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The Mediterranean railway corridor: territorialising multiple visions of a macro-regional axis

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Abstract

The Mediterranean railway corridor is a project of a macro-regional trans-European axis of transport. In its Spanish part, it goes through Mediterranean regions which have historical, demographical, economic and even political common structures. But they are also marked by important gaps and a double lack of economic and political stakeholders' cohesion in a competitive context and of railway infrastructure. In this context, the MRC appears as a common goal and a catalyst: it creates new forms of cooperation between the actors and promotes a new image of the Mediterranean corridor as a possible coherent territory, shared by all the coastal regions. The transport corridor project, even if it is not yet realised as an infrastructure, already works as a strong factor of territorialisation along the Spanish Mediterranean axis. A special form of longitudinal and polymorphic territory, fruit of a complex system of particular and diverging interests seems to be emerging in these regions as a specific "corridor territory".

Keywords: Corridor; Mediterranean railway corridor; Spain; Territorialisation; Trans-European Networks of Transport; Transport geography

Résumé

Le corridor ferroviaire méditerranéen (MRC) est un projet d'axe de transport transeuropéen d'échelle macro-régionale. Dans sa partie espagnole, il traverse des régions méditerranéennes dotées de structures historiques, démographiques, économiques voire politiques communes, mais aussi marquées par d'importantes fractures et par un double manque de cohésion entre les acteurs politiques et économiques dans un contexte de concurrence et d'infrastructures ferroviaires. Dans ce contexte, le MRC apparaît comme un objectif commun et comme un catalyseur : il aboutit à la création de nouvelles coopérations entre acteurs et promeut une image de l'axe méditerranéen, possible territoire cohérent partagé par toutes les régions littorales. Ce projet de corridor de transport, si l'infrastructure n'est pas encore réalisée, fonctionne déjà comme un puissant facteur de territorialisation de l'axe méditerranéen espagnol. Un territoire singulier, longitudinal et polymorphe, fruit d'intérêts particuliers divergents, semble émerger dans ces régions comme « territoire de corridor » spécifique.

Mots-clés : Corridor ; Corridor ferroviaire méditerranéen ; Espagne ; Géographie des transports ; Réseau transeuropéen de transport ; Territorialisation

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Nomenclature

ADIF	Administrador de Infraestructuras Ferroviarias (Spanish infrastructure manager)
AVE	Alta Velocidad Española (Spanish high-speed)
EU	European Union
HSR	High-Speed Rail
IIVEE	Institut Ignasi Villalonga d'Economia i Empresa (Business and economy institute Ignasi Villalonga)
MRC	Mediterranean Railway Corridor
TEN-T	Trans-European Network of Transport
TEU	Twenty feet Equivalent Unit

1. Introduction

The Mediterranean railway corridor is one of the Trans-European Network of Transport projects held by the European Commission to improve interconnection and interoperability throughout the continent for freight and passengers. It is presented as a priority project and as a part of the core network since the 1990's in official documents (Ministerio de Fomento, 1993; European Commission, 1996; European Commission, 2011; Ministerio de Fomento, 2012). The MRC is a great axis from Algeciras to Ukraine in the very last version up to the EU documents. In Spain, it is mainly both a freight and a high-speed passenger axis linking the main ports and cities to France and the rest of Europe through a new, interoperable, international gauge set of tracks. The discussion about the length and modalities of its implementation is very pregnant: the cost of brand new tracks is very high, but the improvements of the actual tracks can't be a long-term option because of their low level of service. The first part should be implemented from the French border to Valencia before the end of 2015. This Spanish part of the trans-European corridor is set in a particular political and economic context. The project of linking the main Mediterranean cities and regions with a railway axis seems to be a response to the lack of powerful infrastructure in these regions and an opportunity to connect with the rest of Europe. But even if the project is present in all the infrastructure master plans of the government since the 1990's, it stands against the historical politics of radial axis centred on Madrid (Comín Comín *et al.*, 1998; Bel, 2010). Today, it also appears as an expensive project in an economic crisis context particularly strong in the Mediterranean regions (Baron-Yellès, 2010; Chastagnaret, 2013).

