the guarantor of the interests of the dominant classes (unless we were to make somewhat convoluted interpretations), but that it has also been able to "disarm" with respect to many of the just demands of the weakest social groups.

It is no less true, however, in contrast with the Ancien Régime which proclaimed itself to be the "father" of all its subjects, the modern post-revolutionary State proclaims itself as protector of a "nation" which is superposed on the citizens, whose welfare is measured in terms of progress, and whose mechanisms are in the hands of new dominant economic groups. I.e., while it is true that the State sets itself up in a certain sense as arbiter of clashes of interests within nations, it is in a way an arbiter that has been "bought" by the most powerful groups, since it is they who incarnate "the idea of progress" in so far as progress is measured only in terms of economic wealth.

The nation State therefore sets itself up definitively as a superstructure that is imposed on local organizations, which have traditionally been interested in the conservation of their vital space, understanding the limited symbiosis between society and environment as the only instrument with which to guarantee the livelihood of future generations. It is important to emphasize the idea that the nation States subjugate local environmental management systems to the "general interest". In Spain, as in other ancient European nations, these systems have given rise to a marked tradition of common law oriented to environmental protection, as compiled by Joaquín Costa at the end of the 19th century (Costa, 1983).

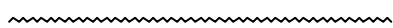
This new program was to reach its greatest splendour in the framework of the Capitalist Revolution, and would lead to the degradation of numerous spaces for the sake of the nation's well-being, ideologically justified with the aid of economic statistics. Beginning in the 17th century, after national monetary and juridical unification, the heavy artillery of progress was brought out against the local systems of environmental protection and management that limited the development of the new productive forces. Jovellanos, the father of the first liberal reforms in Spain, expressed quite

clearly in his famous Report on Agrarian Law (1795) the importance of "removing the obstacles which oppose the action and movement of personal self-interest" (Jovellanos, 1968:31), thereby opening up the way to the disappearance of the communal management of the land, and of the limitations to crop-growing in forest and pasture zones, promoting the colonization of lands that had been left abandoned for centuries because of their limited productive capacity, etc.<sup>4</sup>

During the course of the 19th century, this nation State was to reach its maximum expression due to the contributions of the post-revolutionary French state. It is then that the nation's well-being becomes assimilated with the well-being of the "hive", in the parable of Saint Simon (who was more engineer than sociologist, and no great lover of revolutionary stridency), in sum, to the "industrial class". Only then can one begin to speak of a bourgeois State or, in Marxist terms, of a superstructure in the service of the capitalist class.

The new Napoleonic state, whose model would be imitated by Spain and many other nations<sup>5</sup>, would be the State that, by centralizing administration in a complex system, instrumentalizes all its power in the service of the economic agents. To this end, it created over the course of the 19th century a body of laws that regulate the management of natural resources (mines, water, coasts, land ownership, ...) so that it became definitively possible, as had been preached by Jovellanos, to remove the communitarist obstacles and environmental limitations that were opposed to the development of industrial capitalism. Kropotkin made an early study of this process, in particular the French case, and synthesized it terms of great clarity: "With violence, the worshippers of centralism fought against the commune. And this is what economists call the 'natural death of communal agriculture, by virtue of the laws of economics!'" (Kropotkin, 1978:231). Indeed , the transition was not free of serious conflict which, in the case of Spain, was manifest in the succession of Carlist wars in which the struggle against political liberalism went hand-in-hand with an implicit claim for communal self-organization and self-management of the natural resources.

The intimate link between State, administration, and industrialization was in fact



<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, in no way can one accept the simplistic view - ideological rather than scientific - adopted by many of the new ecological historians. For them, there have be practically no important changes between the Neolithic and the Capitalist Revolutions (Gonzalez de Molina, 1993:29), with the Industrial Revolution and Capitalism being inserted into a sort of Garden of Eden, immaculate since its creation. On the contrary, since at least 2000 years before the capitalist revolution there has been a succession of more or less revolutionary changes in the systems of resource management: irrigation (which, after the discovery of agriculture itself, and the Green Revolution, was the main technological advance that took place in the primary sector), the ploughshare, crop rotation, integrated woodland-grazing management, inter al., involved profound environmental transformations which successively allowed a rise in the sustainability capacity of territories (Luelmo, 1975:217).

<sup>5</sup> In 1833, there began in Spain the systematic process of administrative centralization. The means was the division of the State into provinces, and the concentration in the provincial capitals of the administrative services of the State, which before had been scattered over various towns.

noted at the very beginning of the analysis of contemporary States: "There is in modern nations a major cause which ceaselessly contributes to extending the domains of the sovereign and to augmenting his prerogatives, a cause to which due attention has not been paid: this is the development of industry, which is favoured by advances in equality" (Tocqueville, 1984:II:259). The sharp rise in physical productivity that resulted from the exploitation of natural forces that were progressively being discovered, and that required new transport infrastructures whose construction in turn required the "invasion" of every kind of space that had been sacred to the various peoples -- in a broad utilitarian sense -- made it necessary to develop "those great superstructures of society -- the public administrative authorities" (Jouvenel, 1979:83).

