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# The changing decision-making narratives in 25 years of TEN-T policies

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## Abstract

This paper reviews changes in the role and practice of planners in the last 25 years of European policy on the Trans-European Network for Transport (TEN-T), aiming at describing the role of technicians in the decision-making process, and their contribution to the consolidation of collaborative and transparent planning practices.

The review highlights the driving forces that have used technical considerations to merely create a self-justifying narrative of a process dominated by the institutional stakeholders. The key aspects examined include (1) the respective roles of institutional decision makers (at EU and national levels), other stakeholders and the public; (2) the technical tools mobilized in the process; and (4) the evolution of the prevailing narratives, their rationale, the factual evidence behind them, and their capacity to build up consensus and to empower or to alienate key stakeholders.

The TEN-T process was effectively captured by a coalition of EC and national transport services, as a means to claim more resources for transport infrastructure expansion. The coalition was backed by most of the transport stakeholders, in spite of some minor criticisms (on modal distribution...), as a way to get access to public funding. The academic criticism has not resulted in any changes (although has produced some self-justifying reports from the EC); legal and institutional "windows" to strengthen the planning process have not resulted in more collaborative practices or enhanced review practices.

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## 1. Introduction

The Trans-European Network for Transport (TEN-T) has been a part of European policies for more than twenty five years, and the term TEN-T has become familiar to most Europeans. Primarily, TEN-T can be considered as an archetypical example of a "megaproject", sharing the main traits described by Flyvbjerg (2003): a story of ambition and power with a weak technical logic, mainly and insufficient economic and environmental assessment of impacts. Moving beyond these critics, it is worth to consider TEN-T as process in which the institutional agents reposition their competences and influence, following the approach of authors such as Kaufmann's (2008) or Chaplain (1997)

for other megaprojects. TEN-T can be seen as an opportunity for such repositioning at a moment in which (1) the European Commission (EC) tried to expand its competences; (2) transport lobbyists were seeing decreasing investment in infrastructure and low priority and interest within the public; (3) de-regulation was the rising paradigm, and private involvement was considered as a value in itself.

The research hypothesis is that the changes in TEN-T policy have not primarily followed a technical logic, but have rather reflected the changing balance of power among institutional agents. The technical narrative has merely served as an "ex-post" justification of the options chosen in a politically-dominated process.

TEN-T could be seen as "politically constructed": as a newly-branded battlefield for the EC and the EU member states to expand their power and resources. But, to survive for 25 years, the concept needed to be sustained by convincing technical narrative; planners were needed to legitimate TEN-T before skeptical public opinions and lobbyists pushing for alternative priorities for public funding.

Two technical components have dominated the narratives (Knowles, 2006): technological innovation, with its powerful paradigm of ever faster and cheaper transport, and the not less powerful vision of transport as an enabler of economic growth, particularly for less developed regions to "catch up" with more prosperous ones. Alternative planning narratives, particularly from an environmental perspective, have been unsuccessful in challenging these components.

The paper is organized as follows: section 2 establishes the conceptual framework and the key research questions; section 3 reviews the political story of TEN-T, the (scarce) changes in the legal and institutional framework of the TEN-T process, and the planning narratives and coalitions associated to each period; section 6 concludes..

## **2. Interweaving planning and decision making**

### *2.1. Transport policy as a process*

Transport policies can be understood as the dynamic result of interactions among a variety of institutional, technical and social stakeholders (Innes, 1995). The illusions of an objective, scientifically-based process was challenged long time ago (Marcuse, 1976; Douglas, 2009), and since then, planners (in transport and other public policies dealing with territory) have desperately fought to build up an alternative understanding of the process they are involved in: leaving apart a minority of undeterred believers in the objectivity of transport planning as a science, most professionals currently stay some part in between two alternative visions: planning as a value-free activity, in which the formalization, openness and transparency of the process would provide the necessary framework for a deliberative reason to develop among participants (the Habermasian approach); and planning as a value-driven alternative, in which the views of some particular stakeholders should prevail for the sake of the common good (be this understood as the views of the less well-off, or as the views of the more dynamic and entrepreneurial actors in society...).