In Spain, the notion of Mediterranean corridor has a double signification. On the one hand, it obviously refers to the macro-regional European railway infrastructure project. On the other hand, it also refers to a complex and poorly defined Mediterranean space spread along the Mediterranean Sea, from the French border to an undefined point between Valencia and Algeciras, frequently Alicante or Murcia. This littoral axis seems to have some symbolical coherence in the minds, but it is difficult to call it a "territory" because of its lack of unity or common identity. Territory indeed refers to a clearly defined spatial structure with a coherent identity or opportunity of identification, possibly a political coherence, and a collective appropriation.

In this context, one question has to be asked: how a new macro-regional railway infrastructure as the MRC project can lead to the creation or the renewal of a relevant territory specific to this corridor. The aim of this paper is to show how the concept of corridor, as it is defined in several fields including economy and transport, can be useful in geography to describe a process of territorialisation of a determined spatial field. It therefore proposes the concept of "corridor territory" as the consequence of the acts of the different stakeholders taking part to the progressive implementation or the MRC macro-project.

The qualitative methodology used in this research to establish the different actors' point of views will be first presented. A literature review of the concept of "corridor" and of the link between railway infrastructures and territory will then be set to highlight the existing gap between the multiplication of the use of "corridor" in planning and its very few connection to territorial aspects. The actors' multiple visions of the MRC and of its territorial impacts will then be presented as a result of a series of interviews. This will lead to the main findings of the paper as far as the territorialisation of this macro-regional axis is concerned.



2. Methodology: a qualitative approach of the MRC

In order to demonstrate how the MRC project leads to particular processes of territorialisation through the visions and acts of different stakeholders, the paper will be mainly based on a qualitative methodology.

A literature review on the topics of the “corridors” and of the link between railway and territory will first be step. It will allow questioning two main aspects. First, the concept of corridor was used in relation with territory in very few cases and it is now used mainly in a conceptual way paradoxically in planning documents. Second, the link between railway and territory is present in a large literature and it should help us making a relation between the concept of corridor and its plural forms of spatial consequences in the MRC case study.

In order to approach the specific territorialisation process along the MRC project, this research is based on the methodology of interviews with relevant actors. A first step is the identification of the stakeholders who take part in the debate and the actions around the Mediterranean corridor: the European Commission is supposed to choose the priority projects up to the proposals of each member state of the EU; in Spain, the great infrastructures are a national competence and are implemented by ADIF, the infrastructure manager; the Autonomous Communities have a set of competences; the economic sector and its lobbies also claim for the MRC; academic personalities also take part into the debate. The identification of the actors was made by crossing two sources: the institutional competences are a good way to identify part of them; the observation of the events and actuations around the MRC through the media and the networking allow to complete the list. The main point of the methodology is to collect their opinion through interviews. Since 2011, 43 interviews were realised, mainly in the late 2013, in several Spanish cities, in Brussels and in Paris. During the interviews, a series of questions about the MRC were asked, among which the personal definition given by each actor, his position regarding it and the concrete actuations planned or implemented in relation to the MRC. The question of the meaning of “corridor” was also asked. The public declarations of the stakeholders in the media or in institutional documents were also analysed as a complementary source. Thanks to the answers, we have been able to make a typology of these actors according to the analysis of their different visions, confronted with the concrete actions initiated on the Mediterranean axis.

3. From corridor to territory: a missing link in the state-of-the art

The Mediterranean railway corridor refers to the notion of “corridor” as it is used in transportation field. The term is very often part of the institutional discourse to define an important and large scale transport line (European Commission, 2011), having or not a territorial reference. But literature shows that the great railway infrastructure may have important effects on territory and therefore can’t be considered independently.

3.1. “Corridor”: a complex multidimensional concept

The concept of “corridor” emerged in the 1960’s in the United States in the field of spatial analysis and network analysis (Haggett & Chorley, 1969; Kansky, 1963). At this time, it was quite open to the notions of space, territorial organisation and geography in a rather descriptive way. It was particularly used to describe urban processes linked to the intensification of transit along structuring transportation axis, as C.F.J. Whebell (1969) and B.E. Prentice (1996) could show in North-American case studies. In its first acceptance, the notion of corridor was directly linked to the transport infrastructures or at least to the transportation axis perceived through flows of transit and mobility. But in this sense, it was not necessarily connected to the idea of a territory as a coherent and continuous space or to the idea of territorial organisation and planning at any scale. Nonetheless, the idea of a corridor as a continuum of space with particular characteristics emerged in the 1970’s and is still used nowadays in ecology. In the 1990’s, the notion of “corridor”, in the transport approach, moved to the field of economy. It was used in multi-criteria economic analysis and supply and demand models.

