

The Seville–Bonanza Canal: A public policy failure *

El canal Sevilla–Bonanza: una política pública frustrada

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Resumen: Durante los años sesenta cobró fuerza la idea de construir un canal para impulsar el desarrollo económico de Sevilla a través del río. La iniciativa –ya iniciada en 1953- perseguía conformar una especie de conurbación industrial entre la capital andaluza y Sanlúcar de Barrameda. Fue apoyada por diversos sectores industriales y comerciales hispalenses, así como por las instituciones político-administrativas locales. También fue apoyada por el Jefe del Estado, el general Franco. Sin embargo, aquella iniciativa fracasó. ¿Cómo fue posible que una política pública con tantos respaldos -incluido el apoyo del propio régimen dictatorial- no se materializara? En este trabajo se apuntan varios factores que fueron determinantes en el veto al proyecto: la falta de apoyos de otras provincias andaluzas, la lenta burocracia y los cambios ministeriales que se produjeron en los años sesenta.

Palabras clave: Franquismo, política, políticas públicas, canal Sevilla-Bonanza.

Abstract: During the sixties, the idea of building a canal to promote the economic development of Seville through the river gained momentum. The initiative –already started in 1953– sought to create an industrial conurbation between the Andalusian capital and Sanlúcar de Barrameda. It was supported by various industrial and commercial sectors of Seville, as well as by local political-administrative institutions. The initiative was also fostered by the Chief of State, general Franco. However, that project actually failed. ¿How such a strong public policy could have been thwarted despite of the support of the dictatorial regime? Some of the *veto-players* against the project are highlighted in this paper: the lack of support from other Andalusian provinces, the bureaucratic slowness, and the change of ministers in the Spanish government during the sixties.

Keywords: Francoism, Politics, Policy, Seville-Bonanza Canal.

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Sumario: Introduction. 1. The study of public policies applied to a historical case. 2. The slow and apparent take-off of public policy. 3. Local interests and central interests. Conclusions. Bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

During the sixties, the idea of building a canal to promote the economic development of Seville through the river gained momentum. The initiative –already started in 1953– sought to create an industrial conurbation between the Andalusian capital and Sanlúcar de Barrameda. It was supported by various industrial and commercial sectors of Seville, as well as by local political-administrative institutions. The prospect of reinforcing the navigability of the Guadalquivir through a canal sought to promote Seville as an economic pole, following the model of cities like Rotterdam or Liverpool, capable of transforming the lower valley of the Guadalquivir and southwestern Spain.

That project, always subject to delays, received the support and encouragement of the civil governor José Utrera Molina, who made the canal one of the axes of his actions. This case came to show that civil governors –even in a dictatorship such as the Francoist dictatorship– did not simply behave like “Pontius Pilate” sent by the central government for whom local interests occupied a secondary place. On the contrary, the problems, desires, and aspirations of the provinces under their command mattered on more occasions than they have been given credit for. There were certainly governors who considered their position as another step in their political career and who were, of course, aware of being migratory birds on a trajectory that should carry them to destinations of greater responsibility such as, for example, a directorate-general or an Under-secretariat in Madrid. But there were also numerous examples of governors who toured their provinces and contacted a multitude of local problems that, as far as possible, they felt obliged to solve or, at least, to alleviate.

The canal project was articulated and specified with maps, plans, and budgets. Thus, a thorough public policy was designed, and the governor spared no efforts or consultations in Madrid for its promotion. In appearance, everything was geared to achieving the objective at a time when promoting economic development was a priority for the authorities and, amongst them, the governors. However, despite the consensus that supported the initiative, the truth is that the Sevilla-Bonanza channel project was aborted by sectors

that did not view it favorably. In fact, the canal was never built; instead, a communication route between Seville and the Bay of Cádiz was enabled through a toll highway that was opened in 1972. How was the failure of this initiative possible? Which ones were the sectors against the project?

Rivers, despite their importance, have been often overlooked as an object in public policy studies. However, we do have a series of case studies for different countries and periods, highlighting –due to its parallelism with the Sevilla-Bonanza canal– Ryckewaert’s study on the ten-year reform plan for the port of Antwerp (1956-1965)¹. Throughout the history of Spain it was always a recurring theme to achieve the navigability of rivers to improve trade and communications in a peninsula characterized by rugged relief². The only river that was navigable and that in fact was a commercial injection route with America throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, was the Guadalquivir. There were even attempts to extend its navigability to the city of Córdoba, seeking to convert the Guadalquivir valley into one of the most economically dynamic areas of the country, something perfectly possible given the agricultural production of the area, its industrial potential (never sufficiently exploited), the good weather and the strategic location of the mouth of the Guadalquivir (projected towards the Atlantic and very close to the Strait of Gibraltar). The Guadalquivir estuary has been the subject of various studies because it also

¹ KELLEY, Robert, “The Interplay of American Political Culture and Public Policy: The Sacramento River as a Case Study”, in *Journal of Policy History*, 1 (1989), pp. 1-23; TILLY, Pierre, “Rivers, channels and inland navigation at the Franco-Belgian borders between 1814 and 1914: towards redefining areas?”, in *Revue du Nord*, 416 (2016), pp. 577-599; BELL-LEMUS, Carlos, “Industry, Port, City (1870-1964): How Barranquilla took shape”, in *Journal of Cultural Heritage Studies*, 1 (2008), pp. 62-73; SERRUYS, Michael-W., “The Port and City of Ostend and the Process of State Consolidation in the Southern Netherlands in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: A Geographical Approach”, in *International Journal of Maritime History*, 19 (2007), pp. 319-347; RYCKEWAERT, Michael, «The Ten-Year Plan for the Port of Antwerp (1956-1965): a linear city along the river», in *Planning Perspectives*, 3 (2010), pp. 303-322.