Transport policy has traditionally been value-driven, as objectives have been associated to a variety of values, such as those related to system efficiency (making the most of existing resources and the system in place), and those related to transformation (looking for a variety of "disruptive" changes, from economic development, to reduced inequalities among regions or people). More recently, environmental values have also become more and more frequently mentioned.

Kaufmann (2008) follows Jones's (1970) formulation of the decision-making process in public policy as starting by the setting of an agenda (the social construction of the problem to be solved and the development of the legal and procedural frameworks within which the problem lies) and the implementation of the measures chosen to tackle the problem. The agenda setting or social construction of the problem is the focus of this paper. The agenda setting process takes place at three different levels (Innes, 1995): the political level, the bureaucratic or technical level and the social level. It is worth assessing the relative importance of each level in TEN-T policy.

The quality of the process becomes less relevant once values take the stage. The conventional co-decision process enshrined in the European treaties conceives the deliberation process as a dialogue among national governments (the Council), the European executive branch (the Commission) and the European legislative branch (the Parliament), without providing detailed guidance on the involvement of economic and social stakeholders. It is up to each

institution to establish their own participatory and deliberative processes, to collect technical expertise, and build consensus within their constituencies.

Lacking formalized participatory procedures, stakeholders rely on a variety of "entry gates" to the TEN-T process. They can alternatively claim the need to adopt "broad European goals", while approaching the EC, and national needs, while approaching Member States. They can highlight a variety of social and economic visions while interacting with the various political parties at the European Parliament. At any rate, their capacity to influence the process will mainly rely on their own ability and resources: As there are no formalized processes to get the stakeholders included in the conversation, their inclusion largely remains at the mercy of the key institutional players.

As certain values are at the basis of the process, there is a need to relate proposals and to sustain positions on those values. In transport, this justifying role is entrusted to technical experts and researchers or, more generally "planners". It could be concluded that planners would be instrumental in creating the narratives at the service of a process mainly played at the political level. Changing narratives could be the result of progress in knowledge and innovation or merely the response to changing political strategies. In a bureaucratic or technically dominated process, the former would be more relevant, and the latter in a politically-dominated process.

The actors and the narratives become therefore the two main fields of attention. Both are further examined in the next sections.

## 2.2. *The actors*

Innes (2005) characterizes the policy process or "agenda setting" considering the relationships among three groups of actors: decision-makers, technicians, and the public at large. Depending on the influence of each group, Innes differentiates among three planning styles: "political", "bureaucratic", and "social movement", and calls for an alternative approach (the collaborative turn) to overcome their limitations.

A similar approach can be used to characterize the policy process in European transport. Decision makers include here a variety of actors in the EC, national governments and the European Parliament, which dominate the process in accordance with the "co-decision" rules. Technical bureaucracies play a mainly supportive role, providing technical and factual information to justify positions adopted in advance. As Richardson (1996) stated for the narrower context of transport planning in an English region, the various institutions or political actors commission studies, which take no consideration of the complex contexts in which transport planning operates, and which are providing the biased information that results from asking wrong, narrow-minded questions. Not surprisingly, technical information do not serve to expand and encourage the debate, but to dead-end discussions that makes technical arguments virtually irrelevant for decision-making.

The social and economic actors which constitute the European "public" are quite different from the players of the open participatory processes that are often found at the local level. On the one hand, these actors need substantial resources to participate; on the other hand, participation schemes in the EU are mainly done for information purposes only, without clear rules about their practical influence in the decision making process. To successfully influence the process, socio-economic actors have to mobilize substantial technical expertise, and to skillfully use it in a variety of written consultation procedures, to gain access to a variety of formal and informal meetings and to get in touch with officials at a myriad of services within the European bureaucracy, not to speak of the necessary contacts with at least some of the 28 member states.

There have been some attempts to level the playing field among actors and to move towards a more collaborative planning paradigm for European transport. This was notably the case in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the European Strategy for Sustainable Development (EC, 2001) calling on transport to integrate the objectives of sustainability, and with the adoption of the directive on strategic environmental assessment (SEA) (EU, 2001). Booth (2001) considers both as a window of opportunity to empower public participation and to overcome the tendency of transport planning to become merely a process of conflict resolution among public agencies and among transport modes. Obviously, the trends to marketization (i.e. to considering the transport market as the natural place for conflict resolution) and to politicization (i.e. to granting to the political level full power to take decisions) finally prevailed.