## 2. The predator State in the decadence of the Industrial Society

Although the fascist New State that arose from Franco's victory in the Spanish Civil War was not the most suitable to respond to the needs of the development of capitalism, due to its interventionist character and to its obliged autarchic ideology<sup>6</sup>, its self-definition as a national, authoritarian, labour union, and unitary State made it immensely close to the militarist and personal-Bonapartist model put forward by Comte as an instrument of progress<sup>7</sup>. And in this sense, from 1955, when the Regime began its opening up to the outside, onwards, it was extremely useful to sustain without any possibility of citizen response the installation of highly contaminating industrial facilities, to over-urbanize the sea coast, and to arrange for foreign governments to set up military bases and firing grounds<sup>8</sup>.

From 1960 to 1973, as the Industrial Society attained its greatest heights, there took place in Spain the great transformation: the passage from an agrarian society to an industrial society. The coincidence of this evolutionary moment with a corporatist and authoritarian political regime and with one of the stages in the process of globalization of the economy thanks to the first telecommunication revolution, was to convert the country into a perfect laboratory in which to observe the behaviour of the predator State.

Action would be taken on diverse fronts, but always counting on three basic instruments: legislation, often of the style of the 19th century, that put the main natural resources (mines, water, coastline, land-rights) in the hands of the State; an effective Expropriation Law; and finally a set of laws and norms that repressed civil and political freedoms. A synthesis of the environmental degradation of the territory can be given by describing the ambits that were principally affected.

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<sup>6</sup> The economic autarchy of Spain between 1939 and 1945 was not, however, structural in character, consubstantial with the fascist ideology, but was ultimately determined by the international isolation to which the Franco regime was subjected after the defeat of the Axis powers.

<sup>7</sup> The young Comte dreamt of "a government as head of society, destined to reunite in a single file [as of soldiers, haz (Spanish) = fascis (Latin)] and to lead [it] on to a determined end" (cited in Jouvenel, 1977:404).

<sup>8</sup> This support of the State for the ecological degradation of the nation's territory is symbolized to perfection in an apparently intranscendent anecdote. In the 60's, with the US military bases already installed in Morón, Torrejon and Zaragoza, an atomic bomb dropped off of a US bomber and fell without exploding onto the beach of a small village in Andalusia. Not only did the government not protest, but one of Franco's ministers (who is still an active politician today as elected president of the region of Galicia) went to the site with the television cameras to bathe at the beach, so as to "demonstrate" to public opinion that there existed no risk whatsoever.

## **A) Destruction of urban heritage and agrarian space**

Firstly, "capitalism has found an excellent featherbed in the production of urban space, from which it has extracted excellent capital gains" (Gaviria, 1979:10). Secondly, in consequence with this, any sort of protection was regarded as "restraining the possibilities of economic growth and development" (Chueca, 1977: 12). Thirdly, inasmuch as the concentration of the population in the main industrial centres accelerated the demographic decline of the rest of the territory, the result was that "without country folk, the land itself fell apart under the attacks of erosion, fire, flood or landslides as soon as the roadways and tracks were uncared for, the woods were left unvigilated, the fields were not sown, and the meadows were left unreaped. Human nothingness inevitably leads to physical nothingness, since the country folk are indispensable as preservers of nature " (Saint Marc, 1972: 103). The depopulation of extensive territories, and their economic blockage would be an effect of both the regime's spatial economic policy and of its alliance with the dominant social groups (landowners, fundamentally) in certain county-sized administrative areas (comarcas), which would find themselves reduced to a reserve for labour, water, cheap food, and electricity supply (Baigorri, 1979).

There was also an agrarian policy that explicitly contributed to the environmental degradation of the agrarian spaces, using various public Institutions as battering rams. There was the forced depopulation of villages with the policy of forestry repopulation oriented to timber and paper pulp production, in substitution of the Mediterranean forest. The paradoxically named ICONA (Institute for the Conservation of Nature) would be the instrument used in mountain areas. The IRYDA (Institute for Agrarian Reform and development) would abandon the traditional systems of transformation of land to irrigation and colonization based on the optimization of flood plains that are easily irrigated by gravity, in favour of the development of sprinkler irrigation plans, and at times based on groundwater resources whose use is in deficit in energy terms and in which there is also almost no redistribution of land ownership. The Hydrographic Confederations, the organisms responsible for the management of water resources, became a complementary instrument for control and manipulation of local resources for the benefit of the large interest groups<sup>9</sup>.

## **B) The antienvironmental extension of the infrastructure system**

The design of the infrastructural modernization of Spain was not oriented to territorial planning or the harmonic development of the nation, but to the service of

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<sup>9</sup> Paradoxically, the Hydrographic Confederations, born in the 20's and imitated in the US by way of the Tennessee Valley Authority, had arisen as an attempt at integral and decentralized planning of the principal watersheds. But under Francoism they became converted into corporatist structures in the service of the interests of the State.

the major industrial groups, provoking grave and irreparable environmental damage, and always against the interests of the populations that have to support that damage<sup>10</sup>. The electricity supply system has to be included in this infrastructure. It included support for the construction of highly contaminating coal-fired electricity plants, of nuclear plants, and of hyper-dams oriented to hydroelectric production, etc. Reference must also be made to the policy of the transfer of water from one watershed to another, following the Californian model, to favour demographic and industrial concentration in the Mediterranean basin (Gaviria, 1976:15 ff.).