² MALO, Nicolás, *Estudios sobre el proyecto europeo de la unión de los tres mares Mediterráneo, Cantábrico y Atlántico por el Ebro y el Duero, El Canal Imperial y el de Castilla*, Madrid, Establecimiento tipográfico de Aguirre, 1850; PASTRANA JIMÉNEZ, Lydia, “El proyecto del brigadier Francisco de Cabanes para navegar el Tajo mediante barcos a vapor (1828)”, in *Iberoamérica Social: Revista-red de estudios sociales*, 9 (2018), pp. 178-194; ROMERO MUÑOZ, Dolores, “Apuntes sobre la historia de los canales de navegación en España”, en VV.AA., *Obras hidráulicas de la Ilustración*, Madrid, Ministerio de Fomento, 2014, pp. 84-101; ROMERO MUÑOZ, Dolores, *La navegación del Manzanares: el Proyecto Grunenbergh*, Madrid, Fundación Juanelo Turriano, 2015.

tied in with the problem of floods in the city of Seville³. The idea of the navigable canal required a reorganization of the port, the regulation of the various tributaries and of the river that run through the city of Seville and, obviously, the layout of a fast navigation route to the sea, specifically towards Bonanza right next to the mouth of the Guadalquivir in the town of Sanlúcar de Barrameda.

1. THE STUDY OF PUBLIC POLICIES APPLIED TO A HISTORICAL CASE

The study presented here is, in its foundations, a study that connects history and public policies. And, in this sense, it should be noted that historical studies on public policies deployed in the past are not common in Spain. In fact, the concept of public policies was received in the Spanish academy with notable delay and only the studies published since the 1990s began to be numerically significant, with the pioneering work of Joan Subirats⁴. This delay is even more evident if we take into account that the discipline of public policy in its two aspects -study of public policies (policy studies) and analysis of public policies (policy analysis)- gained considerable importance during the second half of the 20th century hand in hand with the development of welfare states and the deployment of action by public powers in the form of multiple programs for social security, education, health and a long series of sectors. The growth of the state and its administration after World War II was based on the conviction that problems could be solved or ameliorated through the technocratic action of governments. The origin of the discipline is in the United States with the seminal work of Lasswell (1951)⁵ and it was deployed strongly during the 1960s. In that boom decade, the Democratic

³ DEL MORAL ITUARTE, Leandro, “El puerto y la ría del Guadalquivir: mitos, rupturas y continuidades”, in *Puerto y Ciudad*, Sevilla, ETSA, 2004; GONZÁLEZ DORADO, Antonio, *Sevilla: centralidad regional y organización interna de su espacio urbano (1900-1970)*, Sevilla, Ayuntamiento, 2001; DÍAZ DEL OLMO, Fernando and ALMOGUERA, Pilar (coords.), *Sevilla, la ciudad de la riada del Tamarguillo, balance después de su cincuentenario*, Sevilla, Universidad, 2014; SOLÍS RUIZ, Jesús, “Las inundaciones en Sevilla durante el primer franquismo: la acción de los poderes públicos”, in *Archivo Hispalense*, 300-302 (2016), pp. 279-298.

⁴ SUBIRATS, Joan, *Análisis de políticas públicas y eficacia de la administración*, Madrid, INAP, 1989; and *Un problema de estilo: la formación de políticas públicas en España*, Madrid, Centro de Estudios Constitucionales, 1992.

⁵ LASSWELL, Harold D., *The Policy Sciences: Recent Developments in Scope and Method*, California, Stanford University Press, 1951.

administrations –first with Kennedy and then with Johnson– believed that updating and adapting the momentum of Roosevelt’s old New Deal could solve the social problems that plagued the United States despite being a superpower. Hence the New Frontier, Great Society or War on Poverty projects, all inspired by a government action that vertically and from the top down would resolve inequalities and deficiencies through the hierarchical mobilization of material and human resources.

Public policies were considered a linear cycle configured by various phases that can be summarized as follows: a) identification of the problem and setting of the agenda, b) formulation of policies within a range of alternatives, c) decision-making, d) implementation and e) evaluation and feedback. Obviously, this was –and remains– a theoretical model that was very soon revised in view of the failure of the public policies launched during the 1960s and 1970s. The question was unavoidable: how could a public policy designed and promoted by the government not succeed? What had gone wrong to that the large resources invested in solving a problem were of hardly any use? The gulf that separated objectives and results favored a critical development both in the study and in the analysis of public policies, reviewing the various factors that acted in each of the phases and, especially, focusing on implementation without losing sight of the influence of local agents (public policy developed from the bottom up, known as bottom up). There they began a series of works that would have continuity in the following decades until today. It would be mission impossible to establish here a state of the art on this prolonged current of revision, but we will at least cite the works of Wildavsky, Bardach, Derthick or Berman⁶.

Thanks to this growth in the study of public policies, we now have a more sophisticated instrument for the analysis and evaluation of public policies, of which Professor Harguindéguy’s manual is a good example⁷. The risks of the implementation of poorly designed public policies that do not consider local factors and agents, or the complexities of a correct implementation and

⁶ WILDAVSKY, Aaron, *Speaking Truth to Power. The Art and Craft of Policy Analysis*, New York, Routledge, 1987; BARDACH, Eugene, *The Implementation Game*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1977; DERTHICK, Martha, *New Towns In-town: Why a Federal Program Failed*, Washington, Urban Institute Press, 1972; and BERMAN, Paul, “The Study of Macro and Micro-Implementation”, *Public Policy*, 26 (1978), pp. 157-184.

