

**ON THE STATE OF TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURES IN THE EURAM.  
COMMENTS ON A COMPARATIVE STUDY  
JOSEP VICENT BOIRA. UNIVERSITY OF VALENCIA**

They say that comparisons are odious, but the truth is that they are often quite illustrative. Comparing means looking outside, seeing what the neighbours are doing (or what they make them do or, even worse, what has been done for them and not for us). In relation to transport infrastructures, the comparison between territories beyond what we call the Euram (Mediterranean Arch Euroregion), that is to say, Catalonia, the Land of Valencia and the Balearic Islands, offers us an x-ray of the current state of affairs in our region useful for future analyses, while the comparison with the situation of Madrid allows us to have a point of reference for a judgement, sometimes positive and sometimes negative, on what is happening to us.

The first comment that it is necessary to make is that the data show that, despite everything, our societies are growing, and have grown in recent years. A lack of investments, problems of decision-making, economic periphery, globalization... Yes, but both the population and the GDP of our communities (also of Madrid) have grown, something which cannot be said about all the regions of Europe. Demographic and economic growth is undoubtedly an old way of measuring the success of human communities, but is not free from a certain common sense. From 2000 to 2007, more inhabitants came to our communities and there was more economic activity. However, when both things are combined (GDP per capita, for example), things are not as clear. The Land of Valencia is still below the Spanish average and the Balearics has gone down since 2000. The reality is that other communities have grown more and have made the Spanish average go up. Overall, the logical consequence of this first impression has to be that with more population and more economic activity, the transport and communication infrastructures should have increased in a similar manner. This corollary is not, however, so obvious, as we will see.

A second impression from the reading of the statistics gathered by different Catalan (Daniel Albalade, from the Department of Economic Policy of the University of Barcelona), Valencian (Josep Vicent Boira and Ferran González, from the Department of Geography of the University of Valencia) and

Balearic Island experts (Joana M. Seguí and Maria Rosa Martínez Reynés, from the Department of Earth Sciences of the University of the Balearic Islands), corrected, purged and discussed by Rosa Maria Bayà, was the existence of two different situations: that of Catalonia and the Land of Valencia and that of the Balearics. The differentiation is of course due to the insular nature: cars, ports, roads, railways or airports (the communication and transport instruments) are phenomena closely linked to the geography, and I would even say necessarily linked. And the insular (and above all tourist) nature counts. Not in vain, the Balearics have many more vehicles per inhabitant than any other community. Demand for tourist rental is thus noted. As for Catalonia and the Land of Valencia, the differences, within their similarity, are due to the difference in the size (a quantitative nuance), but also to certain recent policies which make a difference depending on the processes. However, there are more similarities than differences. As for Madrid, some of the data shown are evidence of the policy of reinforcement of its position within the field of transport infrastructures that the different Spanish governments have implemented and still implement. The radial conception of Spain has given results and we could say that some of them are substantial, especially for Madrid (the data referring to certain infrastructures are proof of this) and for the geographically central communities of the peninsula. Toledo, Ciudad Real and Guadalajara, not analyzed in these data, are beginning to form a "Greater Madrid" which will make the geoeconomic space of the capital of Spain reach 10 million.

A third comment that we could make on this document is that geography counts, and specifically the territory and its form of occupation. As occurs in the Balearic Islands, where insularity and tourism are reflected in the data gathered, it is necessary to pay attention to something which is often not taken into account in these analyses: the extent and dispersion of the economic and human activities all around Catalonia and the Land of Valencia and their relative concentration in the city of Madrid and its metropolitan area. Moreover, another fully geographic factor needs to be considered: the extent. Talking about size, Madrid is four times smaller than Catalonia and three times smaller than the Land of Valencia. It is true that it has more population than, for example, the Land of Valencia, but it has less territory. This is an important argument: the dispersion around the territory of activities and of people (of population centres,

of hamlets, of small enclaves, also of small and medium size companies, of a dispersed industrial and tourist fabric) increases the need for good communication infrastructures. I would say that it simply increases the communication needs. Madrid's high population density and its relative concentration (at least the relative concentration in city centres of a certain size, which we could call metropolitan centres) "facilitate" territorial management. And they also facilitate the territorial administration. On the contrary, dispersion complicates the management and requires more administration.

Moreover, the details of the report show this clearly. Madrid, with just over 6 million inhabitants compared with a EURAM with 13 million. Whether territories or people have more "weight" (or whether both factors should be taken into account) is a very interesting debate which is now very topical in view of the financing of the autonomous communities and which should also be considered in this case. As for Valencia, Catalonia and the Balearics, both in relation to the territory, and the size, and the dispersion or population model and the population, the financing of the communication and transport infrastructures should be more favourable than it is. And there is also the economic justification! The contribution of the EURAM to Spain's GDP is 32% of the total.

It is therefore important, together with the quantitative analyses, to carry out a healthy and productive qualitative analysis. This analysis should, by the way, include the historical memory of the processes, that is to say, how the data shown were reached. The radial nature and concentration of investments throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century (just to talk about the contemporary state), together with the non-existence of provincial bodies (in the case of the single-province Madrid, a factor which simplifies the management of the territory on reducing the powers in the hands of the community government and increasing, on the rebound, the resources) are elements which should also be taken into account on reading this statistical document.