European case studies mainly appear in the 2000’s in institutional reports of the European Commission and in national scientific productions. The Spanish case is original because of an older use of the term “corridor” to define great transport axis, particularly for the Mediterranean regions (Boira, 2002; Centre for Innovation in Transport, 2012). In the European institutional documents as the TEN-T (European Commission, 2011), the term “corridor” refers to the great trans-national transport axis projects. It seems to be used in a prospective and political vision, as a language instrument to give a reality to these projects. Thus, European “corridors” are not infrastructures – or they are a set of discontinuous pieces of different infrastructures to be linked together.



Neither are they territories because they don't take into account the identity or possible unity of the spaces they go through. This technical use of the notion of corridor leads to an abstraction of the concept.

3.2. Indivisible concepts: railway infrastructure and territory

The idea of a strong link between transport and territory is historically established by scientific literature as reminded by F. Plassard (1997). Railway especially appears as an instrument for planning and territorial unification since the beginnings in the 19th Century. In Europe the train was used as a territorial coherence tool (Troin, 1995; Offner & Pumain, 1996) and some authors even talk about railway as “architecture of the territory” (Grillet-Aubert & Guth, 2003). The same assessment is made at a regional level (Button *et al.*, 1995; Banister, 2007). The regional or local studies of the impact of railway infrastructure on the territory usually give a prominent role to the actors and the analysis of their position and actuations (Wolfram, 2003). In the whole literature, the link between railway and territory is established, even if Offner (1993) demonstrates that there is no “structural effect” of the infrastructure, which leads to the idea that its relationship to the territory is quite complex.

3.3. A missing link with territory

The term “corridor” as used by the European institutions and countries in their infrastructure programs shows that territory is very rarely present in the debate at this macro-regional scale. This is a paradox when all the transport policies are most often oriented towards a better cohesion or equity of the (national) territory. It is as if the step to European level made it difficult for the states to consider a possibly coherent territory which would not fit with their borders and would oblige them to consider new forms of territoriality.

The notion of “corridor”, as it appears in literature, seems to have slipped from spatial to economic analysis (Hall & Hesse, 2013). Nonetheless, the reactivation of the concept of transportation corridor in the context of the TEN-T projects could paradoxically bring it back to geography. *De facto*, the trans-European networks need to take root in the specific territories in which they are implemented. Therefore, the implementation phase of European projects, which can be quite long, can appear as a privileged phase of territorialisation.

4. Actors, territory and the MRC: from a plural space to new territorial cooperations

The trans-European projects, as they plan long term and long distance infrastructures, go through different territorial entities, as states, regions or cities, but also more fuzzy forms of territoriality. The Spanish Mediterranean regions have strong identities and traditions at political, economic, social, demographic and institutional levels. It makes it a plural space marked by common Mediterranean affiliations, but also strong divisions in which the different actors are moving and changing their relationships; as it is noticeable through the interviews.