⁷ HARGUINDÉGUY, Jean-Baptiste, *Análisis de políticas públicas*, Madrid, Tecnos, 2015 (last edition, 2020).

evaluation are better known now. All of them are useful tools for those in charge of public policy making and implementing today, but we believe that they present another interesting use for all those interested in carrying out studies with a larger time frame. We refer specifically to the possibilities offered by the application of the study of public policies in the past, especially in modern history when nation-states were gaining prominence. If in the 19th century the political-administrative apparatus of the State presented a clear dimension of control and domination⁸, for the 20th century it is difficult to deny the new responsibilities -without forgetting the maintenance of order- embraced by public authorities.

We propose looking at the policy, administration, and performance of governments in the past in a different light. Historiography -and this certainly applies to Spain- has developed multiple and fruitful lines of work around ideas, politics, or cultures, but a political history of the State with all its administrative apparatus, both material and human, is still missing. With this new approach, we can address more adequately questions such as the effectiveness of public authorities, the relations between politics and administration, or the causes of the limited scope or outright failure of policies implemented in the past. And we would be wrong if we think that public policies have only been developed since, at most, the sixties. Quite on the contrary, throughout the entire twentieth century (without excluding earlier periods) we can find thousands of examples of public policies in Spain: from shipbuilding to hydraulic policy, from social reformism (see the Institute of Social Reforms founded in 1903) to educational policy during the Second Republic, from the extension of the network of special pavements in the 1920s to housing projects. The results of these policies have been studied -obviously noting the difference with respect to the proposed objectives- but few have explored the possible causes of failure through the study of the policy design, decision-making or the forms of implementation. Recent publications -such as the work by Carmona and Simpson on the failure of the Republican agrarian reform- offer interesting contributions insofar as they relate the role of the State to the failure of public policies⁹.

In this paper, as stated earlier, we attempt to clarify the reasons why the Sevilla-Bonanza canal -a potential axis of economic development for

⁸ RAPHAEL, Lutz, *Ley y orden. Dominación mediante la Administración durante el siglo XIX*, Madrid, Siglo XXI, 2008.

⁹ CARMONA, Juan and SIMPSON, James, "Capacidad del Estado y fracaso de la reforma agraria en España (1931-1936)", in *Ayer*, 119 (2020), pp. 253-285.

southwestern Spain- was never built. A case that was unique because it had the explicit support of the Head of State, General Franco, in addition to the local elites and the encouragement of the civil governor José Utrera Molina. With so much support and under a dictatorship like the Franco regime, how could this project to fail?

2. THE SLOW AND APPARENT TAKE-OFF OF PUBLIC POLICY

Events unfolded as follows. In 1952, the mayor of Seville on a visit to Franco exposed the many problems that afflicted Seville. Despite the years that had gone by since the new regime had promised the recovery of Spain after the civil war, in Seville there were problems with water supply, housing, lack of schools, green areas, the need for an urban expansion district, rail links, and the improvement of the inner port, unique in the Iberian Peninsula for its length. Little more than a year later, in April 1953, the head of State arrived in Seville accepting the invitation of his mayor. The visit was full of formal acts, but in one of them the president of the Port Works Board, Luis Ybarra, explained to the *Caudillo* the advisability of building a large direct channel between Seville and the mouth of the river in Bonanza, which would run along the left bank of the river, for the economic development of the entire southwest. This solved the navigability problems of the river, its low draft and the expenses derived from the regular dredging of the riverbed.

So far, everything seems to point to a bottom-up model of public policy promotion in its initial phase (local identification of the problem and setting the agenda for the government). The result they obtained was immediate: days later the Ministry of Public Works ordered the authorities of the Sevillian port to draw up a preliminary draft. What is striking is that the draft was not already drawn up in advance - or very advanced, at least - when the project was presented to Franco. It was, essentially, an idea which was not fully outlined, nor designed after ruling out other possible alternatives. It seems that local authorities decided to delay presenting a more elaborate plan until they could expect a more receptive position from higher authority. They had managed to introduce the issue in the government's agenda, but the draft, not being previously drawn up, was not approved by the plenary session of the Port Works Board until June 1954. More than a year had gone by. The delays began.

Yet another year would go by –July 1955– until it reached the Council of Public Works of the Ministry. The preliminary project was endorsed with favorable reports from the Port Works Board and the Federación Hidrográfica

del Guadalquivir (Guadalquivir Hydrographic Confederation). The project was under study for almost another year by the Ports Section of the Public Works Council, which reported favorably, although it still had to be submitted to Council plenary. There the matter ran aground due to technical issues, as the Council was an advisory and consultative body, made up of officials belonging to the Body of Engineers of Roads, Canals and Ports. The plenary session began in 1956 to request reports from various general directorates and its final approval was delayed until May 1959. Despite the importance of the Council, its pronouncements were not mandatory and the minister (first, Fernando Suárez de Tangil and, since 1957, General Jorge Vigón) could have accelerated the process if they had been determined to do so. The policy of budget cuts that was imposed in the late 1950s prevented undertaking such an expensive project but, apart from that obstacle, there was unquestionable administrative slowness.