Readers of the report can draw their own personal conclusions from the excellent graphs of Rosa Maria Bayà. There are, however, some reflections which may be of help to read and interpret them. Some of them are obvious and well-known and are pending issues in our communities. For example, the greater weight of toll motorways in Catalonia and Valencia in relation to Madrid.

This is objective information: 334 kilometres in Valencia, 656 in Catalonia and only 148 in Madrid. It is obvious that, if the analysis is weighted, the difference is even greater: 0.02 kilometres of toll road per 1,000 inhabitants in Madrid and 0.07 and 0.09 in the Land of Valencia and Catalonia, respectively. The disproportion is obvious (and logical in view of recent policies) with non-toll roads too: over 600 kilometres of toll-free dual carriageways in Madrid compared with 528 kilometres in Catalonia.

Other aspects also appear in the comparison which should be analyzed in detail and not in a simplistic manner. For example, the big 281-kilometre underground railway network of Madrid compared with the 121 kilometres of the Land of Valencia and the 94 of Catalonia. Historical economic and political injustices can explain part of the evidence, but maybe not all. With the money, a lot or little, that each autonomous community (or city council) has it is possible to make underground railway lines or “*cities of sciences*” and “*forums*”. And both? This would be ideal, but sometimes you have to choose. The 0.05 kilometres of underground railway per 1,000 inhabitants of Madrid should be observed with envy from our lands: 0.02 km per 1,000 Catalans and 0.03 km per 1,000 Valencians are poor results which should also, and I reiterate the “also”, be imputed not just to the fact that certain communities have more state investment, but to what they allocate it.

The graphs also show that, in many respects, the Catalan-speaking lands are a power within Spain. Territories which include 34% of the passengers who are transported in the state by sea and 40% of those transported by air deserve at least a certain consideration when ports and airports are debated, decided on and financed. More consideration and participation, of course, than what they currently have in the not very federal and shared management of the infrastructures in the service of this logistic power (especially as regards airports, with a centralized AENA. Ports are another matter). At the same time, we should talk about the maritime orientation shown by the Land of Valencia in goods transport. Attention thus needs to be paid to the figures of the graph referring to the distribution between goods transport by plane or by ship. Against the absolute concentration of Madrid in the former (a little distorted because it is difficult to take into account the presence of “dry ports” around Madrid which concentrate the goods to be

exported directly from the Port of Valencia), we need to talk about the balanced distribution between plane and ship in Catalonia, the predominance of the plane on the Islands and, on the contrary, the predominance of the ship over the plane in the Land of Valencia. This maritime vocation of Valencia, together with the “victory” of the Port of Valencia over that of Algeciras in 2008 – and over that of Barcelona, all things said -, in container transport (at present, just Valencia concentrates 40% of Spain’s foreign trade traffic in containers) and the maritime orientation of some important recent leisure and media entertainment activities promoted by the government of the Generalitat of Valencia (America’s Cup in Valencia in 2007 and Volvo Ocean Race in Alicante in 2008) could inspire new economic and strategic activities which would give a new boost to the traditional industrial and services economy of the Land of Valencia. With good judgement, the maritime logistic and leisure orientation (together with the traditional sun and beach tourism) could become a horizon of what the experts call new market niches in a global and post-Fordist economy.

It should, however, be indicated (as shown by the data) that at present the territories of Catalonia and the Land of Valencia are territories fundamentally dependent on the road. A few decades ago this was symptomatic of agility and prosperity, but now, and above all in the future, it is a problem if we take into account the tolls, the price of fuel, road congestion and the fight against pollution begun by the Kyoto protocol.

The considerable land (and specifically road) dependence of the Catalan and Valencian economies is explained, first, by the territory, much bigger than that of Madrid, for example, and by the dispersion of the population and of the economic activities. There are, however, also other factors, such as the structure of the small and medium-sized company more suited to local and individual transport than to big lines, the necessary flexibility of the production conditions of the traditional sectors of the economies of Catalonia and Valencia, the export vocation to the rest of Europe when Spain was a backward and closed country, the lack of investments in major railway and airport infrastructures on the Mediterranean axis, etc. The fact is that, at present, the economies of the EURAM are very dependent on the road: 76% of the tons transported in Catalonia are taken by road and 71% in the Land of Valencia. In Madrid, the percentage is 46%.

This fact should be confronted with another detail of concern: the reduction in railway traffic which is observed in the data in recent years both in Catalonia and in the Land of Valencia. Although the Catalan and Valencian railway network still moves 63% of the goods transported by train in Spain, the graphs show a reduction in the tons transported in this region, which is far from the recommendations of the European Union included in the 2001 “Transport White Paper” and its successive reviews.

This report thus shows different trends which should be read with care. It is not a series of complaints, or of demands, but it sometimes points out clear injustices. In other cases, the differences should be attributed to the policies developed at the heart of each community. In any case, it is a useful instrument to know and to be able to form an opinion on an increasingly important subject.