

The role of large scale infrastructures in the organization of supranational regions: the Catalan case



Juli VALDUNCIEL and Jaume FELIU

University of Girona
SPAIN

1. Theoretical and methodological basis

- 1) Megaregions have consolidated as the new urban standard in the global economy (Scott, 2001; Hall, 2006; Florida, 2008)
- 2) Large scale infrastructures have become basic means to articulate these new functional spaces and are key to ensure their performance
- 3) Territorial debate: their implementation involve not only technical issues but also cooperation among stakeholders, consensus around scenarios and conflict resolution
- 4) Methodology: The case of the “Mediterranean railway corridor” (MRC), 2003-2012
Almost 200 news items were analysed

2. Barcelona mega-region

- 1) Trying to define the megaregion. Barcelona-Lyon is the 4th in Europe with 25 million inhabitants and a GDP of 610 billion dollars
- 2) The (Spanish) “Mediterranean Arc” is a very dynamic area of 13 million inhabitants and the main export axis in Spain
- 3) Barcelona, its principal hub, is a subglobal city of 4,8 million inhabitants specialised in services, tourism and industry

The 12 Florida's (2008) megaregions in Europe



3. The Mediterranean railway corridor debate (1): background

- 1) The Spanish railway model took a sharp turn in the 1980s with the commitment of the Socialist government (PSOE) to the high-speed train (HST) and the European track gauge
- 2) The Transport Infrastructure Plan (PIT, 2000-2007) drafted by the Partido Popular (PP) new government reinforced the commitment to the HST based on a radial design. The freight traffic axe considered was Algeciras-Madrid-France, the so-called new "Central corridor" through the Pyrenees
- 3) In 2003 the MRC was left out of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T)
- 4) As a consequence, political and social mobilisation erupted to promote the construction of the Mediterranean corridor

High speed railways implemented/under construction (2011) and the freight Central corridor project



3. The Mediterranean railway corridor debate (2): actors

- 1) Spanish government: in 2005 the new Socialist government drafted a new plan called “PEIT 2005-2020”, but once again the MRC was left out
- 2) Regional governments: the Catalan and Valencian governments argued against the PEIT plan. Catalonia asked for the regions to be consulted by the EU when deciding the TEN-T matter
- 3) Ferrmed: a new business lobby with the aim of building a railway line exclusively for freight traffic from Algeciras to northern Europe was created
- 4) Academics:
 - J.V. Boira (2002): “Europe is the parth for development...”
 - R. Tremosa (2007): “The geostrategic value of Barcelona...”
 - G. Bel (2009): “The inefficiency of the radial infrastructure model...”

The Ferrmed axis: a high-performance corridor for freight traffic running through the most important industrial and logistical areas between the north and south of Europe



3. The Mediterranean railway corridor debate (3): recent status and prospects

- 1) A revision of the TEN-T was announced in 2009: pressure intensified by Ferremed and the regional governments (Catalonia, and Valencia with the addition of Murcia)
- 2) In 2011 the Socialist government demanded MRC being included in the TEN-T and submitted a project to construct it in 2020. A pragmatic railway model was accepted by all the actors. (1) a new HST passenger line (which would include high-speed and regional trains, helping to relieve the other lines), (2) convert the conventional line to European gauge, used largely for freight traffic
- 3) In 2012 the TEN-T incorporates the MRC and excludes the Central corridor. This would open up the possibility of receiving funds from the EU
- 4) The new PP government brokes the consensus and asks the EU to include the central corridor in the TEN-T. The 2012 budget earmarks 4 Beur for HST but no significative investments for the MRC freight line

4. Conclusions

- 1) The case of the MRC illustrates the complexity of political coordination of large scale infrastructure projects within states because of the diversity of actors and scenarios
- 2) In the Spanish case there was divergence between the priorities of the Central government, focused on the construction of HST passenger service for cohesion the state and centralise flows in Madrid, and those of the Mediterranean Arc megaregion, where the HST was linked since the early 2000s to creating a corridor for freight traffic, and therefore as a mean for becoming the “south door of Europe”
- 3) The absence of political power in the Mediterranean Arc was substituted by input from various actors, all of which helped to create a novel discourse and scenario
- 4) In the end, some consensus was achieved by all actors for the priority on the completion of the MRC in 2020 and its inclusion in the TEN-T, but the new PP government seems to be not specially committed with it and has re-opened the debate on the Central corridor, which augurs new tensions and major uncertainties