Despite the delay, the plenary meeting of the Public Works Council finally accepted the construction of the Guadalquivir side canal and the creation of a Mixed Commission to “propose the total solution, both in its technical and economic aspects, within a maximum period of six months”¹⁰. In other words, the project, despite numerous studies and reports, was still not complete in all its details for the Ministry of Public Works. And it was not, among other reasons, because Minister Vigón took over the Ministry in 1957 and his priorities were different at the height of 1959. The Stabilization Plan required a policy of austerity and reduction of investments, which ended in the following decade, when infrastructures were relaunched (a road plan, railways with RENFE, reservoirs). That is why the words pronounced by Minister Vigón in Seville, in April 1959, were a slap in the face for Seville’s expectations and the prelude to what was to come. In short, he told those attending the Trade Union Economic Council that it was difficult at the time to have the necessary funding for the construction of the canal. What is striking is that he affirmed this when the Mixed Commission that was going to draft the final project had not even been created. Moreover –and under these circumstances the new delay is better understood– the Mixed Commission did not complete its mission until the beginning of 1961 and, again, it did so in the form of a preliminary draft. From there it finally went on to the minister’s

¹⁰ Everything pertaining to the development of the project can be found in: SALAS, Nicolás, *Sevilla: complot del silencio*, Sevilla, Universidad, 1974. The Council’s agreement on p. 29.

signature and, taking advantage of a visit by Franco to Seville, Vigón stated that:

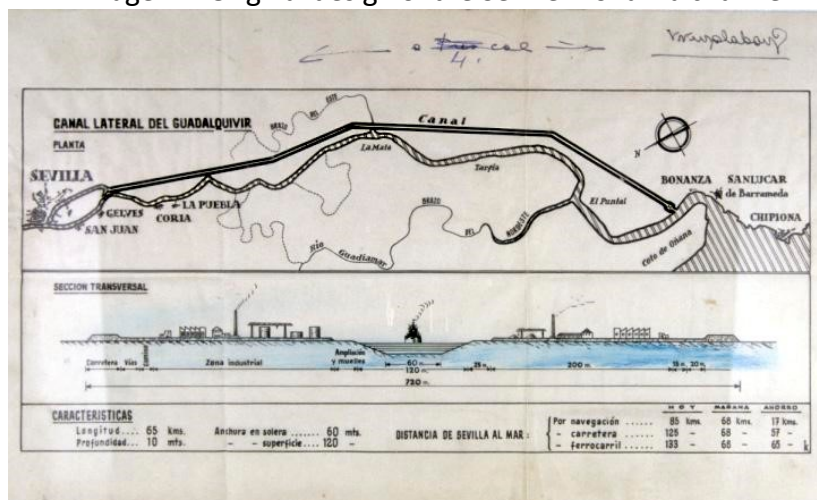
I want to say that [...], for the completion of this project, I was very much influenced by the wishes of the Sevillians, but much more, in ninety percent we would say, it was the express will of H.E. the Head of State, who insisted again and again that the project be carried out as quickly as possible. And indeed, by overcoming many obstacles and difficulties, and working the services with an intensity and accuracy that I believe are insurmountable, we have drafted a preliminary project, which will be the basis when the preliminary projects and execution are put out to tender as soon as the government decides on the funding of the work...¹¹.

So, if we are to believe the minister, it seems that Franco's decision was the key to unblocking the situation. This being the case, the effusion with which the dictator was received and the optimism that took possession of everyone is not surprising. However, it was clear from Vigón's own words that the execution of the work would depend on the funding that, despite all the promises, remained undecided. In a way, the issue was still in the first phase of a public policy cycle. So much time for so little progress. Something was wrong.

Indeed, over a year had gone by without anything productive or effective being done. In August 1962, the press reported that a comprehensive report was being drawn up on the status of the file on the Sevilla-Bonanza canal to demand the project from the government again.

¹¹ *Ibíd.*, p. 43.

Imagen 1. Original design of the Seville–Bonanza channel



Source: <https://twitter.com/sevilla21web/status/525590821245300736> which links with *Diario de Sevilla* and the recent attempts to resume the project. See: https://www.diariodesevilla.es/sevilla/Ayuntamiento-cajon-proyecto-canal-Sevilla-Bonanza_0_855814736.html

3. LOCAL INTERESTS AND CENTRAL INTERESTS

The year 1963 marked a turning point as local pressure increased in favor of the canal. This increase was encouraged and channeled by the civil governor José Utrera Molina who realized the convenience and importance of that public work. Flooding problems were known to be linked to river navigability. When there were floods, river navigation was complicated because sediments grew in the riverbed, increasing the risks of stranding of ships. The Guadalquivir estuary was very sensitive to tides and ships had to wait for high tide to travel up the river to Seville because the draft was very shallow. Hence the interest in having a canal running parallel to the river to facilitate smooth navigation without waiting for the tides, with sufficient draft and without being exposed to the sediments of the floods. This canal required a remodeling of the harbor and conditioning works to prevent the frequent flooding of the city. Thus, the work would bring nothing more than benefits and even more so if its economic potential in terms of trade and productive development was added. The floods created multiple problems in Seville because the damage was considerable, making the lack of housing even worse

when hundreds of families were left on the streets due to the destruction of their precarious houses under the floods. In fact, Governor Utrera came to Seville to replace his predecessor –Governor Hermenegildo Altozano- who fell politically discredited after the terrible floods of 1961. Two years later the floods occurred again, and they would not be the last. Utrera was interested in the construction of the canal and shortly after arriving in Seville he gathered all the documentation on the canal project to request an interview with Franco. He presented the project to the dictator, who supported him and encouraged him to overcome the “technical stubbornness and pressure of dark interests” that were against the project. Those obstacles he was able to perceive the next day when he visited the Minister of Public Works, Vigón. Utrera himself left his impression of that visit in writing:

As soon as the interview began, I understood his absolute lack of interest in the realization of an undertaking –the canal- that he considered chimerical. The minister had an irrepressible proclivity for acid and scornful expressions. The terms he used bore this sign. As he noticed the disappointment that my face clearly showed, he tried to mitigate the radical nature of his judgment by announcing that he would once again discuss with his collaborators the reconsideration of the technical difficulties that could be argued against the construction of the canal¹².

