

## **Sara Fernandez - Interview Transcript**

Interview by Donna Mlyneck, April 6 2021 on Zoom.

*Donna:*

Why was desalination seen as the solution to the water scarcity problem in Spain? How could this dominant discourse emerge?

*SF:*

Let me first start to give you some recommendations. I can recommend you to look up Erik Swyngedouw as he wrote about desalination in Spain. However, there is a debate between him and Leandro del Moral and his colleagues. The latter published a paper in *Water International* about "*Ongoing dialogues with Erik Swyngedouw about desalination in Spain*": Here you can find disagreements between the researchers about desalination in Spain. Also, Swyngedouw wrote a book called "*Liquid power*", which I can recommend as it has many interesting facts about Spain and its water politics.

Now let us turn to the question. There have been long-standing policies and politics in Spain about hydrology around the 19th century. Later, the **dictatorship of Franco** was very active in **hard infrastructure**. In the 1990s, there were a lot of protests on policies from civil society and researchers and scientists in Spain. We can witness the rise of the **New Water Culture**.

Also, we could observe competing projects: To either transfer water from the Rhône River in France or the Ebro River in Spain to Barcelona and Southern Spain. This brought huge controversies and protests.

**Water is much more politicised** in Spain than it is, for instance, in France. It polarised activism in Spain.

In **2004** there were national elections, which the socialist surprisingly won. It is important to point out that there were terrorist attacks in the train station of Madrid some days before the elections, for which ETA was blamed for. It killed a lot of people. Also, the **Iraq War in the US** influenced the election results. All of these destabilised the right-wing party PP.

The **AGUA Programme**, including the building of desalination plants, was proposed by the new socialist government in 2004. The socialists want to change the water culture with it. The investment in desalination plants was funded by the **European Union**.

In Barcelona, the desalination plant was built because of the **water scarcity problems**. However, the desalination plant is used normally more in very dry years. But desalination has very high "fix" costs. The Spanish government needs to ask themselves how they can justify these running costs of desalination?

*Donna:*

The desalination plant in Barcelona is currently highly under-utilized. What is your opinion on that?

*SF:*

We need to investigate how the local governments in Barcelona think about the desalination plant. The question we need to ask is: "Why would they want such an infrastructure (desalination)? It will cause a lot of problems as it is very costly."