### 2.3. *Successful coalitions and their narratives*

Although successful coalitions in European transport policies have been built around political actors, technical and socio-economic actors have played a valuable secondary role for providing legitimacy and rationality. Following Kuhn's and Lakatos's description of the scientific paradigm (Kuhn, 1962; Lakatos, 1978), technical actors have produced the necessary arguments to preserve the core of the EU transport policy: transport as a key instrument for economic development, territorial cohesion, and European integration. At their turn, socio-economic actors have developed strategies to promote their views, which accept and further preserve that paradigm, and present their own objectives as complementary to it.

To preserve the core theory, the circle of protection or narrative has evolved during these years. The technical narrative has focused, alternatively on transport-centered efficiency, cohesion and accessibility, sustainability, or macroeconomics.

As a politically-driven process, TEN-T can be understood as a search for more resources and an expansion of the relevance of the European institutions (and mainly, the EC) in transport policy. But it is difficult to understand that this process could continue for more than two decades, unless some benefits have been ripped by other stakeholders, so that a successful coalition of promoters can consolidate and expand.

It is worth noting that transport infrastructure investment sharply decreased in the 1980s in Western Europe, and stabilized at around 1% of GDP in the mid-1990s. (ITF, 2013). The TEN-T concept is discussed and approved at a time in which many national transport agencies were facing shrinking public funding, providing fresh arguments to justify further investment in transport infrastructure, even if many national systems had achieved reasonable efficiency levels after four decades of sustained effort. TEN-T provided the necessary arguments and the financial incentives to keep the pipeline of projects running. However, the European funding covered merely a tiny percentage (up to 10% or 20%) of the total investment and only for those projects labeled as "TEN-T"; the success of the concept was probably due to its visual strength as a materialization of seamless travel throughout an integrated Europe: it is this powerful political narrative which prevails in the TEN-T vision.

The scientific narrative is developed to sustain the claim for significant socio-economic and spatial development impacts from transport infrastructure expansion, and has to accommodate the interests of the coalition: from a focus on efficiency- of interest mainly to the more developed, transit countries in Western Europe facing the threat of congestion, to an overwhelming interest on accessibility, mainly concerning peripheral countries in the South and, after the EU enlargement, in the East of Europe. The comparatively modest implementation of TEN-T compared to its objectives has not deterred researchers from looking for evidence of significant TEN-T impacts or, alternatively, the loss benefits for non-completion (Schade et al, 2015). At any rate, the old paradigm of "cheaper, faster" transport remains at the core of all scientific narratives (Knowles, 2006).

The legal and institutional framework for the materialization of TEN-T has been comparatively weak in terms of resources and competences. In spite of this, the EC has gained some field of action, from its initial role as mere funder of national projects to a more relevant role in the last years to monitor implementation through "project coordinators", a dedicated executive agency (INEA) and an expanding monitoring system (TEN-tec). These gains in influence have not resulted in relevant changes in the assessment practice of TEN-T, which largely remains in the hands of national governments following their own procedures: TEN-T has never been subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment, project assessment follows disparate national guidelines, and calls in the TEN-T legislation to consider a variety of impacts remain largely neglected. Planning narratives have changed, but they mostly serve to justify an institutionally-monopolized process. The analysis undertaken in the next section provides an overview of the changes in the planning narratives and their relationships with the political paradigm.

## 3. TEN-T as a political process: building up an effective coalition

### 3.1. *Setting the foundations (1985-1992)*

TEN-T can be seen as a by-product of the European single market project initiated in the mid-1980s. Until then, a modest transport infrastructure fund had been active in Europe for many years, without much political relevance, and the common transport policy had not made any meaningful progress for decades. The political project of the

"single market" offered an opportunity for the EC to gain influence in the transport field: on the one hand, by giving response to the European Court reproach to the member states for not having developed the common policy foreseen by the treaties; on the other hand, by developing a Keynesian investment program focusing on transport infrastructure in a context of sluggish economic growth. This vision was developed in 1986 by the EC (COM(1986)340 and COM(1986)341); the first document provided new rules to consolidate what until then was a pilot program supporting transport infrastructure of European interest; the second one envisioned a European high-speed rail (HSR) network.