The lack of political freedoms explains the ease with which the serious territorial conflicts that arose between local groups were overcome. Companies promoting turnpike highways, superports, nuclear or coal-fired power stations, could count not only on the fiscal, financial, or judicial support of the State, according to each case, but also on the closest collaboration on the part of the Guardia Civil (Spain's rural police force), to the end of repressing local protest movements.

### **C) No-limit industrialization**

The policy of industrial promotion, with respect to the space, followed two criteria from 1960 onwards: the development of economies of scale by optimizing and consequently promoting the traditional industrial centres (Barcelona and Vizcaya, fundamentally)<sup>11</sup>, which would contribute to the aforementioned demographic desertification of extensive regions; and the commitment to foreign investments, which naturally sought the best locations from an economic point of view without taking environmental variables into account. In this ambit too, there would be another determinant instrument, the INI (National Institute of Industry), for the development or support for many of the environmentally most aggressive industrial projects.

The spatial policy developed by Francoism would have a beneficial effect on the main industrial centres with regard to the production of wealth. Recent research into public capital (Delgado, 1998), which is generated basically by public investment in

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<sup>10</sup> Naturally, spatial evolution has its own logic which is not always foreseen by planners. In this sense, there can be no doubt that, together with the undesirable environmental effects of much infrastructure, its construction has had other collateral effects and unexpected benefits for dependent territories. We have elsewhere shown the effects that the connection between the main industrial centres of Spain has had on the Ebro corridor, converting it into an essential node of intercommunication (Baigorri, 1980:15). Also, the development of new communication infrastructure, constructed because of the need to connect the peninsular capitals (Madrid and Lisbon) is having an unforeseen effect on Extremadura (Baigorri, 1999:313).

<sup>11</sup> From the mid 60's onwards, there existed an extended decentralizing discourse in the framework of the emerging Regional Science, and the model of France was followed in designing a policy of Poles of Development which would extend into the mid 70's. In practice, however, the said policy was a failure except when the Poles coincided with locations that were interesting for certain multinational industries.

infrastructures and equipment, has shown there to have existed great disparities in the indicators of public capital by the end of the said period (1973): for instance between the three Basque provinces (100 for Vizcaya, 71 for Guipuzcoa, and 55 for Alava) and the two Extremadura provinces (14 for both Cáceres and Badajoz). The said concentration, however, would also provoke serious environmental deterioration in those zones, with the State acting as an instrument of annulment, or at least moderation, of the environmental conflicts generated by the industrial contamination. Thus, of the large cities of the OECD, Bilbao, together with Lisbon, became the capital of the industrial world that registered the greatest increments in sulfur dioxide contamination of its atmosphere in the period 1970-76<sup>12</sup>. This ambivalence between concentration of wealth and at the same time environmental degradation led Barry Commoner to state, in his visit to the city, that "Bilbao is like a museum of environmental horrors" (cited in Allende, 1982:169).

Furthermore, large foreign investments most often involve grave environmental impacts, whose effects are buffered with respect to public opinion with the aid of political oppression. Amongst other cases, one may cite the refineries and petrochemical complexes of Huelva, which led to the complete environmental degradation not only of a city but also of an extensive estuary (Baigorri, 1982a), and of Tarragona, which added a major serious conflict, still not totally resolved, concerning sectorial competence over scarce water resources to the already existing problems of atmospheric pollution and waste dumps (Baigorri, 1982b). There is also the case of the installation of the Ford factory in Valencia, which provoked the destruction and transformation of one of the oldest and most fruitful market-gardening areas in Spain.

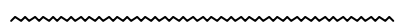
### **C) Mass tourism and coastal degradation**

Special reference must be made to tourism, since this has for decades been one of the axes of the Spanish economy. The development of mass tourism and the exceptional environmental conditions of Spanish beaches soon attracted first foreign, and then domestic tourists. The Francoist State took on as its own the program of urbanistic speculation in coastal zones, the modification of the coastal margin, and the draining of marshes and salinas, ... . In 1975, after just two decades of a clichéd Spain being one with sun, beaches, and speculation, a tentative evaluation was made of the recreational/touristic areas affected by processes of desertification, with the estimate being 1.7 million hectares (López de Sebastián, 1977:202). The most definitive critique of the program of mass seaside tourism, however, was made by the sociologist Mario Gaviria, also in the 70's: "The Mediterranean beaches (...) are very scarce and limited

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<sup>12</sup> Near Bilbao, in Erandio, there occurred in 1969 what were probably the first deaths in the framework of ecological conflicts in the developed world. As a consequence of the police repression of the general strike and the demonstration protesting against contamination, two people were killed and many others injured.

natural resources. Man can not reproduce them artificially; at present he is destroying them. These spaces of the greatest ecological quality and optimal habitability are a national resource which is the object of a two-fold colonialism: the neocolonialism of the use of the space and the neocolonialism of the production and buying /selling of property by foreign capital" (Gaviria, 1976:310)<sup>13</sup>.