In these circumstances and seeing that the politicians most opposed to the canal were monarchists and technocrats, it is understandable that Governor Utrera, of clear Falangist filiation, would rely on the institutions of the *Movimiento*¹³ to reinforce the local claim for the construction of the Seville–Bonanza canal. Thus he managed to unite the forces of the local institutions (City Council, Provincial Council, Port Works Board) together with those of the unions, companies and a good part of the public opinion. He reported on his conviction about the benefits of the canal and the local support that he had in his memoirs as civil governor:

As I expanded my contacts with institutions, experts and sectors of the press that had taken a keen interest in the canal, it became increasingly clear to

¹² UTRERA MOLINA, José, *Memorias de un gobernador civil. Estudio introductorio y notas de Julio Ponce Alberca*, Sevilla, Editorial Universidad de Sevilla, 2020, p. 209.

¹³ Movimiento Nacional was the ideological support of the dictatorship controlled by Falange (FET-JONS), but it did not integrate all the informal political groups of the regime, such as, for example, monarchists, technocrats, members of the Opus Dei, etc.

me that the key to Andalusian development lay fundamentally in its completion. The project was not only a mode of transportation, but it also strengthened and created an industrial enclave that would project its benefits and influence over all southern Spain. I must emphasize, out of a basic sense of justice, that Joaquín Carlos López Lozano, president of the Port Works Board and director of *ABC* newspaper, Eligio Sánchez, chief engineer of the port, and Miguel Maestre y Lasso de la Vega, president of the Provincial Council, were its most fervent supporters¹⁴.

It cannot be said that the governor was the architect of that public policy, but it can be said that he was the driving force behind it. He identified himself completely with local desires and played the role of intermediary between the central government and the province under his command, defending the interests of the latter always in obedience to the central power to which he owed his position. In July 1963, after the V Economic Trade Union Council was held in Seville, a delegation of some sixty members headed by Governor Utrera visited Franco. After the usual speeches, Franco replied that the canal would be built in the following terms:

It is a source of satisfaction for me to see all of Seville united in this legitimate aspiration of the Seville-Bonanza canal, which needs no recommendation, since it recommends itself. It is a historical need and a need that must be met. (...) If we do not have the means, if we do not prepare the exportation of goods and the establishment of derived industries, we will cry tomorrow for the port of Seville.

On the other hand, the project is complex, of difficult solution, but I repeat that, once all the pertinent studies have been made, it will be carried out with the necessary diligence so that it can meet the needs not only of the region of Seville, but of the entire Andalusian region, as I have said.

Rest assured that today the detailed problem is in the hands of the experts, not the decision to build the canal; of course, once the experts have made a detailed study marking the phases of execution, what must go first and what must follow later, then this will be an uninterrupted work, which will be carried out in the time that nature allows us to do it¹⁵.

The delegation and the governor returned from Madrid with the assurance that the canal would be built after learning of the dictator's position.

¹⁴ UTRERA MOLINA, José, *Memorias de un gobernador civil... op. cit.*, pp. 208-209.

¹⁵ SALAS, Nicolás, *Sevilla: complot... op. cit.*, 59. Taken from *ABC*, July 18, 1963, 31-33.

In a dictatorship such as Franco's, no one could suppose that an express wish of the dictator would not materialize or, even less, that the dictator's words were not sincere. We cannot know what was going through Franco's mind and whether he was displaying a genuine exercise in cynicism, but what was clear was that the canal was still stuck despite his support. And the project was stuck at a point that was difficult to understand from the point of view of regular public policies, since the decision had been taken but the concrete formulation of the policy to be implemented was still in the hands of the experts. And this opened the door to important modifications in the project, as would happen in the following years. However, the words of Franco himself once again raised the hopes of the project's unconditional supporters and the authorities in Seville. They also had the support of the minister without portfolio Pedro Gual Villalbí, a good connoisseur of the floods caused by the Guadalquivir. Governor Utrera himself –aware that there were detractors and opponents of the canal- was also confident that the determination of the head of state would be key.

More than a year was still to elapse, but finally, by Law 80/1964, of December 16, the works of the Seville-Bonanza Navigation Canal were put out to tender. But there was an important detail: what was put out to tender was both the project and the execution of the works, and it was estimated that these works would last seven years. In other words, the canal project was once again subject to new modifications. And the possibility of this happening was high, both because of the high cost of the works and because of the opportunity costs (in addition to interest) of the industrial development of southwestern Spain compared to other regions. With respect to the cost of the works, Minister Vigón himself estimated that the cost of the canal would range between 3,980 and 4,105 million pesetas, a large figure in those years, but not unaffordable. To get an idea of the scale of this investment, we can recall that the budget of the Ministry of Public Works in the mid-1950s –when the project began to be promoted- was around 4,000 million pesetas, and that in 1967 the expenditure of this department was around 37,000 million pesetas¹⁶. In other words: the Seville-Bonanza canal represented a good percentage of the public works budget for the whole of Spain, but it could well be amortized over several years and had potential benefits for the

¹⁶ SUÁREZ DE TANGIL Y ANGULO, Fernando, *Las obras públicas en España y los gobiernos de autoridad*, Madrid, 1954, p. 50; CARRERAS, Albert and TAFUNELL, Xavier (coords.), *Estadísticas históricas de España. Siglos XIX-XX*, Bilbao, Fundación BBVA, 2005, p. 933.