Planners, and the transport research community at large, quickly supported the idea, on different grounds. Primarily, the interest was for transport performance: rail remained a core element in all the documents: for the promotion of combined transport for freight, and for the expansion of HSR lines for passengers. The purpose was to provide increased capacity and improved quality of services for the congested European core to cope with the increasing flows in a Europe without borders.

The original concept did not get the necessary support: on the one hand, it would put an enormous amount of resources in the hands of the EC; the EC would have had capacity to influence the priorities of national governments towards projects of a "European significance". On the other hand, the narrow transport-efficiency focus would concentrate the allocation of resources in the networks of the European core, at the expense of peripheral countries; rail revival (combined transport and HSR), and the completion of missing international links were the main topics on the agenda.

Different working groups followed. The "Group Transport 2000+" (1991) (a group of former high-level officials established by the European Commissioner for Transport) forecasted an imminent crisis for the European transport system if action was not taken, as a result of the increased flows following the single market. The experts pointed out that transport infrastructure investment was at a record low and that most governments and the public opinion were not giving to transport the relevance it deserved. The report also called to go beyond a "sole-supply" approach, taking into consideration the demand for better quality and the needs of territorial and regional planning "looking beyond short-term profitability". The narrative had therefore expanded from technical efficiency to spatial planning and to quality of service, making it possible to add to the TEN-T coalition new members from peripheral countries, supported by a variety of transport researchers, professionals, service providers and users appealed by the technological novelties required to provide higher quality in transport services.

In this period, the planning narratives moved quickly from a purely transport logic to a combination of transport and geography issues. At the time the "new economic geography" was starting, a renewed interest was found in the impacts of transport on regional development. This was coupled with interest in the most advanced economies for the societal impacts of transport, as illustrated for example by the "European network society", based on HSR mobility (Nijkamp, 1995). Whereas the engineering-based transport narrative was already well developed, this was not the case for multimodal transport or for questions related to quality of service. Space development was another relatively newcomer to the planning field (although transport and spatial issue had bloomed in the 1960s, planners had lost interest for them), and needed to be revisited. This would be one of the focus of transport research in the next years.

### *3.2. TEN-T formalized (1992-1996)*

Once the EC's plans to launch an ambitious, Brussels-controlled TEN-T program were abandoned, national governments became the main players, and the TEN-T concept evolved to accommodate a compromise among the diverging priorities of each member state, and to provide a fair distribution of the modest resources available. Two processes ran in parallel: the definition of the network as a whole and the identification of priority projects; the former was left to the EC; the later to a group of "personal representatives of the heads of states and governments". This group was able to put in place a list of priority projects two years before the TEN-T network were approved through the co-decision process (Turró, 1999).

Planning seemed to be almost completely out of the playing field. TEN-T was becoming a mere patchwork of national plans and priorities: many of the priority projects referred to one single country such as the Milan airport or the "Greek motorways", and most of those of a trans-national nature include large sections within each country, taking the lion's share of the project budget. As for the network, each transport mode was considered almost in

isolation, losing the initial multimodal ambition. The relationship between TEN-T and the 14 priority projects was never clear. Although the TEN-T guidelines, passed in 1996, included them as an Annex.

Button (1998) provides a critical review of this period of frantic, national-minded negotiation period. Lacking any solid planning activity at the European level, the process relied solely on conventional national planning approaches and the narrow logics of each transport mode. Funding was well below the initial expectations, and lacking consistent allocation mechanisms. European integration and the removal of (mostly never demonstrated) bottlenecks were the main justifications for the TEN-T concept. The result had fallen very short from the ambitious of a European parallel of the US Interstate program half a century before.

Vickerman (2000) criticizes the bottom-up logic of this initial TEN-T process: lacking concrete mechanisms for project selection and funding allocation, the network became a wish list of the European regions, lobbying at their turn their national governments to be adequately included, while national governments mainly tried to avoid any domestic tensions with their regions.