<sup>13</sup> The ecological recovery that has taken place in some cases and begun in others along many stretches of the Spanish coastline over recent years has also to be understood precisely in the framework of the regionalization hypothesis that we are developing in this present work.

### 3. The origins of european Ecologism as a struggle against the State

In Europe, the differentiation between concern for the conservation of Nature and Ecologism as political ecology (i.e., as the proposal for improving the relationships between man, society, and the environment) has been sharp and clear since the very beginning of environmental concern. Even before Ecology existed as a science and ecologism as an ideology, in the mid 19th century anarchist thought went hand in hand with Social Science in Fourier, Cabet, Kropotkin, or Reclús, especially so in the latter two, to make manifest the inevitability of a natural contract not from the perspective of a right of things, but from the perspective of the most radical humanism. Almost one century before Lovelock put forward the Gaia hypothesis, the geographer and militant anarchist Reclús had noted the idea that "the Earth should be cared for like a great body, whose breathing which is effected by the forests would be regulated according to a scientific method: it has lungs, which man must respect, since on them depend his own hygiene" (Reclús, 1933:VI:183).

The evolution of the two lines (environmentalism and ecologism)<sup>14</sup> has been, in fact, clearly differentiated from the beginning, although at certain times there has been a confluence of interests. Thus there is coincidence in one radical aspect: their critique of the State. For both, although on the basis of quite distinct assumptions<sup>15</sup>, the State, "rather than manager, has become the proprietor of nature and of all goods and spaces known as 'public'" (Simonnet, 1980:96 ).

But in this political opposition to the State, there is in turn a triple confluence with proposals that are scientific based on Territorial Planning, and ideological based on nationalism, and which both set out a spatial opposition to the State, i.e., an opposition to centralization. Together with all the other phenomena that were triggered in the 60's but reached their maturest expression in the 70's, regionalism appears in Europe as an authentic revolution<sup>16</sup> in the very same France that had previously exported its

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<sup>14</sup> We could probably make an equivalent distinction between a Social Ecology (not necessarily as understood by Bookchin) which is more interested in forming a comprehensive social theory of natural-physical phenomena, and (or together with) an Environmental Sociology which is more interested in applying the "environmental theme" of abstract empiricism.

<sup>15</sup> In Darwinist-inspired environmentalism, which has so often coincided with the sociobiology of Wilson, the critique of the State is made within a neoliberal framework; in ecologism, that same critique is based on anticapitalist anarchist ideologies , by taking the State, as also does Marxism, to be an instrument in the service of the dominant classes.

<sup>16</sup> As Friedmann (1980) has shown with respect to the North American regionalism of the first third of the 20th century, in its close relationship with academics related to spatial analysis (specifically with  
(continued...)

model of unitary and centralized administration. The denunciation that is made from the standpoint of regionalism, and that holds a close relationship with the centre/periphery model of Amin and Gunder Frank that was fashionable at that time, is that the underdevelopment that characterizes the most backward regions of France derives from "the economic submission of the one-time conquered country on which is practised a colonialism that is no different from that practised overseas" (Lafont, 1971:8). In France, in certain ambits, there began demands for the constitution of a Basque State, a Breton State, and even a Languedoc State. At this same time, an equivalent phenomenon was developing in Spain, although here its echo was stifled by Francoist repression<sup>17</sup>. It also presented its own set of paradoxes and particularities. For instance, there was a simultaneous rise of ethnic nationalism in some of the most developed regions (the Basque country and Catalonia), and an environmental and economic regionalism in some of the least developed regions (such as Andalusia, Aragon, or Extremadura). In both cases, however, there was coincidence in denouncing the State as causal agent of the environmental degradation of their territories.

In what might be regarded as the first Social Ecology text in Spain (Gaviria, 1976), a detailed development of these suppositions was given, showing how the first battles in defence of Nature in Spain, or more precisely in defence of territories whose population was being affected or threatened by actions with a high level of ecological impact, were in reality battles against the State. The State appeared on all fronts in representation of the "national interests" (i.e., in the service of the large industrial groups), or directly as a simple proxy of those interests.

In 1974, in response to the announcement of the construction of several nuclear power plants in Sástago and Escatrón (Zaragoza), various head-of-family associations (the only associations authorized under the Franco regime) began to mobilize and make contact with the first environmental group that arose in Spain (AEORMA). The local power centres (Town Councils, Brotherhoods of Farmers) supported the mobilizations, and in May 1976 the Association for the Defence of the Interests of Lower Aragon (DEIBA) was formed. This was the first case in Spain of a group formed in defence of the land following the model that had become widespread at that time elsewhere in Europe, above all in France. General Franco had died only half a year before, and there was still to be a long wait before the first democratic elections were held in Spain.

