Proposal for the 3rd MMHN Conference

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Seaports, Gateways between Land and Sea:
The Portuguese seaport sector development in the beginning of the 20th century

The seaport sector is an active agent of modernization and change to any country or region, a reality that makes impossible to look at it as a simple infrastructure.

From the last decades of the 19th century to nowadays, there were several changes and transformations, which took place, one after another, in a true domino effect. It is, in fact, undeniable the crucial role that the seaport structures and dynamics played in the paths followed by the European continent, and by the Mediterranean basin, throughout their history.

Portugal’s peripheral position and the country’s usual delay in welcoming news and innovations were not able to hold back the country’s participation in the restructuring scheme of inter-countries’ relations. The wider connections, the new paths and spheres of social and economic development and the growing circulation possibilities, at all scales, both to people and goods, became central challenges to any nation, and inexorably led to the adoption of a new seaport culture and to the definition of new countries’ alignments in the social and economic world-wide structure.

From an historical point of view, my aim is to present a reflection concerning the Portuguese seaport development in the beginning of the 20th century. I will particularly focus on the Portuguese central authority options and decision making.

The increasing volumes of maritime traffic, the bigger ships, the growing of commercial transactions and the acceleration of maritime transportation demanded continuous transformations on seaport infrastructures, which led to new solutions in seaport administration and exploration. Gradually, from 1910 to 1926, the perspectives about seaports were also modified, beginning to be visible an effort on coordinating investments and constructions; and the circumscribed and localized measures, that acted only as temporary solutions and lacked the definition of a national plan of action, gave place to the idea of a ‘concentration of investments’.

After the First World War there was a more systematic and continued effort on Portuguese seaports, and even the economic and governmental instability was not able to interrupt this persistence on change. After the War, the number of the existing departments dedicated to seaport control and administration, the so-called Juntas Autónomas, rapidly augmented, and even a law project, intending to define a national seaport policy, was prepared.
Although the real results of these attempts were much reduced, it was undeniable that the need to a definition of a coordinated national intervention strategy on Portuguese seaports was definitely recognized, and that the ideas to achieve that purpose were already in motion.
Short CV

Academic Qualifications
- Since August 2009: Doctoral Student, at Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, New University of Lisbon. Specialization in Contemporary History.

Professional Career
- Researcher at the National Commission for the Portuguese First Republic Centennial Commemorations (1910-2010), Ministries Council Presidency.
- Researcher and Member of the Institute of Contemporary History, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, New University of Lisbon.

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