

The Urban Network as a Vertebral Element of the Euroregion of the Mediterranean Arc

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In recent decades, Europe has experienced an important development in geo-economic axes. The territories that form the Northwestern Mediterranean have been forming one of the principal axes of growth on the continent. Despite the recent displacement of the centre of the European Union towards the east, its importance, with a significant population density and some considerable traditional industrial centres, is being reinforced by its indisputable role in acting as a link between Europe and the African continent and therefore, to one of the principal routes to the Middle and Far East. However, today as in the past, the strength of the axis is above all found in its network of dynamic cities that have been building a history of relations (often as rivals) that have now become its great potential.

Notwithstanding, this region has not had, until now, any type of political-administrative body, but is now being recognised by the numerous studies, projects, programmes and agreements between administrations, business associations and academic bodies. This lack of political-administrative recognition has caused its territorial development to be rather variable. The new system of Euroregions, of increasing importance within the European Union, or the agreements between the provincial administrations, are examples of timid steps in the right direction.

It is worth mentioning from the outset the initial idea of the Mediterranean arc. One of the first times that this concept

was debated was at the 1^a *Conferència Econòmica de la Mediterrània Occidental* that was held in Barcelona in 1985. Also, it is interesting to note that at that time, the definition was wide-ranging, in order to be able to incorporate contributions and speakers that looked at various areas: in effect, the framework that they were drawing up covered a wide area from Murcia to Calabria.

Shortly afterwards, the already classic interpretation of Europe, made by the group GIP RECLUS from Montpellier, in their report *Les Villes Européennes*, at the request of the French DATAR in 1989, highlighted an important growth axis in the Mediterranean arc. This study had a great impact on the debate concerning the European growth axes, with its conceptualisation of the "Blue Banana," which is still today a reference point in European regional geography. The appearance of the autonomous governments in Spain is a key to understanding the subsequent impulse in the area. This led to the definition of the first Euroregion in 1991 between Catalonia and the French regions of Midi-Pyrenees and Languedoc-Roussillon, or seen in terms of their capitals, between Barcelona, Toulouse and Montpellier. Although not sufficiently developed, the proposal laid the foundations on which, for instance, an Atlas of the Euroregion was published in 1995, produced by GIP RECLUS itself and the Cartographic Institute of Catalonia, with the support of the statistical services of the three territories. Furthermore, in this period and significantly from the pronouncements made by the cities within the Mediterranean arc, a network of cities was created, namely C6. This network, made up of Barcelona, Montpellier, Palma de Mallorca, Toulouse, Valencia and

Saragossa, reinforced the idea of using the territory capitals as motors of trans-border cooperation in the Mediterranean Pyrenees region. It was an important step forward, because they moved on from the questions of defining areas, analysis and studies of the region, to co-operation and collaboration between the cities. It is worth remembering that both of these initiatives had originated from Barcelona, the city with the greatest weight amongst all its members.

During the nineties, various other academic studies were undertaken (chiefly by economists and geographers, but also by sociologists, from Catalonia, Valencia and France); even the university manuals started to reflect the existence of the geo-economic axis in different formats. Also in this decade, the European Community started confirming the existence of this area of cooperation. This led to the report 'Europe 2000 plus': Cooperation for European Territorial Development', published by the European Commission in 2004, which outlined in detail a set of large European regions, one of them being the Mediterranean Europe that makes up what is known as the Latin arc. This macro region includes Andalusia up until Lazio, as well as the Balearic Islands, Corsica and Sardinia. In recent years, the initiatives on this subject have been numerous and, furthermore, diverse. In 2000 the Eurocongress was held, with an increasing number of regions involved, including a number of French regions such as Aquitaine and Rhone-Alps and some Italian ones, including Piedmont and the Aosta Valley. Its principal objectives were, to contribute effectively to the cohesion of the European Union, reinforcing and creating debate forums between states and to contribute to promoting Latin Europe,

from its central base (known as the Central Latin Eurospace). Shortly afterwards, in 2002, the Latin Arc Association was formed in Montpellier, made up of 66 NUTS III level entities. Its objective was to formulate a definition of an integrated strategy of sustainable development and the organisation of the Latin Arc area, as outlined by Europe 2000+, and to create an area of cooperation with the countries in the south of the Mediterranean. It needs to be pointed that not all of the NUTS III local administrations of this area are currently involved with the Association (as is the case for some Spanish provinces: Girona, Almería, Murcia, Castellón, Alicante, Valencia and the Italian provinces of Calabria and Sicily). In the same year, 2002, the *Ignasi Villalonga Instituto de Economía y Empresa* was created in Valencia, with the objective of encouraging cooperation between the regions of the North-western Mediterranean arc Euroregion (EURAM) that is made up of Catalonia, Andorra, Valencia, Balearic Islands and North Catalonia. Finally, in the spring of 2004, an initiative was announced to create a Euroregion to be politically recognised by the European Union. This region would be made up of Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, Aragon, Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrenees. Although the authorities in Valencia have not yet accepted to be a part of the group, negotiations are taking place to find possible cooperation formulas and the Valencia business community is keen to find a solution.

