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Mountains and Conflict: Conflict as a Factor in Territorial Adaptation and Innovation

An Introduction

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EDITOR'S NOTE

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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- ¹ In the introduction to his study on conflict, Patrice Melé questioned the heuristic relevance of conflict in the analysis of territorialisation (Melé, Larrue, Rosemberg, 2004, pp. 13-32). This same approach is used here as we postulate that conflict may be a powerful factor capable of generating territory, just as much as territory itself is capable of producing conflict. Through its inherent distortions, conflict defeats, expands and reveals by spreading beyond a context that is strictly private to one that is more public. In so doing, it also breaks up identities as much as it constructs them. To fully understand its impact, conflict should be considered in its broadest etymological sense: *conflictus*, which means shock, and *confligere*, which means to strike or collide with. That which collides with or shocks, by definition, produces movement and change. In this respect, conflict covers notions of opposition and struggle, whether armed or unarmed – not only

in a military and political context but also in relation to social and cultural aspects. This wider definition of conflict also covers notions of resistance, protest and reaction.

- 2 The link between conflict and territory has been addressed on numerous occasions in recent years, particularly in the way conflict changes lifestyles and affects environmental protection (Torre, 2010). Here it will be considered more specifically in its capacity to generate innovation, conflict being a fruitful space-time because its actors often have to develop and present strategies, discourses and even their visions of the world (Melé et alii, *op. cit.* p.5). These visions may be entirely new, if not innovative, or more backward-looking, but no less original, and in every case they represent an alternative (Attali, Dalmasso, Granet-Abisset, 2014).
- 3 But how do these notions of conflict apply to mountain areas? The mountain context invites us to examine the territorial dimensions of conflict in greater detail. Mountain areas, the definition of which is subjective in itself (Bozonnet, 1992, p. 12; Debarbieux, Rudaz, 2010), are considered here as liminal space, in other words as “between two states”, comprising altitude, slope and restricted spaces capable of shaping behaviour if not distinct identities (Andrews, Roberts, 2012). In what way does a conflict situation bring into play the morphological characteristics, values or mountain identities that are capable of producing territorial identities? And what are the scales at which such changes take place?
- 4 The issue of mountain territoriality, marked by liminality, is even more pertinent with respect to the border situation of certain mountain massifs (Fourny, 2013). This situation has led to the major routes in such areas becoming strategic sites. In historical times and from a military perspective, they have sometimes represented places of penetration, conquest and/or defence for a territory. In more modern times and from a planning perspective, through the use of rail tunnels and infrastructures, for example, they may also constitute objects of domination or the dissolution and disappearance of territories. Places and subjects of conflict may also constitute by themselves heuristic elements suitable for analysing the relationship between mountain areas and networks, from the point of view of scale (local territory versus international networks), identity (the passage as a territorial identity in itself), or development (territorial anchorage versus attractiveness and activities based on flows).
- 5 An approach through territory invites consideration of the dimensions of conflict not only concerning particular events but also over the long term: an approach that is more likely to activate heritagisation and remembrance issues. The participation of historians (modernists as well as scholars of the contemporary) alongside geographers provides this issue of the RGA with an unusual chronological depth. This is because conflict, even if it claims to be seeking to maintain a situation as it is, always produces a ‘before and after’ with its own temporalities and sometimes changes. This aspect, however, does not contradict an approach based on long-term observation, using a tracking method that combines the event dimension with processes expressed over several centuries. A good example is the heritagisation of certain conflicts or historical figures and their links with identity and memory issues (Walter, 2004). Through their powerful modifying and destructive effects, conflicts leave a more or less profound and lasting imprint on both mankind and the landscape. Thus they may have a direct or indirect impact on the natural environment. This perspective makes it important to contextualise the conflict, analyse its immediate and future consequences and examine the possible vestiges from one historical situation to another. What are the past and present areas of conflict that

can be identified? Which memories of past conflicts are activated, and how are such memories mobilised or reinvented, and with regard to which current problems?