4.1. The Mediterranean as a plural space and a coherent axis?

During the interviews, the historical dimension of the MRC, first claimed by orange producers in the 1920's, and of the Mediterranean regions was very often evoked as follows. Historically, the Mediterranean Sea has a common heritage and shares a common culture. Nonetheless, this Mediterranean cohesion was slightly modified with time. The constitution of national States connected politically the Mediterranean regions with the other components of each state and therefore disconnected them from each other (Béthemont, 2000). Recently the Mediterranean heritage was rediscovered through regional cooperation in a European frame (Institut de la Méditerranée, 2004) – Interreg, Union for the Mediterranean, etc. In Spain, demographic and economic indicators seem to confirm the coherence of the Mediterranean space from a geographical point of view. Apart the region of Madrid, the major growth rates of demography and of economic indicators in the last 15 years are concentrated along the Mediterranean coast (up to the national institute of statistics). This dynamism is reinforced by the presence in the Spanish Mediterranean regions of the main ports (Valencia, Barcelona and Algeciras) and economic sectors, such as automotive industry, ceramics and textile. These exporting companies need an improvement of the railway axis to Europe, but the economic dynamism goes hand in hand with a strong competition between ports (Valencia is very proud to overtake Barcelona in TEUs) and industries (Ford in Valencia and Seat in Barcelona on the European market). From a political point of view, the situation seems to be very propitious to a Mediterranean good understanding, at least for Catalonia and Valencia Community, both governed by a conservative majority. But historically, a strong rivalry has been opposing both regions and it is



still very active. One of the elements building a reputation of unity for the Mediterranean axis is the dominant political philosophy in Spain. It is indeed set on the idea of a cultural and institutional domination of Castile and the region of Madrid (Loyer, 2006; Romero, 2006) based on ideas from literary and philosophical works.

In the field of transports, the construction of the route and rail networks are quite good indicators. As Germà Bel shows in his book *España, capital París* (2010) transportation networks were always a way to create and reinforce the nodal position of Madrid and at the same time to build an artificial unity of the national territory. As underlined by all the regional scale actors, this political choice led to the construction of a radial highway and railway network, centred on Madrid. Its consequence is a lack of coastal infrastructure in the Mediterranean regions which were the poor relation of the infrastructure politics. Nonetheless, if we look at the dominant flows, it is noticeable that the Mediterranean corridor is the most important of the country (Monzón *et al.*, 2010). In this context, the MRC seems to make sense, and we can assume that it is coherent with an existing territory, at least from transportation flows' point of view. Nonetheless, even though the MRC project is supported as a European priority, the Spanish central government doesn't make it a real priority as far as funding and construction are concerned but one project among others.

Nonetheless, as José Ortega y Gasset underlines in his book *España invertebrada* (1921), the whole country lacks of great "vertebrating" axis. It is especially true when considering the Mediterranean axis from railway point of view. Two high-speed lines, Madrid-Levante (with a branch to Valencia and further to Castellón and a branch to Alicante) and Madrid-Barcelona don't take into account the 200km missing between Castellón and Tarragona to complete the network, which by now has medium speed lines and 40km of one-track line. This absence of continuity along the Mediterranean axis is in a way based on very deeply anchored in the psychology and ideas of institutional actors –as shown by the interviews– but also of everyone.

Almost all the actors agree that the Mediterranean axis is fragmented and appears as a quite rejected territory at a national level. But a corridor exists *de facto*, underlined by the importance of freight traffic, passenger demand and tourism. This gap between the political philosophy and the common ideas about Mediterranean space as a non-coherent and non-appropriated region and the existence of real transport demand and needs appears as a paradox. The existing functional disjunctions seem to disappear in transport field.

4.2. Multiple and diverging stakeholders' visions for a single objective: the MRC as a territorial catalyst

If the different interviewed actors seem to agree on the MRC as a necessity for the coastal regions as well as for the national economy, this consensus is based on rather divergent visions and conceptions of the corridor. It was often very difficult for the interviewed actors to express in a direct way an opinion about the question of the territorialisation, because they are not familiar with the concept and don't take this particular issue into account in their actuation. Nonetheless, academic actors (some of them being geographers) and some of the lobbyists are very concerned about territory (Boira, 2010). Political actors also refer very often to the idea of "territory", meaning an institutional perimeter in which they are elected or have a competence in terms of planning. Therefore, their vision of the territory mainly depends on the political scale they represent.

Even if the question of the territorialisation of the MRC is not directly present in the content of interviews, the answers of the stakeholders can be analysed and their vision of the political and economic relationships along the Mediterranean axis and of the new complementarity or cooperation to be created allow us to have an idea of their vision of what could be the territory of the Mediterranean corridor.