The main weapons used by these groups (which soon were to spread to numerous

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<sup>16</sup> (...continued)

disciples of the Chicago School), the resurgence of regionalism in Europe has a strong relationship with the rapid development of Regional Science or Regional analysis in the 60's.

<sup>17</sup> The lack of freedoms to channel the expression of nationalist-type regionalism explains the appearance of the terrorist group ETA as an escape valve against the strong pressure exerted by the Francoist regime.

other regions and comarcas in Spain) were popular support (above all, from the agrarian sector which still controlled the means of local power in rural zones of Spain) and information. DEIBA too would be the first of these groups to promote a study of the zone that showed the environmental aggression to which it was being subject . The report, which was directed by Mario Gaviria, pointed explicitly to the State as one of the principal agents of expropriation of the comarca. With respect to the effects of the (non-nuclear) thermal plant that already existed in Escatrón (which the plan was to replace by one of the proposed nuclear plants), we then noted that "The INI (National Institute of Industry), the head of all those industries in which the State has a total or partial shareholding, has acted identically respecting Lower Aragon as any other multinational would have acted respecting any colonized country. (...) While the New National Syndicalist State proclaimed to the four winds the unity of the men and lands of Spain, and the equality of rights and duties of all those lands, the territory was planned or unplanned in such a way that some of these regions were used to obtain raw materials and labour with which other regions, which were always the same, could put into motion the machinery of industrial development" Baigorri, 1976:114).

## 4. Dependent regions as reserves of natural resources in the service of urban-industrial centres. The case of Extremadura

These same issues were again brought to light a little later in another report which also arose from the necessity for a local collective to collect elements of information with which to challenge another nuclear power project, this time in Extremadura (Gaviria, Naredo, 1977). In this case the State carried out its sacking of the region this time via not its industrial but its agrarian agencies: IRYDA and ICONA.

The region of Extremadura had lost nearly half its population (some 400 000 people emigrated to other more industrialized regions of Spain or Europe) between 1955 and 1971, and is characterized by an economic structure based on an agriculture of large land-holdings. In the mid 70's, the State had planned a series of projects which, had they come to full fruition, would have converted the region into the authentic dunghill of Spain: massive repopulations with eucalyptus (an exotic species that speeds up desertification) for the production of paper pulp; the construction of a paper mill in the mid Guadiana basin, upstream from a zone of more than 50 000 hectares under irrigation transformed since the 30's; construction of four nuclear units (two in Almaraz that came online, and two in Valdecaballeros that, as we shall see, were never completed); the opening of a uranium mine and of a cemetery for nuclear waste; the encouragement of touristic urbanization in the sierras of the North of the region, as a breathing space for Madrid; a system of water management increasingly oriented to hydroelectricity production for export to other regions (while Extremadura itself suffered a terrible deficit in electrification).

Precisely the same centre/periphery model used by Lafont for the French case is applicable in the analysis of the situation in Extremadura. This region, which had functioned for decades as a colony of the central spaces of Spain, now found itself subjected to "a new, far more threatening and irreversible ecological colonialism" (Gaviria, Naredo, 1978:11). The denunciation against the predator State is not in reality, however, against the State as superstructure in the service of the dominant groups in the capitalist system, according to Gunder Franck's model. Rather it falls within the Spanish anarchist tradition -- Proudhonian and petit-bourgeois. Hence, the intention is to explain the relationships of domination which condemn the region to being the cess-pool of Spain's industrial system, not in determinations of some mode of production, nor in a certain class structure, but in nothing less than the existence itself "of what today is known by the name of State" (Naredo, 1978:12).

Independently of the greater or lesser degree of success in the analyses of that time in conceptualizing the Extremadura situation, this was felt by the population, with

respect to the environment, as a status of being looted of their resources. Hence there occurred a certain confluence, in various of the environmental conflicts, between the most radical groups of the left and the class considered most menacing in the region, the large landholders<sup>18</sup>. This was the case, for instance, in the struggle against the project of a paper mill in Mérida, or against the nuclear power plant in Valdecaballeros. Between 1976 and 1979, there was a development of intense mobilizations culminating in a sit-in strike of more than 100 mayors in the Villanueva de la Serena Town Hall, the town closest to the planned site for the Valdecaballeros plant, and in a gigantic protest demonstration of more than 20 000 people, the largest ever held in Extremadura<sup>19</sup>.



<sup>18</sup> Almost exclusively the great landowners of irrigated lands, who felt themselves directly threatened by the potential contamination of the waters of the River Guadiana.

<sup>19</sup> As an example of the paradoxes and strange alliances that arose in the framework of the territorial struggles, it is noteworthy that the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) was at all times opposed to the antinuclear protests in the region, considering them in its analyses as going against progress. The socialist party, on the contrary, sided from the first with the protests, thus taking the first step to hegemony in the region, not only because of its left-wing progressive ideology, but also because from that time onwards it would appear in the eyes of the population as also a regionalist party, which defended the land against centralist interests. At the height of the protest, however, the PCE found itself overwhelmed by its own local leaders, who joined the sit-in of the mayors. Even the local leaders of the party at that time in Government, the Centre Democratic Union (UCD), ended by opposing the approval of the Valdecaballeros plant and joined the protests.

