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COPING WITH THE ECONOMIC CRISIS IN SPAIN: PUBLIC TRANSPORT SUPPLY AND HOUSEHOLD SPENDING PATTERNS

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Référence à la session / reference to the session

S3 – The impact of economic crisis and austerity policy on urban and regional development and inequalities in Europe

Résumé / Summary

The economic and financial crisis has been impacting European countries since 2007 at varying degrees. Numerous academic works on major economic crisis in the past have shown evidence that the transport sector, may it be passenger or goods transport, is very sensitive to the fluctuations of economic conditions.

Spain has been coping with a severe economic and financial crisis since 2007-2008 which resulted with a drop of macroeconomic indicators, the end of the housing bubble, the banking crisis of 2010 and a very high unemployment rate. Individual/household disposable income, public services and the welfare system were severely impacted and in 2007-2011, Spain became the country in the EU with the largest income inequality (OECD, 2014).

The objective of this paper is to improve understanding of the effects of the crisis on transport-related inequalities. We will study how did public authorities in the urban transport sector, on the one hand, and households, on the other hand cope with the impacts of the macroeconomic crisis on disposable public and private monetary resources:

- What measures have transport authorities implemented on public transport provision to address the impacts of the crisis?
- What trade-offs have households made between the different expenditure items, with a particular focus on transport expenditure?
- Are there any differences on household spending patterns according to their purchasing power and residential location?

This paper presents some of the findings of the research conducted in the CIME project (The Crisis and its Impacts on the Mobility in Spain. Measure, analysis and benchmark for the French case; Ray et al., 2015), funded by the French government, and carried out by a French-Spanish team.

The sources on public transport provision are data and reports produced by public agencies, particularly the Metropolitan Mobility Observatory, which collects, processes and analyses the yearly information provided by the main public transport authorities (OMM, 2006 to 2014). Also, qualitative data collected for the CIME research project (Ray et al., 2015) through semi-directed interviews of officials from transport authorities in seven metropolitan areas provide concrete examples of policy measures that were implemented to face the crisis.

The main data to study household spending is the annual national household budget survey, from 2006 to 2014 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2006 to 2014). The yearly sample contains more than 20 000 households with thorough information on expenditure through four nested nomenclatures. The social effects of the crisis are studied through household purchasing power, which is measured in per capita expenditure quintiles. The density classes (high-, medium- and low-density areas) are those used by Eurostat and the European national statistical agencies (Eurostat, 2003).

To cope with the crisis, public transport authorities reduced transport supply and increased fares, which had a greater impact on the poor and the residents of peripheral areas who are public transport captives. They also implemented other measures to bring in extra income which had no impact on transport services.

Transport is one of the items of household expenditure the most affected by the crisis. The average amount spent on transport fell to its lowest value in 2013, 63% of the amount spent in 2007. The reduction in the proportion of the household budget that is spent on transport is observed whatever the residential location or purchasing power of the household, with the exception of the poorest. Households reacted promptly to the crisis by reducing their purchases of new cars; their spending on transport use (fares, use of personal vehicles) was affected less significantly. Poor households and households living in low-density areas were least able to reduce their transport costs.

Sustainability-oriented transport policies promoting public transport and the reduction of car dependency, together with land-use policies that set out to control urban sprawl and concentrate activities may help to limit the impacts of an economic crisis on passenger travel.

Key words: economic crisis, household spending pattern, public transport supply, urban transport policy, Spain

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