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The concept of hinterland in geography: A state of the art

This article presents a state of the art about the Hinterland concept (and its relative concepts of Land and Foreland) in human geography. It is mainly an Anglophone and Francophone literature which one seeks to highlight convergences, divergences and relationships, key authors and contradictory conceptualizations. This work shows the richness but also the complexity of this theoretical framework.

Theoretically, the term hinterland derives from the economic geography of transport. Following Chisholm (1889), the term hinterland refers to the area inland from the coast for which the port is used for exports and for imports. This term is used in port geography (Debie & Guerrero, 2008, Zondag, Bucci, Gützkow & Jong de, 2010, Garcia-Alonso & Sanchez-Soriano, 2010) but has been losing its relevance since the 1980s due to changes in freight transport, including containerization (Slack, 1993, Foggin & Dicer, 1985).

Since the 1950s the term hinterland has been often associated with rural or mountainous continental areas, lying behind a coast. When referring to the Atlantic hinterland, Mediterranean or even Baltic hinterlands, the term received a second interpretation, which is spatio-permanent physical and almost fixed, such as in the hinterland of the Côte d'Azur, the Catalan hinterland and the Mediterranean hinterlands. This second interpretation has been followed by a series of regional studies on the period of the 1950s (Blanchard, 1952 ; Kayser, 1958 and Carrère & Dugrand, 1960), and rural geography in the 1980s (Marié, 1982 ; Catanzano, 1987 ; Dérioz, 1994 and Rouzier, 1990). However, it became pejorative, by

reflecting low of development activity and local dynamics as well as decay and decline.

On this subject, one can note the great ambiguity of the concept of foreland. The term foreland refers to all the regions, often foreign, which are served by the regular maritime lines. This interpretation has been often used by scholars (particularly Anglo-saxon), who adopted the first interpretation to the term hinterland. By contrast, the majority of authors who support the second (and more Francophone) definition of the hinterland concept (see Autiero, 2000 ; Mascellani, 2001) perceive the term foreland in the sense of lowland, that is to say : the coastline with its port cities.

The third definition of hinterland refers to a subordinate space, which is entirely disengaged from the coastline (Brunet, Ferras & Théry, 1992 ; Bernard, 2013 ; Hoggard, 2005). The authors deal, for example, with the hinterland of the city of Grenoble, in the Northern Alps. Moreover, Giraut (1997) ignored the distinction between foreland and hinterland in favour of a distinction between land and hinterland. This land can be a part of mountain tourism, an active industrial valley, or even an urban area or in other words, a centrally located developed space, which is not necessarily along the coastline.

These three definitions of hinterland are mutually exclusive, not to say contradictory. In all cases, there is a need to announce clearly the definitions of hinterland and foreland adopted in future studies in order to improve clarity and academic discussion on the territorial dynamics between cities, rural or maritime areas.