## 5. Political/spatial transition. The new State of Autonomous Regions

Centralization was a tremendously efficacious instrument with which to put the State (which, incarnate in the monarch of the Ancien Régime, was on the contrary autonomous with respect to the groups of economic interests) at the service of the capitalist bourgeoisie. And, if this is so, it would be only logical that political and administrative decentralization should move decisions away from the centres of economic power.

The constitutional process for the transition to democracy therefore had to take into account not only the demands of the so-called "historical territories"<sup>20</sup>, but thanks to the conflicts triggered by the environmental movement also the need to respond to demands for control over their own fate of those Spanish regions that felt that they had been "exspoliated" by the major industrial groups with the help of the State. Thus was born, with the 1978 Constitution, the State of Autonomous Regions. The autonomy with which the constituents endow the regions "also means capacity for self-government, i.e., the power to direct the community politically and administratively and to have a particular policy that allows options and directives to be defined that are different from those adopted by state organisms" (Alvarez, 1986:139).

The Spanish constitution is one of the first to explicitly declare the right (art. 45) to enjoy an adequate environment, charging the public powers with the rational use of all natural resources in order to improve the quality of life. But the management of natural resources is no longer concentrated in the central State: the Constitution (arts. 148, 149) delimits the domains of responsibility for the environment between the State and the Autonomous Communities. While the State reserves for itself the setting up of the basic legislation, the regions may establish additional protective norms, and are responsible for management of protection of the environment.

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<sup>20</sup> With respect to the territories which, during the II Republic (1931-36), had been endowed with some federal-type statute of local government: the Basque country, Catalonia, and Galicia. The first two are also the cradle of romantic nationalism in Spain in the 19th century. It has to be said that the nationalist, or even separatist, movements in the "historical territories" found in the environmental movement a wholly unexpected ally during the first years of the political transition to democracy. In the Basque country in particular there is documentation of the manipulation of the antinuclear movement by the independentist movement. This became especially manifest from the time when the terrorist group ETA became involved in the antinuclear battle. The projected Lemóniz nuclear power plant, near Bilbao, was never built due to citizen protest (as occurred in Valdecaballeros in Extremadura, and with others that had been planned in Navarra and Aragón); nevertheless, the fact that ETA carried out terrorist attacks (including the assassination of engineers) contributed to encouraging the merely ideological belief in the determining role of the band.



## 6. Extremadura: from colonized space to self-managed natural reserve

The regions of Spain are governed according to their Statutes of Autonomy, as approved by the regional parliaments and by the Spanish parliament. That of Extremadura was passed in 1983, after a period (1978-83) of a pre-autonomy regime. The Statute of Extremadura, while it does not explicitly declare amongst its objectives the protection of the environment<sup>21</sup>, lays out its exclusive areas of competence in matters of Territorial Planning, Town Planning and Housing, in the management of those water resources which flow wholly within the territory of the region, together with the management of hunting, fishing, and protection of ecosystems. Also, in the framework of the basic State legislation, the region reserves to itself the development of legislation and its execution in matters of environmental protection, mining and power production, the management of forestry resources and of protected natural spaces.

In May 1983, with the Statute come into force, the first regional elections were held. The presidency of the Junta of Extremadura (the local government) was obtained by the socialist party (PSOE) candidate, Juan Carlos Rodríguez Ibarra, who was to win for the fourth consecutive time in June 1999.

One sociological phenomenon that is pending study in Spain is the role, in all these processes, that has been played by the local leaders who arose in the transition to Democracy. The coincidence of the crisis of Francoism with the worst economic crisis of the latter half of the 20th century (which lasted in Spain from the mid 70's to the mid 80's) meant that the channels of migration were blocked off due to the grave situations of structural unemployment that arose in the main industrial centres of Spain. This had a beneficial effect for the regions: many dynamic young people who would have emigrated years before now had to remain in their home communities. It was here that they were to develop their vocations as political leaders, professionals, or entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the constitution of the State of Autonomous Regions involved a certain duplication of the State apparatus<sup>22</sup>, and hence of the possibilities of employment for ambitious politicians and functionaries. At first the regions were also colonized by the state-level apparatus of the political parties. But by the mid 80's, in

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<sup>21</sup> The main statutory references are directed at promoting economic and social development, providing infrastructural backbone to the territory, recuperating its emigrated population, agrarian reform ... . In sum, to the instrumental means with which to overcome underdevelopment.

<sup>22</sup> In fact, during the first decades of the democratic experience in Spain, the main criticism that the State of Autonomous Regions has received is that of having multiplied the number of functionaries and professional politicians.

almost all the Spanish regions, a local political class had arisen able to make itself, if ever so slightly, partially independent of the Madrid élite.

In this sense, and relative to the question at hand, special reference has to be made to the role played in the decentralization/environmental awareness binomial by the new leaders and local politicians who came out of the 70's. The incorporation of new local leaders -- who had often come to the fore precisely concerning the environmentalist struggles against the large corporations and above all against the State -- into the regional organisms and political institutions, meant a major contribution to the environmental awareness of the regional governments.