All these initiatives, so different in their formats, objectives, areas covered, protagonists and creators, have in common the idea of a network of cities forming a unifying framework for the Northwestern Mediterranean region. Still, while up until now the role of the regional capitals has been highlighted, when considering the system of cities as a whole, those of a lesser hierarchy are found to be equally necessary as those occupying top positions, whatever their population and territorial function is. The city systems are at any one time, dynamic structures that reflect the transformations in their economic and social fabrics and the political initiatives launched from the different political-administrative bodies. These city systems are not only everyday more open, but also present structures that

are more and more complex and diversified. As well as the hierarchical functions and relations, there is a wealth of relations between the cities, in the areas of common and shared interests, involvement and strategies.

The urban system of the Mediterranean arc, whatever specific terms are adopted, is a complex system made up by a vast network of cities of different levels, with diverse and complementary functions. Together with the metropolitan conurbations (such as Barcelona, Valencia or Toulouse), there is within the arc, a large number of intermediate cities and each one has a role to play and a specific function in the totality of the system. We would like to emphasise that this system of intermediate cities of differing levels and functions represents one of the great potentials of the Mediterranean arc and one of its most specific characteristics.

Regarding this question, it is worth highlighting another significant aspect. If we discard the definitions that led us as far as Lazio or Calabria and that would imply the incorporation of Rome in the group, one of the characteristics of the Mediterranean arc, is the lack of a city that is a state capital. This fact can either be seen as a potential strength or as a weakness: the strength lies in the fact that it helps facilitate the coordination and collaboration between the principal cities, which are all capitals of autonomous communities (in Spain) or of regions (in France), without any reticence that could develop if one of them was also a state capital. The predominance of Barcelona, due to its dynamism and as the capital of the region, could lead some to be fearful of its leading position. One of the clearest examples of articulation between large cities, already in existence, is the network of large cities in the Mediterranean arc known as the C6.

However, not having a state capital within the group weakens its position, as this European area is not reinforced by any specific political measures of the states that make part of the area. For the Spanish and French states, the configuration of a geo-economic axis in the North-western Mediterranean area has never been a priority. Good examples are the policies concerning the infrastructure of communications and even more, those of the rail network. A consequence of

this is the weakness in the articulation within the group. If on the one hand we can speak of a strong link and bond in the socioeconomic fabric between the cities of Valencia, Barcelona and Saragossa (if we consider the proposals to incorporate Aragon in this arc) and a cohesion that reaches as far as the city of Murcia, the trans-border articulation is still limited and even more so if we include Liguria and Lazio in the arc and weaker again if we include Calabria, despite the existence of the C6 network. This lack of articulation is even greater when we take into account the numerous intermediate cities in the territory. The trans-border relations and the dialogue between these cities still have much room for improvement. We are not only referring to the infrastructure weaknesses that make transport and communication between the participating cities more difficult, but also the lack of relations between the social and economic fabrics.

Some studies show the strong dependency of nearby metropolitan conurbations: Marseilles, Milan, Turin and Lyon, principally, are an evidence that the lack of articulation within the Mediterranean arc will consequently hold back its strengthening. Even so, it is evident that for the arc to be strengthened, it is necessary to improve the connections with all the large metropolitan neighbours, not only those previously mentioned, but also with Bilbao, Bordeaux, Madrid and others. Despite the mentioned weaknesses, it is clear that the current dynamics allow us to speak of reinforcement and growth in this geo-economic axis, as the concentration of activities and infrastructure projects in this corridor is unquestionable. It is also clear that this territory is receiving an increasing amount of attention from different quarters –we have made a brief summary at the beginning, which shows the recent increase in these initiatives– despite being still undefined. Also, we should highlight the general dynamic of the cities to establish networks of collaboration between themselves. This dynamic already affects a good number of cities in the Mediterranean arc and will soon lead to important articulation over the whole area; already planned transport infrastructure projects and in lines of execution that will improve the accessibility of the whole

THE PYRENEES – MEDITERRANEAN EUROREGION

The Pyrenees-Mediterranean Euroregion was officially founded on 29th October 2004 in Barcelona. The objective of this initiative is to offer **a flexible space of co-operation** to the various political, economic and social actors which undertake their activities in the area made up by the regions of Languedoc-Roussillon, Midi-Pyrenees, Aragon, the Balearic Islands and Catalonia. Its conception is based on the fact that it does not create any governmental or administrative bodies, but that it co-ordinates the different levels of government promoted by the regional and autonomous governments.

It is an initiative of **open interregional co-operation**, in three ways: it is a project for all the *administrations* (it is hoped that all levels of government will participate), open to all types of *actors* (institutions, companies, universities

and civil organisations) and *open geographically* ("variable-geometry" projects will be organised around a central core).

Presently, the Euroregion is an area encompassing approximately 13 million inhabitants (2001), which places it among the most populated of Europe. It represents 13.2% of the combined populations of Spain and France and its GDP (2001) is 12.7% of the total of these two countries.