The maps and guidelines resulting from the TEN-T process remained in urgent need of justification, and planning was called to the rescue. Two narratives were tested. The first one elaborated on the accessibility gains provided by TEN-T; accessibility became a planning objective in itself, fully aligned with the regions' gained influence in the process. This was consistent with the priority granted to TEN-T in the regional development funds and the "cohesion funds", compensating the modest resources provided in the new TEN-T fund. Ironically, European funding seemed plenty available for doubtful transport infrastructure expansion in less developed regions, and not for congestion-prone areas in the continent core where the TEN-T concept had originally been born. And less well-off regions were confronted to biased incentives to dedicate their scarce resources to transport infrastructure rather than to alternative development policies.

The second narrative served to create a link between priority projects and economic development. Many of the priority projects included substantial rail and road sections, and this inspired researchers to revisit the spatial concept of corridor. Following traditional theories of location, the improved accessibility created by the TEN-T priority projects should generate a concentration of economic activity in their vicinity. The concept was however, dubious for many spatial planners (Priemus, 2003), which either saw corridor development as undesirable sprawl challenging the efforts for densifying urban areas, or at least as virtually impossible to implement, lacking the necessary governance tools. The discussion was fueled by another initiative of the EC: the development of a spatial development vision for Europe, which resulted in the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), approved in 1999. For a time, the corridor concept was backed in the ESDP drafts, merging together transport and regional development arguments. However, the concept was dropped, and the final document approved in Potsdam in 1999 by the European ministers in charge of spatial development only kept a milder reference to the relevance of transport to regional development (CSD, 1999).

During this period, the subsidiary role of planners became particularly obvious: the planning narratives increasingly focused on accessibility and territorial cohesion, as key measurable outcomes of transport policy and, particularly, of TEN-T. The link between accessibility and economic development was explored, but evidence was too weak, if not counterfactual, to build up any solid narrative. Accessibility became therefore a goal on its own and the main element of the planning narrative.

### *3.3. The (failed) integration of the environment (1996-2004)*

The environment could have played a decisive role in changing the TEN-T process and leveling the playing field among decision makers, technical expertise and the European public. After the implementation of the European directive on environmental impact assessment of projects (EIA) (EU, 1985), the EC launched a proposal in 1996 to establish a similar procedure for plans and programs. In 1998 the European Council launched the "Cardiff process" to integrate the objectives of sustainable development within all the sectoral policies of the EU, including transport and TEN-T. The SEA directive was approved in 2001, the same year of the approval of the first EU sustainable development strategy.

Transport was taken as a priority sector for "integration", and the green push in the EU was accompanied by intense technical work from experts and governmental officials from transport and environment. The outputs including a "Transport and Environment Reporting Mechanism" (TERM) based on indicators annually provided by

the European Environment Agency (EEA) since 1998, a variety of reports from an expert group on transport and environment between 2000 and 2003 and a myriad of consultancy reports and studies suggesting innovative transport planning tools putting the environment at the center of the decision-making process. There were unsuccessful attempts to conduct a full Strategic Environmental Assessment of TEN-T, as there was a mandate in the TEN-T guidelines requiring the EC to "develop appropriate methods of analysis for strategically evaluating the environmental impact of the whole network".

All these initiatives put together, they could have served to develop and apply new technical tools for the assessment and monitoring of the transport system, including TEN-T, and to provide more transparent information for a collaborative planning process opened to a wider spectrum of stakeholders. However, TEN-T remained protected from any comprehensive environmental assessment at the EU level, and the discussion and decision-making process remained mostly in the hands of national governments. The rich literature produced during these years on European sustainable transport was firmly supported by the EU framework programme on research and development (FP5); this was significantly halted in the next framework program (2006), as an indication of the loss of priority for this approach (Geerlings, 2003).

During this period, the planning narrative moved forward to integrate environmental objectives; but the practical results were scarce. The development of SEA methodologies provided new tools for measuring environmental impacts such as land fragmentation or emissions within the planning process. Nevertheless, these changes do not include the revision of the planning process from a collaborative perspective, in spite of many expectations. The new tools rather followed the path of the "accessibility" mania of previous years: developing models and indicators based on disputable hypotheses, with no clear influence on the decision-making process. Following Booth (2001) assessment, the window of opportunity to create an innovative planning narrative, opened by SEA and the "integration" paradigm, was closed too soon to actually change the planning process.