This was the case in Extremadura, where the best-known antinuclear activist of the region, Juan Serna, is incorporated into the first socialist government of Ibarra, with the portfolio of Public Works, Town Planning, and Environment. Some months later, the Environmental Agency was created as an instrument for the development of environmental policy. Another well-known environmental militant of the region, Jesús Garzón, one of the founders of ADENEX, the most powerful environmental association of the region (after the Sierra Club model)<sup>23</sup>, was given the charge of this agency. In this way, the two lines that had marked environmental issues in Spain since 1974 (political ecology and environmentalism) were incorporated into the region's political project.

This fact was doubtless to have a great influence on promoting the somnolence of the local environmental movements, insomuch as their principal leaders had been incorporated into the government<sup>24</sup>. But it is no less true that this presence would favour above all the progressive shift of the regional government towards environmentalist positions, following what years before had been defined and put forward as "the Extremadura model of ecodevelopment" (Baigorri, Gaviria, Mejías, Serna, 1980). This could be perceived at once, since between 1983 and 1984 the III National Energy Plan was debated, in which the regional government managed to impose the inclusion of Valdecaballeros as among the nuclear power plants that were to be subject to a moratorium, despite being half-built.

The electricity companies immediately undertake a campaign on all political, marketing, and public opinion fronts to keep the Valdecaballeros plant out of the

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<sup>23</sup> Juan Serna had led, since 1976, the struggle in an extensive comarca against the project of installing a nuclear power plant in Valdecaballeros; Jesús Garzón headed the mobilization to achieve the declaration of natural park for the comarca of Monfragüe.

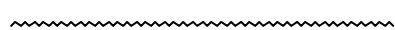
<sup>24</sup> The decadence of the environmental movement in Spain during the 80's is often attributed to precisely the fact that the socialist party (PSOE), unlike the Communist party, knew early on how to incorporate not only many of the principles of the environmentalist movement, but also many of its leaders who became professional politicians or functionaries. In the decadence of ecologism in the 80's, however, which was general all over Europe, other factors of greater weight came into play. The most important among them was the pronounced economic recovery, in terms of an authentic boom, which took place from the middle of the decade onwards.

nuclear moratorium. They manage to get the regional representatives of the conservative parties, who in 1979 had opposed Valdecaballeros, to modify their opinion. They offer the Communities of Irrigation Users, who had participated intensely in the opposition movement to the nuclear plant, major economic compensation if they modified their attitude of opposition. They publicly offer large investments in the region. They mobilize the workers of the subcontractors of the construction of the plant (most from outside the region) to demonstrate against the Junta of Extremadura.

The reaction of the regional government was, however, blunt and to the point. It threatened the Madrid Government with resignation en masse if the petition of the electricity companies was accepted. It then in turn put into motion all its ability to mobilize public opinion, seeking support from the social agents who were most directly affected by nuclearization, and opposing the temptation of economic compensation for the nuclear energy to enable the creation of new irrigation lands. The president of one Community of Irrigation Users write at the time: "This zone generates more wealth and employment directly than the nuclear plant, let alone the induced employment and profits. To exchange the production of the Guadiana Vegas (floodplains) for the 2000 millions of the energy quota is bad business" (Pessini, 1984). The result would be the achievement of making the abandoning of that nuclear plant definitive, thereby provoking a major impact on the whole of Spain with the fact that "in some lost corner of Extremadura, the nuclear giant had been cornered and defeated, with no other weapons or bombs than reason and justice" (Baigorri, 1984).

Again, in 1989, when the National Energy Plan was up for revision, the nuclear battle of Valdecaballeros flared up again. The radical opposition of the regional leader of the PSOE, Rodriguez Ibarra, to the reopening of the Valdecaballeros construction would provoke one of the first major schisms in the socialist party at the national level: the left of the party were clearly aligned with the environmentalist theses of Extremadura, while the neoliberal sectors<sup>25</sup> showed themselves to be in favour of suspending the moratorium. Finally, however, the thesis of the region won out. The position of the regional government was expressed by its president, who noted that "we have already paid our nuclear quota. Almaraz, which contributes 2000 megawatts to the 7500 of the PEN. If energy consumption is to expand for the good of Spain, let other regions take on the load of their quota" (Rodriguez Ibarra, 1989). The Valdecaballeros plant thus became not just a landmark in the history of self-government in Extremadura, but even became the symbol of an entire program of public action.

The model of development of the region was now definitively oriented to a line of ecodevelopment to which we referred above (or sustainable development, according to the more recent concept), inspired directly in the definition of Sachs as "supported



<sup>25</sup> Strongly influenced by the theories of the Chicago School which the Reagan and Thatcher governments had disseminated so intensely during the course of the 80's.