A typology can be set on the criteria of the definition of the MRC given by the actors, their more or less spatially integrated vision and their concrete territorialised proposals. Table 1 (below), by comparing stakeholders' priorities and visions of the MRC, leads to several findings. First, the impact of the main objectives of each actor on his vision of a corridor territory is obvious. National or regional objectives as those of the Central Government or of the Autonomous Governments lead to an addition of institutional perimeters, whereas a European integration perspective or the local development objectives mainly lead to non-institutional perimeters. The latter are mainly based on functional considerations. Second, the question of the extension of the MRC, in its Spanish part, is variable depending on a more or less extensive vision of it. European documents and Ferrmed (2009) and EU Core Net Cities informs promote a trans-continental axis which would be the link between Africa and Northern Europe: in this case, all the Spanish Mediterranean regions (Andalusia, Murcia, Valencia and Catalonia) would be part of it. But the economic field has a more limited vision, taking into account Catalonia, Valencia and most of the time Murcia, and sometimes a little part of Andalusia till Málaga. But regional political



actors even exclude Andalusia. This region has a topographical and a political gap which makes it more likely to be connected to Seville-Madrid axis than to the Mediterranean corridor. Third, there is a huge domination of a freight railway axis in the claiming of the different stakeholders, whereas a passenger axis is mainly a demand of the cities. A freight axis would be economically profitable and gathers all economical actors, whereas a passenger high-speed rail axis would cost much more than its social profitability would make it acceptable (Bel, 2010). But the idea of a high-speed passenger corridor is present in the discourse of the stakeholders as an attractiveness element and as an argument to convince the inhabitants of the opportunity of the corridor. The consecutive territorial vision is ambiguous: one argument in favour of HSR is to improve the accessibility of the whole coast for tourism, giving it a homogeneous sense. However a HSR service would only stop in the main cities and maybe improve their metropolitan status, but it would reinforce the fragmentation of the Mediterranean space by increasing the gap between the main cities and the secondary ones.

Even if it's possible to make a difference between economic, political and academic stakeholders according to their priorities and to their visions of what could be a Mediterranean corridor territory, and despite their divergent objectives, they all are involved in the MRC project and cooperate into some debate and proposition task forces, such as IVEE-Euram, an institute which promotes a Mediterranean Euro-region (Boira, 2002). Despite their different objectives and positions about the modalities of the project, all these stakeholders are part of a great pro-MRC cluster lobby. This scheme shows how actors coming from diverse origins with quite unlike cultures and knowledge participate to a common effort in favour of the Mediterranean corridor.

Table 1. Classification of stakeholders according to their vision of the Mediterranean corridor.

Type of territorial vision of the MRC	Actor	Main objectives	Concrete projects
Integrated / macro-regional vision	European Commission	Promoting European networks interconnection and interoperation	- One end of a great TEN-T - Railway connexion to North Africa
	Spanish government (Grupo Fomento : ADIF / RENFE)	- Completing HSR network - Improving the connexion to Europe - Improving competitiveness	- From French border to Algeciras as a maximalist hypothesis - to Murcia a mid-term
	Mediterranean regions (Catalonia and Valencia mainly)	- Euro-regional integration, - Connexion of main Spanish harbours, - South-north axis avoiding Madrid	Integrating Catalonia, Valencia and Murcia regions
	Academics	- Promoting a Mediterranean great region, with particular cohesion and identity, - Reinforce the economical weight of the Mediterranean	Catalonia, Valencia and Murcia in a Euro-regional perspective
	Lobbies (Fermed, Business Eumed, AVE, IVEE)	- Connecting industries of the Mediterranean regions, - Opening Spanish coast to Europe	- Piece of a project from Casablanca to Saint-Petersburg, - Along the Mediterranean
Sectorial / cluster vision	CCI	Improving the connexion of Spanish industries to Europe	- Connect the main cities to Europe - International clusters
	Port authorities	Become a gateway for Europe	Connect ports to European market
Isolated / localist vision	Cities	- Reach a metropolitan status in Europe	- AVE stations, urban renewal - Events and communication about the MRC



It seems impossible to draw one coherent vision of the MRC up to the results of the analysis of stakeholders' priorities, but there is still an active effect on the Mediterranean macro-region as if all stakeholders were moving towards a common objective through different ways. This movement towards the MRC implementation allows to define the notion of "corridor territory".