- 6 The relationship between conflict and territory, in addition to memories, also concerns innovation, opportunities for change and visions of the future. While the mobilisation of identity in conflicts is a subject that has received considerable attention, less is known about the effects of this situation in terms of territorial projects: What are the consequences for the representation of a group, for political commitment or for development models? Does conflict lead to a combination between that which is local and that which surrounds it, or between endogenous and exogenous elements? Does conflict lead to blockage and confinement in a reactive, or even reactionary, stance, or does conflict provide an opening and new opportunities?
- 7 We do not pretend to seek answers to all these questions, some of which are also the subject of research being carried out by the Labex *'Innovation et Territoires de Montagnes (ITEM)*. Nevertheless, by linking the notion of conflict with the space-time of mountain areas, we propose interpreting conflict as the lever for territorial bifurcation: Through a particular and momentary situation, a mountain territory is led to mobilise a historical path, if not to trace it. In a position of interscalarity and interspatiality, conflict is confronted with an interpretation of the natural environment, with its instrumentalisation and its values. Finally, what type of territoriality is produced by conflict?
- 8 This issue focuses on a number of different topics:
 - Effects and processes of social and cultural transformations, where conflict is understood as a matrix of social, technical and cultural innovations.
 - Identity construction and heritagisation: the mobilisation of history in current conflicts and the role of territory in shaping identity.
 - Memory of conflict, conflict as a form of cultural practice.
 - Borders and limits, armed conflict in mountain areas, development of defence and fortifications.
 - Strategic value of mountain morphologies: valleys, slopes, summits, and piedmont areas as communication structures and geostrategic objects.
 - Tensions between identities and autonomy, centrality and periphery.
 - Conflict and the natural environment: adaptation, alteration, destruction etc.
- 9 The articles selected will enable us to examine various geographic zones, which not only cross the Alps (France, Italy), the Carpathians (Slovakia) and the Pyrenees but also run from one continent to another: from the Andes and Guatemala all the way to Vietnam. Thus mountain areas played a central role in the counterrevolutionary revolt of Thônes (Haute-Savoie) in 1793. The reaction heralded the arrival of a historic figure with which a tradition could identify, associating local history with the characteristics of a mountain area. The strong identity of Valgrisenche (Val d'Aoste), shaped by a centuries-old tradition of self-defence, nourished resistance in the face of a state seen as the oppressor and incapable of understanding local needs. With certain similarities, the identity and religious issue also played a role in the conflicts relating to the opposition to the socialist collectivism that manifested itself in the Slovak Tatras during the 20th century. This was also true in Guatemala in the old confrontation between landowners and local farmers, whose traditions were mobilised and adapted to counteract the dynamics of emigration.

- 10 The mobilising capacity and strength of an alternative proposal arising from conflict may vary considerably, even in the face of the same “threat”. This is the case if we compare the Susa and Maurienne valleys with each other: liminal ‘in-between’ spaces facing the same high-speed rail link project. Here the reactivity observed is an indicator of the degree of territoriality or of the capacity to reinvent.
- 11 In the Alps of the Dauphiné region of the 17th and 18th centuries, territoriality was constructed out of the ordinary conflict that contraband produced with the Piedmont area. The interlinking spaces and multiple flows of both people and goods resulted in a physical and symbolic territory developing around the border, reflecting not only its delineation but also its permeability.
- 12 In the Andean “*precordillera*”, conflicts were generated by new lifestyles. Confrontations between the authorities and local people appeared as “amplifiers of territoriality” in that they generated new relationships with mountain areas and their management. This was also the case in the Hautes-Pyrénées, where local resistance was expressed in the rejection of state intervention and the protection of the natural environment, but in so doing, such resistance was at pains to get away from a ‘reactive logic’.
- 13 The case of certain mountain areas in Vietnam that were profoundly affected by war focuses on the destruction caused by armed conflict. Widespread bombing and earthworks wreaked havoc with the environment. At the same time, local populations, forced to take refuge or to participate in guerrilla warfare, had to modify their practices and their perceptions of mountain areas.

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