Guadalquivir Valley and the industrial and commercial development of the southwest of the country. Although the high cost of the investment was always used as an argument for the rejection of the canal, it was difficult to sustain it in the face of investments being made in other parts of Spain, such as, for example, the northeast of the country. The strategy of the sectors opposed to the canal would be to let time go by so that the project would be forgotten or, in any case, to transform it profoundly so that it would not entail either an excessive cost or a significant diversion of investments that would be directed to other objectives.

Even though towards the end of 1964 it seemed that the canal was going to be put into operation, the following year Minister Vigón was replaced by Federico Silva Muñoz, a Catholic with a technocratic profile, as were other ministers such as the Minister of Industry (Gregorio López Bravo) and the Minister without portfolio (Laureano López Rodó). All three were opposed to the construction of the Seville-Bonanza canal, although they never openly acknowledged it. They played the role of veto players in the whole affair¹⁷. López Bravo did not write down his memoirs and López Rodó does not refer to this matter in the several books he published on his political life¹⁸. We only have the testimony of Silva Muñoz, Minister of Public Works from July 1965 to April 1970. He did allude to the canal in his recollections when he mentioned a notorious incident with the local authorities, but in a somewhat cryptic way and without explicitly mentioning the canal and the time it had been in the pipeline as a project. In March 1966 he visited the province of Seville as part of a tour of southern Spain. He got up early to leave from Cordoba, stopping in Ecija, and then arriving in the capital of the province, Seville:

A very hectic morning of visits; the engineers, at odds with each other, could not agree; the local authorities were at loggerheads with the Public Works services. It was three o'clock in the afternoon of a day that had begun at seven in the morning when we arrived at Seville's city hall. There was a human concentration of the most diverse species: engineers, authorities, journalists and gossipers. Silence was barely broken, and the engineers began to explain to me their graphic studies and "monkeys" [*sic* for drawings] for the year 1980 and for the year 2000. They linked their stories with a hypothetical Guadalquivir highway, which had a name as poetic as unrealistic; and a thousand other

¹⁷ TSEBELIS, George, *Veto Players: How Institutions Work*, Princeton University Press, 2002.

¹⁸ LÓPEZ RODÓ, Laureano, *Memorias*, Barcelona, Plaza y Janés, 1990.

elucidations without a single project or a single economic study. I could not take it any longer, I asked: Where is there a project to start tomorrow? Silence. Where is the project of the *Generalísimo* Bridge to connect the populous neighborhood of Los Remedios? Silence. The tension grew. The air was thick. The agglomeration and the expectation created an unbreathable climate. I took the plans, the elucidations, and the drawings they were playing with and said: “Give me a project to start with”. “I have an allergy to the year 2000, because it is more than thirty years away”. “This is over”¹⁹.

The press, subject to the censorship of a dictatorial regime, reported the incident in such a sweetened form that it was difficult for the reader to realize what had happened. The Minister’s purpose was to carry out specific works, at a lower cost and with a quicker execution; the canal, of course, was not his project. He confronted the experts of the Provincial Delegation of Public Works, disdaining the studies carried out on the project and affirmed: «Seville cannot wait any longer, the city is suffocating, its socioeconomic development requires speed and, above all, good will». He added that he was not willing to respect the canal project, no matter how many laws and provisions supported it: “If there is an order, on this occasion or any other, that does not conform to reality, it will be modified. What no one should do is hide behind a provision to justify a regrettable waste of time”²⁰. It was clear that the canal was a waste of time for the minister, but he could not reject the project openly because Franco had given it his explicit support.

One year later, in March 1967, the Minister of Industry, Gregorio López Bravo, visited Seville. The visit was important because the Minister, apart from other tasks, came to deal with a matter that was linked to the construction of the canal: the establishment of a steel plant in the southwest. It was for this reason that the main authorities of the provinces of Huelva, Cadiz and Seville (mayors, presidents of the Provincial Council and civil governors) met at the Civil Government, together with the Minister and the Ministry experts who accompanied him. The idea of establishing a fourth steel plant dated back to 1962. The demand for steel was increasing with the economic expansion and the three Cantabrian plants (Altos Hornos de Vizcaya, Ensidesa and Uninsa) had to be reinforced with another one. In principle, several locations were considered: Bonanza (right next to the canal), Huelva, the coastal area between Rota and Chipiona (Cadiz), and Sagunto, in the north of the province of Valencia. Among the criteria for the choice of location were the ease of

¹⁹ SILVA MUÑOZ, Federico: *Memorias políticas*, Barcelona, Planeta, 1993, p. 128.

²⁰ *ABC*, March 8, 1966, 33.

supply of raw materials, the maritime connection and the availability of soil and fresh water. In principle, the location in the south was taken for granted: in the same canal (Bonanza), or close to it (Huelva, Cadiz). It had better conditions because of the availability of ore nearby and, if necessary, the possibility of transporting it through the canal. In this case, it was a top-down public policy that, of course, had the support of local interest groups. The problem was the final decision on the location and the Ministry was betting on Sagunto, not Andalusia.