In the context of **globalisation**, the Euroregion has the necessary size and economic capacity in order to compete, as an equal, with other economic territories in the world.

The aim of this new Euroregion is to develop an **area of innovation and sustainable growth** based on a network of industrial, scientific and technological centres in the area. The Euroregion also aspires to improve social and

territorial cohesion, as well as to project the diversity and the creativity of its members. The objective is to exert **de facto leadership in the Euro-Mediterranean context** which is shared by all the regions that make up the Euroregion and to develop a reference point in south Europe and the Mediterranean as much as an engine for sustainable and compatible growth with respect to the environment.

The priority areas of co-operation that have been defined so far are: communications and infrastructures, research and technological innovation, university co-operation, culture and heritage, the environment and tourism.

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system. The role of the cities, their governments and their social and economic actors is and will be the key to this process, as in the dynamic territories the cities are already the principal players. To continue along this path, however, studies need to be undertaken over the whole urban system in the region in order to assess the current dynamics, the degree of cohesion within the system and to identify the principal actors and protagonists that will be the motors of the consolidation of this region.

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TERRITORIAL COHESION AND GOVERNANCE: THE ROLE OF THE REGIONS

In 2003, the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR) celebrated its thirtieth year. On this occasion, it carried out a restructuring of its activities on three fronts, with the aim of adapting to the new changes in these regions caused by the evolution of the EU.

1. To implement the Lisbon strategy for territorial cohesion

The CPMR is invigorated by the conviction that growth will occur from the association of all the European regions with policies that aim to increase competitiveness, a process that will renew the European Union. It is for this reason that it has been working toward promoting the success of a regional governance that is egalitarian and ambitious (1st Local and Regional Authorities Forum), celebrated on 24th February, 2004, with the presence of Commissioner Michel Barnier, influenced the proposals of the European Commission from 17th February until 15th July, 2004, which included the essential CPMR proposals. It has also warned the member-regions about the Commission's proposals for change that affect State subsidies in the regions.

The CPMR has worked on sector-policies that have a strong impact on the regions:

- the role of regions in matters of rural development (Seminar of 30th April 2004, in collaboration with the Tuscan region).
- transport: specifically, the CPMR has promoted the proposals of its geographical commissions concerning the Trans-European Transport Network and Maritime Highways.

Finally, the CPMR organised on 22nd October 2004, in collaboration with ARE, and the participation of the Sicilian region as a guest, a seminar for reflection on "European territorial co-operation after 2006." This allowed the regions to formulate their proposals and to carry them to a higher level.

2. To build a European governance that associates the regions

At the end of the conference on the future of Europe, the CPMR obtained particularly favourable support for the recognition of regions, as well as for valuing the principle of territorial cohesion. This text, adopted in July 2003, was to be rapidly adopted by the Heads of State of Government. These achievements were defended by the CPMR immediately afterwards and they were preserved in the adopted text of June 2004.

In parallel, the CPMR participated in the drafting of the white paper on governance. This white paper particularly tried to enrich the concept of "territorial dialogue" of the European Commission and to which representatives of European regions and cities have committed.

3. To promote the maritime dimension of Europe

The CPMR has a maritime interest in nature. Maritime security is one of the major concerns of member-regions. This is the reason why the CPMR asked for and obtained the status of observer of IOPCF. Further, it organised on 13th and 14th October 2004, a seminar in Nantes on "maritime security and the role of the regions."

The nomination, within the new Commission, of a Commissioner in charge of fisheries and maritime affairs, is the first step toward specifying the demands of the CPMR: that the European maritime dimension be considered and valued at a European level. The announcement of the writing of a green paper on the European maritime policy is a second step and the CPMR has established an ambitious partnership to actively participate in it.

The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPRM) gathered 150 regions from 25 different states, comprising European Union

members as well as non-members. It aims to favour a more balanced development of community territory. In fact, the centre of Europe (The "Pentagon" London, Paris, Milan, Munich and Hamburg) represents 14% of the territory, although it comprises 32% of the population and produces 46% of community GDP. The regions have been working together for thirty years to propose an alternative to this spontaneous concentration of population, of activities and infrastructure, but above all to develop the periphery.

Mediating between national governments and community institutions, the CPRM strives so to make the needs and interests of these territories be taken into account. This concerns all policies that have a strong territorial impact, namely community regional governance, sustainable development, transport, agriculture, fisheries and research.

To favour regional development, the association is also a pool of co-operation projects between members. It is organised in 6 geographical commissions around the EU maritime basins: islands, Atlantic, Mediterranean, Baltic, North Sea, Balkans/Black Sea; it initiates and catalyses co-operation projects between regions to tackle shared problems.

The regions of the CPRM are the shores of Europe, for better (i.e., exchanges with the rest of the world, an exceptional environment, quality of life, marine resources) or for worse (i.e., distance from economic and decision-making centres, pollution). Their joint work, with the CPRM as creator of ideas, aims at the carrying out of actions by the States and the European Union as a whole, to reduce their handicaps and give value to their successes.