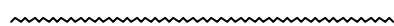
on three pillars: the autonomy of decision (self-reliance) and the search for endogenous models that are suited to each historical context; the equitable consideration of the material and immaterial needs of all men and of each man, so that each one's existence has a meaning; ecological prudence, understood as the search for development in harmony with nature" (Sachs, 1980:32). This was a model that was very hard to apply in the Spain of the mid 80's, when the strong economic recovery led to many ecological and environmental concerns being forgotten: "The challenge is difficult, to find the point of equilibrium between industrial, agricultural, and economic advances in general that give incentive to development, and the environmentalist tendencies is in no way easy. We have the prodigious task of building a developed region, assimilable to the mean of the European regions, and at the same time our Natural Environment is of great value, probably unique" (Rodríguez Ibarra, 1991:67).

In sum, the issue is to find a compatibility between a developmental will fed by a long period of underdevelopment and dependency, with the conservation of one of the richest natural heritages of Europe. This heritage has been preserved precisely because of the region's underdevelopment.

The full incorporation of Spain into the European Union was to be the key element enabling the regional Government to maintain its own model of development. From 1986 onwards, the considerable European regional funds for aid to development (FEDER), as well as the endowments from the European Social Fund (FSE) that have come to Extremadura have allowed both the endowment of infrastructures and quality equipment and the setting up of numerous programs of environmental protection.

The effect has been exactly that foreseen implicitly in the Extremadura model of ecodevelopment, so that currently, despite still occupying one of the last positions in the ranking of European regions, the standard of living in Extremadura is fully assimilable to the national mean, as also is the volume and quality of infrastructure and equipment<sup>26</sup>. But above all, and respecting the question at issue, the region has gone from being the back-yard of Spain's industrial regions to fulfilling the function of being one of the most important natural spaces of Europe.

Between 1979 and 1998, more than 200 000 hectares (around 5% of the territory of Extremadura) has come under the control of different levels of environmental protection, to be converted in 1998 into the Network of Protected Natural Spaces of Extremadura<sup>27</sup>. A set of regional normative regulations has been developed for the



<sup>26</sup> Other elements have been contributing to the region's development: the rise of an endogenous entrepreneurial class; the maturing of the University; the maturing too of the irrigation lands that had been transformed from the 30's to the 70's; and the disappearance of the Spanish-Portuguese border, which has meant that has gone from being situated at the bottom of a sack next to a frontier over which economic communication was sparse, to a privileged and well communicated situation between the Iberian metropolises of Lisbon, Madrid and Seville.

<sup>27</sup> The region of Extremadura has an area of 4 160 200 hectares, and a population of 1.1 million (continued...)

control and protection of the territory, both its natural heritage and its constructed heritage<sup>28</sup>. Forestry repopulation with alien species has been stopped. Specific programs have been developed for the protection or recuperation of unique species in danger of extinction. Despite the difficulties deriving from the low density of population, an urban solid waste program has been developed. There has been promotion of environmental research in the University.

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<sup>27</sup> (...continued)

inhabitants distributed over more than 500 towns and villages. The population density (26.4 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>) is one of the lowest of Europe.

<sup>28</sup> Self-government has also permitted one of the most important historical-artistic heritages of Europe to be valued. This includes prehistoric archaeological sites, Roman theatres, Arab fortresses, Renaissance palaces, and some of the most remarkable convents (such as that at Guadalupe) in the world. The figures for cultural tourism have shot up in recent years.

## 7. Conclusions

It would be lengthy to enumerate the environmental programs and actions undertaken by the Extremadura Autonomous Government. What is particularly noteworthy is how, effectively, decentralization and the development of a system of self-government have allowed the region to gain control over its own territory, and over its own eco-destiny.

With the definition of its particular model of ecodevelopment based on real possibilities -- and of course on the optimal use of outside aid, fundamentally from the European Union -- it has been possible to simultaneously protect the environment and develop the economy. There has been a feedback effect inasmuch as the natural and historical patrimony of the region has become an ever more important source of employment in recent years.

It is not difficult to simulate how the region's future would have been if a movement in defence of the land had not arisen in the 70's and that originated various forms of regionalism, and if the State of the Autonomous Regions had not been set up in Spain. Four nuclear power units, two of them upstream of a floodplain with 100 000 hectares of irrigation, and in mid-course of the same river a paper pulp mill; a major part of the territory replanted with eucalyptus, with its lands eroded and acidified; extensive areas dedicated to hunting reserves as a leisure space for bankers and industrial grandees from Spain and the rest of Europe; new migratory movements after the economic recovery of the 80's ... . In sum, the region would still be Spain's back-yard, and a good part of its natural heritage would by now be dilapidated.

We can therefore conclude that the various forms of self-government that have spread through different European countries in the last decades, as well as in some Latin American countries, following in part the Spanish constitutional model, constitute a fundamental instrument for the conservation of natural spaces, most particularly in backward regions.

Naturally, self-governing regimes pose problems of politics, of relationships with local power groups of quite divers order that we can not discuss here. For instance, with respect to urban development, it is not clear whether Spain's decentralization process, which has endowed the municipal administrations with the direct control over town planning, has been positive. With respect to the question of the environment, however, and overall to the conservation of natural spaces and endangered species, as well as in the development of participatory policies of environmental awareness of society, the case aazd here clearly shows us that the results are highly positive.

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