The Andalusian authorities were aware of the Minister's intentions and, for that reason, called a press conference on the same day of the meeting. It was probably the idea of the civil governor, Utrera Molina, who opened the session with a few words in which he wanted to make it clear that Andalusia deserved that steel plant, although without forgetting the loyalty owed to the government and to Franco:

We have always been very enthusiastic about this issue, which is so important for the development of Andalusia, and we are firmly confident that the objectivity of the technical studies will facilitate the solution, which is necessary, and if it is not necessary, we will accept it because, in short, we have absolute confidence in the Government and in the person, who has presided over it for thirty years²¹.

There was little more that local authorities appointed by the government could do within an authoritarian regime. They were willing to defend that the integrated steelworks should be established in Andalusia, but they could not openly confront a minister who disembarked from Madrid to present the decisions of the central government. It was eloquent that the minister wanted to send the journalists away with a written note, resisting the use of microphones on the table or tape recorders, alleging that «there was no need for them»²². In the end, thanks to the intermediation of the civil governor, there was an interview after the delivery of the informative note that said that, although the final decision had not been taken, it was very likely that the steel plant would be installed in Sagunto. Andalusia could wait. This is how the informative note ended:

²¹ *ABC*, March 8, 1967, p. 66.

²² This tense interview was recalled years after by journalist Nicolás Salas: *Diario de Sevilla*, January 31, 2010. URL: https://www.diariodesevilla.es/sevilla/Frente-ministro-Franco_0_337766350.html. Accessed October 12, 2020.

In short, there is no reason for the hope of having an integrated steel mill in western Andalusia in the future to disappear, and to achieve this, we must all continue to promote its economic development, to increase local steel consumption. And above all, the absolute guarantee that the studies carried out by the Administration have a national dimension and are governed by the most rigorous criteria of objectivity²³.

Not everyone was as convinced of the Ministry's alleged objectivity and this became clear when the journalist Nicolás Salas challenged the reliability of the studies as well as the convenience of the installation of the steelworks in Sagunto, a place without fresh water and where the ore would have to be transported by rail from very distant mines. Tension grew and someone asked whether certain economic or regional groups had vested interests in the decision. Of course, the minister denied this and continued the interview in a defensive but contemptuous tone. Finally, the steel plant was established in Sagunto and started operating in 1971. It soon became loss-making until it was finally closed in 1984, after the loss of billions of pesetas. The experts did not do their calculations well, nor were they rigorous in their forecasts. Anyone would be never responsible for the *fiasco*.

With ministers such as Silva Muñoz in Public Works or López Bravo in Industry, the construction of the canal was going to be difficult. About the former, Governor Utrera Molina recalls in his memoirs that he:

was cautious and cold about the canal project. In some conversations with me, he did not hesitate to use a sharp dialectic. Time and again, while chairing different commissions, I went to his office to no avail, reiterating my reasons and arguments with notorious impertinence²⁴.

And of his clashes with López Bravo, “closely related to certain Sevillian elements”, he recalled that “he showed no sympathy for the construction of the canal”. When years later Governor Utrera was proposed for the Grand Cross of Isabella the Catholic, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs López Bravo dismissed it outright²⁵.

With all these obstacles, it is understandable that the call of proposals process for the construction of the canal underwent extensions. It was not until

²³ ABC, March 8, 1967, p. 67.

²⁴ UTRERA MOLINA, José, *Memorias de un gobernador civil... op. cit.*, 213.

²⁵ *Ibíd.*, 213.

1968 that the concession of the first phase of the works was awarded to a group led by the company Dragados y Construcciones S.A. (Official State Gazette, BOE, July 30, 1968). Four years had gone by to resolve the tender and four years had also gone by for the Ministry of Public Works to impose its model for the canal. And we say “impose” for several reasons: because the *Comisión Administrativa del Canal Sevilla-Bonanza* (Seville-Bonanza Canal Administrative Commission, created in April and controlled by the Ministry) would be in charge of the management, because it decided the tender in favor of Dragados y Construcciones (the cheapest budget and limited in scope), because the Ministry had the triple purpose of turning Cadiz into a container port, building a Seville-Cadiz highway and improving the port of Seville, and because it substantially modified the project: It would no longer be an independent canal running along the left bank, but a shorter canal that would take advantage of sections of the original riverbed. In addition, what was envisaged was the construction of the first phase, which was limited, among other measures, to the detour of the Guadaira River and the enlargement of the port. For this purpose, the Ministry allocated 2,150 million pesetas and a seven-year time limit²⁶.

It was evident that this was not the original project, a much more limited public policy and following a top-down model was implemented instead. Obviously, there was no clear response or opposition from the authorities who owed their posts to the confidence of the central government. Neither did the civil governor, who had to settle for the construction of the Seville-Cádiz highway to bring the city closer to the sea and leave the canal as a simple remodeling of the port²⁷. In a dictatorship like that, one did not resign: one was dismissed. No one dared to cross certain red lines. If that was the decision of the superiority, the only choice was to accept it. Besides, less was better than nothing. Two articles, published in April and December 1968, stated that the canal was neither profitable nor would it ever be completed²⁸.

It was striking how quickly the Ministry of Public Works promoted its Seville-Cádiz highway as compared to the continuous delays suffered by the canal. In January 1969, the Council of Ministers approved the construction of the Seville-Cadiz highway and the Ministry issued an informative note to the media which made clear what the plan was:

²⁶ SALAS, Nicolás, *Sevilla: complot... op. cit.*, pp. 106-107.