5. Main findings: towards the creation of a "corridor territory"

The Spanish Mediterranean regions have some homogeneity according to indicators such as demography, political representation or economy at a small scale. But if we look at a more precise scale, it is fragmented and it seems difficult today to talk about a territory as an appropriated and identified coherent portion or space organised with common interests and cooperation. Nonetheless, the actions of the different stakeholders in the MRC project renew the idea of a relevant corridor territory through political, economic and social (circumstance) cooperation, and through a qualitative jump from regional straight to European scale. The analysis of the main findings lead to the justification of the concept of "corridor territory".

5.1. Cooperation and the regional jump towards European scale

The MRC project as a part of the TEN-T projects introduces a major change in the way stakeholders act. Indeed, the Spanish Autonomous Communities are directly represented in the EU institutions through the Committee of the Regions. The principle of subsidiarity, in use in European institutions, implies that the decisions should be taken at the closest practical level for the citizen (Kersbergen & Verbeek, 1994). Therefore the regions have increasing weight and credibility even though they are theoretically not competent for infrastructures in Spain.

As the MRC doesn't reach a full consensus in Spain, and principally in Madrid which would be put aside, the Mediterranean regions had an important mobilisation at the European Commission. That was the starting point of a dialog between Catalonia and Valencia, two neighbour regions which were competing with each other and had no project in common. This cooperation started in the 1990's when the MRC was first included in the TEN-T but was particularly reinforced in the last years. It is interesting to see that the Secretaries of Transport of both regions are now present together at the same meetings, as at the meeting organised by IVEE in February 2013 in Peñíscola, at mid-distance from Barcelona and Valencia. The IVEE is represented in both regions.

The creation in June 2013 of the EU Core Net Cities new lobby of the cities of the European core network was also an interesting event. It showed the increasing political cooperation along the Mediterranean axis, but also the remaining gaps. The initiative was due to Ferrmed. A large number of Spanish Mediterranean cities were represented (17 out of 27 European cities) including small ones, which confirms the existence of an increasing continuity and a common interest of the Mediterranean actors for MRC. But the city of Valencia – third Spanish and second Mediterranean metropolis – was not represented. The political cooperation of the Mediterranean corridor is still incomplete, but it is under construction and is reaching a very interesting level: institutions at all scales and of all sizes feel concerned by a single project.

But the political cooperation seems to have come for institutional reasons -that is to say to support the MRC project at the European Commission, whereas the economic actors began their coming together earlier and on much more rational basis. The opportunity offered by the MRC for all the economic sectors and for the Mediterranean harbours is very important (Spain has an Iberian gauge railway network which cannot connect directly with European gauge tracks in France and the rest of the continent and which creates a loss of time and additional costs). The Chambers of Commerce and Industry of the different Autonomous Communities began to cooperate around the MRC project. They were influenced by a set of ideas from economists such as Germà Bel (2010) and by academic and economic institutes such as IVEE.

In 2004, Ferrmed was officially created and installed as a lobby at the European Commission. It emerged from the first attempts of economic cooperation between the Mediterranean regions and from the conviction that a strengthened cooperation was necessary to support the MRC as a part of a wider network. Ferrmed proposes a "Great Axis" from Casablanca to Saint-Petersburg. Nonetheless, the Spanish part of this axis is in the centre of the lobby's action: it was created and is managed by Joan Amorós, a Catalan, and a huge proportion of its members is Spanish. Ferrmed, as well as IVEE and some other structures (Business Eumed, EU Core Net Cities, etc.) are now having a role of interface between the different stakeholders. They are the structures in which economic and political actors can meet as well as civil society members. Therefore, they are the sign that a real territorial cooperation is emerging in the Spanish Mediterranean corridor.



5.2. *A corridor territory made of a set of actuations and symbols*

All the stakeholders which strongly support the MRC have their own interests and therefore project in the Mediterranean corridor their representations. It contributes to the constitution of a territory as a symbolically appropriated space.