### *3.4. Cohesion as a primary objective (2004-2008)*

Nijkamp (1997) had anticipated the tendency of TEN-T for further concentration of activities and increasing disparities among regions. This trend could only be weakened, in his words, by a targeted regional policy on equity principles, meaning an orientation of growth towards adjacent and peripheral regions. He concluded that Europe was likely to become "a continent of privileged and less privileged regions".

This was not certainly the official view of the institutional stakeholders leading the TEN-T process. By that time, cohesion countries had put in place ambitious transport infrastructure programs; although with a generous contribution from European funds, the bulk of the investment remained in the national budget. More decisively, intensive transport investment had created an ever growing economic sector on its own, with substantial employment creation, and national and regional politicians could ever think of halting it. In 2004, countries such as Spain were dedicating more than 2% of GDP to transport infrastructure construction, more than twice the effort of any other advanced western economies. As stated by the periodical "Cohesion reports" of the EC, the slow progress in the completion of TEN-T was mainly happening in cohesion countries (EC, 2004).

Candidate countries had already joined the TEN-T concept through an identification of priorities (EC, 1998) and some EU funding through the Instrument for pre-accession assistance. Those were the framework conditions to undertake the first comprehensive revision of the TEN-T network. It is not surprise that the revision resulted in an ambitious expansion to the new member states of an already oversized network. The list of priority projects was updated and replaced by a list of 30 priority projects, most of them including dates for expected completion. At the time, only two of the priority projects approved in 1994 had been completed (EU, 2004).

In spite of the uncertain outcomes achieved thus far, too much was still expected from TEN-T, particularly by the now much expanded and influential group of cohesion countries. The terms of co-financing of TEN-T requested a significant effort from the national budgets of those countries, diverted from other priorities and, to judge following Nijkamp's (1997) expectations, the main benefits would be ripped by advanced metropolitan regions, most of them in the European core. There have been different interpretations of the positive attitude of cohesion countries towards TEN-T, including the positive short-term Keynesian effects on consumption and employment in stressed societies, the lack of feasible alternatives in a political context of liberalization and dwindling public policies, and the increasing pressures of national and regional coalitions ripping short-term benefits such as the construction, real

state and tourism sectors. Other arguments have pointed out to the prospects to re-gain power, influence and direct action by stressed national governments facing decentralization challenges (Albalade, Bel and Fageda, 2015). The dubious effectiveness of TEN-T to create resilient economies and societies was ultimately illustrated by the effects of the economic crisis since 2008.

The failed "environmental turn" was therefore followed by a renewed interest in the planning narrative of accessibility and territorial cohesion. The main novelty was the focus on rail, as a reaction of the road-dominated investment of the prior periods in southern countries. The new rail consensus was attractive to old and new cohesion countries, as well as to central countries willing to expand HSR; furthermore, this would represent an impressive push for the European rail industry, mainly based on the most advanced economies of the EU.

The planning narrative had therefore to justify the role of rail in accessibility gains. Being the density of rail networks much lower than for roads, and the investments required much higher, these virtues could only be justified either focusing on a few busy corridors, or taking rail as the "backbone" of a multimodal system reaching all regions. Planners mostly developed the latter narrative

### *3.5. A new role for the EC (2008-2015)*

The revision of the TEN guidelines introduced some changes, with a stronger implementation role for the EC, through the creation of a new executive agency in October 2006 and the new roles of "project coordinators" for each priority project. The new executive agency, renamed in 2014 as the Innovation and Networks Executive Agency (INEA), would not become fully operational and responsible of the management of all TEN-T open projects until January 2009.

The aftermath of enlargement for the EU transport policy saw an unprecedented effort of policy revision, including the TEN-T component. The effort included three major studies conducted in 2008-2009 and a 6-month public consultation process in 2009. The studies provided long-term transport scenarios forecasts for 2030 and 2050 (Petersen et al, 2009), an evaluation of the outcomes of the common transport policy (including TEN-T) (SDG, 2009) and the conclusions of a series of three focus groups with a variety of transport experts and stakeholders (EC, 2009). It is worth noting that all these studies failed to anticipate the profound and long-term consequences that the financial crisis would have in the EU.