²⁷ ABC, January 25, 1969, p. 25.

²⁸ “¿Será rentable el canal Sevilla-Bonanza?” by José María de Mena, and “El canal Sevilla-Bonanza no se terminará nunca”, both in *Don Quijote. Semanario sin fronteras*, April 8, 1968 and December 12, 1968.

The evolution of the conditions of shipping since the canalization of the Guadalquivir was projected until today has modified the approach to maritime traffic, marking a significant difference between those ships with a tonnage that we could call traditional (up to 15/20,000 tons) and those others, the current ones, with a much higher tonnage. The total canalization of the Guadalquivir would be, in principle, a totally insufficient work since it would not be to absorb the traffic with the ships currently in navigation. (...) There is also an economic argument: would it be profitable to invest more than ten billion pesetas to make the canal navigable for ships of up to fifteen thousand tons? (...) the desired objective is to bring Seville closer to the sea, overcoming the technical and physical difficulties and limitations that would necessarily entail the total canalization of the river as a solution applicable to the aforementioned purpose. (...) The Seville–Cádiz freeway will be the great artery linking the Seville region with the sea and will turn Seville into the great receiving center for the container port of Cádiz and the general port of the capital of Cádiz with its thriving shipbuilding industry²⁹.

In 1972 the highway was completed. However, in 1973 it was published in the newspaper *Sevilla* that the traffic was not very intense on that road but, nevertheless, the traffic of the port of Seville had increased despite the absence of the canal³⁰. Someone had made a mistake. For Utrera Molina, the cause for the failure of all this public policy was clear:

The main factor that determined the non-implementation of the project was the lack of credibility given to it by the experts of the Ministry of Public Works. Undoubtedly, they were the ones who always had a negative influence on the ministers of the Department, inducing them to distrust the potential results of the canal. Since the main supporter of the idea of the canal was the Head of State himself, and the people and authorities of Seville, who warmly supported the project, the attitude of the experts to confront Franco's firm decision -whose word he had pledged before the people of Seville- had at first no other way than the systematic delay in the processing of the project. These postponements determined a second even more negative circumstance: the economic cost of the investment was increasing day by day, which added arguments to their opposition³¹.

²⁹ SALAS, Nicolás, *Sevilla: complot... op. cit.*, pp. 115-117.

³⁰ *Ibíd.*, p. 137.

³¹ UTRERA MOLINA, José, *Memorias de un gobernador civil... op. cit.*, p. 212.

Many years later, in 2017, the platform *Sevilla por su río, la industria y el empleo* (Seville for its river, industry and employment, promoted by the Confederation of Enterprise of Seville and the Chamber of Commerce) was still calling for more draft in the river to facilitate the entry of medium-sized vessels to boost the development of the city³².

CONCLUSIONS

After it has been stated it is remarkable the failure of a project like this and supported in public by general Franco, which it is interesting to understand the nature of some dictatorships and how they work internally. The entrance of the *technocrats* in the government was an important factor to understand the failure of the channel proposal. In fact it is well known the rivalry between the catholic technocrats and Falange (and the governor Utrera was an outstanding *falangista*). But it is not clear if the role played by ministers such as Silva Muñoz or López Bravo was due to their ideological differences against the falangismo or due to other interests. In fact, there were local elites in Seville -far from being falangistas- that supported the channel. Aside from these ideas and thoughts, four conclusions can be drawn:

1) The Seville-Bonanza canal emerged as a public policy that followed the bottom-up model but was cut in the end and replaced by the decision of the central government. However, public policies during the dictatorship did not always follow the top-down model, as shown by the case of the construction of the FASA-Renault car factory in Valladolid, which received a strong boost from the local sphere and Franco supported it, in this case fruitfully³³.

2) The role played by the head of state of a dictatorial regime in this whole process was significant since, despite his explicit support for the project, the canal never materialized. This seems to corroborate that the ministers in Franco's governments enjoyed notable margins of autonomy despite the nature of the regime and the omnipotent power of General Franco.

3) The ministers opposed to the idea of the canal cited the unfavorable reports of the Ministry's experts and the excessive costs of the project. Both

³² ABC, July 27, 2017. https://sevilla.abc.es/sevilla/sevi-plataforma-sevilla-cree-nuevo-calado-guadalquivir-no-solucionada-201707271349_noticia.html. Accessed October 20, 2020.

³³ That initiative left its mark on popular perception, as evidenced by the lecture delivered by Carlos Gallego Brizuela and published years later: "Teoría de Valladolid (I). Antecedentes inmediatos y riesgos de futuro", in *Hojas Libres*, 1 (2006), pp. 21-23.

arguments were poor excuses for two reasons: because it was experts (including those of the Ministry) who had previously approved various preliminary projects, and because the increase in costs was due to the time elapsed because of the excessive administrative delays imposed by the delays and slowness of the central Administration.

4) The canal's estimated cost of 10,000 million (in pesetas of the late sixties) was not an unattainable figure, and even less so with the support of private initiative. This figure would be equivalent to about 1.5 billion euros today, in current prices. For a better comparison, two data from the general State budget for the 1970-1971 biennium can be quoted: The General Directorate of Ports and Maritime Signals had a budget of 1,600 million pesetas and the Ministry's budget at that time was 41,454 million pesetas³⁴.

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³⁴ *Boletín Oficial del Estado* (BOE), December 31, 1969, p. 20479.

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