A set of images and representations of the Mediterranean corridor exist. They are mainly maps from the lobbies, the Government and the research institutes, but also pieces of advertising from the municipalities (Gandía created the image of an AVE train arriving on the beach) or the private actors (like Pro-AVE business association) and caricatures published in the media or on the internet. These representations are very diverse, but they all promote the idea of a coherent Mediterranean axis through images that people can keep in mind. As an example, Ferrmed map of the Greater axis (Ferrmed, 2009) represents a project as it was officially proposed to the European Commission together with impact and feasibility studies: it actually is an executive prospective map. Nevertheless, it is also an image of a structuring European corridor based on intermediate cities, which are the majority of the lobby. Thus, this map is both a proposal for European networks and the symptom of a synthesis of different stakeholders' interests. It is very well-known and present in mind of all the stakeholders. Business Eumed, a lobby of commerce and industry companies, presents a map of the "Mediterranean orbital train" which, according to an interview with the director (Libourel, 2011), is mainly a representation to consider and keep in mind, and not a real executive project. The idea is to create a vision of a fuzzy territoriality around the Mediterranean to strengthen the cooperation between the Mediterranean companies for commerce and industry. The profusion of these representations (a large set of symbols could be added) makes the Mediterranean corridor exist as a coherent territory despite its multiple definitions and perceptions. A real "corridor territory" structured by the infrastructure is progressively emerging from the MRC project.

At the same time, the events organised by some of the actors (especially the lobbies) joining together a large set of stakeholders at different levels and from different territories contribute to the unification of the Mediterranean corridor as a relevant frame for political and economic action. Sectorial groups are emerging as representatives of the interests of the Mediterranean corridor as a coherent territory, such as Cierval, the business association of the industrials of all the Mediterranean regions from Catalonia to Murcia and some provinces of Andalusia. The implementation of a provisional "third rail" to adapt the existing tracks to European gauge is also a factor of unification of the interests and of cohesion of the territory because it allows the whole corridor to access Europe.

At a local level, numerous projects of urban infrastructure (high-speed rail stations, urban renewal around the stations, logistic parks...) claim their affiliation to the MRC and use it as a justification. There is indeed a huge expectation based on the implementation of the railway corridor: it is supposed to increase the dynamism of all the Mediterranean axis. Even if the projects presented at a local scale are not directly in relation with the MRC, the trans-European project appears as a way to justify investment at a local scale and to create a global vision of the Mediterranean coast as a dynamic territory in Europe.

Thus, in a moment of economic crisis which is particularly strong in the Mediterranean regions and in which the Catalan exception is particularly strong also, the MRC project acts as a catalyst. It renews a Mediterranean coherent perception and makes the idea of a relevant "corridor territory", appropriated by the stakeholders and by the people, possible. The MRC is used as an instrument for diverse aims, but it still is a territorial entity more and more identified and perceived as a coherent bloc in Spain and Europe.

6. Conclusion

The Mediterranean railway corridor is an infrastructure project at a macro-regional scale, and even at a trans-continental level. In European terms, it is a technical or even a technocratic vision of a more or less ideal link between several European regions. But in Spain, where the Mediterranean regions lack of powerful railway infrastructures but have a strong freight and passenger demand, it takes a particular dimension.

An analysis of the geographical skills of the Mediterranean axis showed certain coherence in the demographic, economic and political indicators at a macro-regional level, even if an analysis of the situation at a more detailed scale shows some important gaps. But according to the series of interviews made with the different stakeholders of the MRC and to their actuations, these gaps are being passed over by new political, economic, social cooperation which make the Mediterranean corridor exist in the facts and discourses, even if it still doesn't exist as an infrastructure.



The political revival of the concept of corridor leads to the positive appreciation of a latent territoriality through its symbolical appropriation. The Mediterranean regions are not yet a complete “corridor territory” as it is not fully appropriated and organised in a coherent way. But we can assume it is positively under construction thanks to the mobilisation and conjunction of interests produced by the Mediterranean railway corridor project. This territorialisation process is visible through the discourses of the different stakeholders, but also through positive acts of economic and political cooperation. Of course, this does not mean that competition is now over, but it means that the stakeholders are aware of the need to give body to a territorial structure in order to make the MRC essential.

This Spanish Mediterranean corridor case study leads geography to integrate the notion of territory to the notion of corridor when it takes the form of a territorial phenomenon.

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