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Culture, Nature & Coast: Three determinants employed for the re-appropriation of the redundant railway network of Peloponnese

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Résumé / Summary

This paper explores alternative strategies that will allow the currently inactive metric railway line of the Peloponnese network to create value for agro-food supply chains and to contribute to alternative destinations intensifying the tourism sector. The main scope towards this objective is to explore forms of competitive advantages supported by consolidating synergies developed in different scales (from local area initiatives to central urban nodes) in the wider region of Central, South and West Peloponnese through the introduction of bottom-up actions in all three economic sectors.

In a conjuncture of limited resources, redevelopment of the Greek railway remains the largest infrastructural project underway. Despite the macro-economic objectives set by policy-makers for the mobilization of effective and fast rail services across the TEN-T Corridor 22, the embeddedness of the networked railway paradigm has remains poorly studied in Greek spatial planning (Giannakou, Natsinas 2009). Although contemporary scientific research recognizes the need for an integrated planning approach between infrastructures and urbanization processes (Cascetta, Pagliara, 2009; Priemus, 2008, Scholl; 2012) in the Greek case, inconsistencies and asymmetries between clashing planning cultures obscure this perspective (Peric and Scholl, 2016). Hence, the observed gravitation towards selective technological modernization has prioritized tunneling effects within well-connected mega-cities while it has intensified the abandonment of regional rail branches within de-populated and fragmented rural zones.

With the aim to challenge this phenomenon, and in the frame of recent bottom up planning discussions that have been initiated by the ETH spatial planning department (CODE PATRAS, 2015; CODE PELOPONESE, 2016) this paper further discusses the alternative determinants that can become operational for the re-appropriation of obsolete railway branches. The methodology that has been followed does not reside on the optimization of a single infrastructural element (i.e. rail) or a territorial scale (i.e. the city of Patras), but rather on the description of a synthetic landscape of potential 'service ecologies' operating across scales. It recognizes that railway planning needs to adapt policies that will allow for the comprehensive reading of rail infrastructure as driver of the wider socio-spatial process (Kaika, 2005). Within this scope the research establishes a broader understanding of bottom up processes, social dynamics and regional characteristics that underpin the persistence of efficiency and innovation. It unveils synergies within three categories of the built environment aiming to describe the opportunities for reactivation: a) Rail corridors and the abandoned / underutilized metric line; b) Port infrastructures; c) Unused or abandoned building shells. These three elements are then combined with four economic activities across the whole spectrum of economic sectors: a) Agriculture and especially fruits, vegetables and wine -cultivation; b) Food processing and packaging; c) Research and development in the knowledge economy; d) Tourism development and accessibility of archaeological sites. Based on research that is grounded in robust cartographic information and analysis, it aims to unveil how a new scale of observation, enables the description and piecemeal design of how users, fields and immaterial services, previously excluded from traditional planning discourses, are shaped and performed. By avoiding logics of delivering singular design solutions, the objective remains on mastering processes which will prepare a landscape capable to serve and allow for ancillary activities to emerge in creative and unexpected ways as a potential activity grid instead of a network with pre-defined spatial functions.

This process not only results to the creation of multiple sources of direct and indirect investment but also reflects the maximization and adaptation of existing structures and infrastructures within inert market potentials. The "train-by boat", the "green-supply chain initiative", the "knowledge corridor" and the "cruise train" contribute to resilient determinants within a changing transport landscape which requires to be easily adaptable to the fluctuating social and economic structures.

Key words: rail networks, service ecologies, agro-food supply chains, tourism

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