The interest of the EC in gathering technical expertise for TEN-T continued during the revision of TEN-T, started in 2010. Three working groups were put in place, including one specifically in charge of providing a sound methodology for TEN-T planning. Regrettably, the working group's planning provisions were limited to technical considerations, without addressing the crucial aspects of the planning process itself and the involvement of the various agents (EC working group, 2010).

The revised TEN-T guidelines, approved in 2013, managed to reduce the ambition of the TEN-T by selecting a reduced or core network, with 2030 as horizon for completion, and leaving the rest of the former TEN-T (now called the comprehensive network) to a limbo status, with completion expected by 2050. The core network included a list of nine core network corridors, where the effort should be concentrated in the next years; each corridor would be followed by one coordinator appointed by the EC.

The new approach could be seen as an attempt to liberate the EU from getting involved in projects of a purely regional interest, as had been the case in the past (Proost, 2011); not surprisingly, this received criticism from those considering TEN-T as a key policy for regional development (e.g. Rosik (2015) referring to Poland).

In spite of the significant technical efforts mobilized during this period, the actual definition process of the core network and its nine corridors did not diverge much from the usual political bargaining that characterized TEN-T in the past. As for the new TEN-T guidelines (EU, 2013), some new guidance on TEN-T "resource-efficient" planning was added, including the need for strategic environmental assessment, network vulnerability and adaptation to climate change and contribution to mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions; but the actual realization of these planning efforts was not explicitly requested to be done at the European level, but to member states. In spite of these limitations, the EC will be able to put in place a technical information and monitoring platform for TEN-T (TEN-tec information system), which could provide a better technical base for future planning

The new planning narrative strengthened the "transport efficiency" rationale that had been relegated in the early 1990s providing a rationale for real prioritization of actions. The "corridor" concept was introduced from a purely



transport perspective, apparently devoid of the spatial planning vision of the past. Multimodality emerged as the basic characteristic of corridors, conceived as a bunch of interconnected infrastructures. The focus on accessibility and territorial cohesion seemed to be, finally, relegated. Last, but not least, the new planning narrative remained lacking any ambition on the improvement of the planning process itself. The obvious limitations in terms of access of stakeholders to the deliberative process, lack of formalization of consultation and isolation with respect to other policy fields were not even mentioned.

#### 4. Conclusions

TEN-T has stimulated a flooding of research studies on the socioeconomic and spatial impacts of major transport infrastructure projects. While spatial researchers have developed new tools to describe the wider accessibility gains associated to TEN-T (Gutierrez, 2001 and 2011; Van Exel, 2002), they have found scarce- if any- evidence of the economic impacts associated to increased accessibility in less developed regions (Ribeiro, 2010). Researchers for the economics field have tried to fill that gap with general equilibrium models (GEM), through the impact of improved transport conditions on cost functions (Schade et al, 2015), but these impacts seem marginal in advanced economies with already well-developed transport systems (Lakshmanan, 2011). For a long time, the dominance of the perspective of the economic geography has left aside the other two planning narratives: transport efficiency and planning as a process (with a focus on the environment). Whereas the former has regained attention since 2008, the latter only experience a short period of interest in the early 2000s. The obvious limitations of the TEN-T policy have not resulted in a willingness to revise a decision-making process dominated by member states and with limited transparency.

The TEN-T policy has provided a biased set of incentives to some member states to overspend in transport infrastructure, exaggerating the European added value of many projects, as anticipated by authors such as Sichelschmidt (1999). Furthermore, the TEN-T label remains being, to many regions, an effective way to bargain additional transport investments from their national governments. Such a politically-dominated planning process has proved to have a high risk to generate a good number of high-cost projects with dubious benefits.

In spite of the large amount of research generated around TEN-T, the attention given to the planning and decision-making process has been modest. Research has been focusing in providing (and challenging) the various justifications for TEN-T (growth, prosperity; cohesion, efficiency...) rather than developing alternatives to a biased and politically-controlled decision making process. The planning narratives have merely followed the political leadership of the process, without challenging the rules of deliberation, power distribution and decision-taking, and without highlighting the obvious deficits in transparency and participation.

TEN-T could therefore be characterized as a policy lacking a robust planning process. On the one hand, the technical and scientific evidence provided has not served to revise the core policy assumptions; on the other hand, the evidence and factual information gathered is not made available to a wide range of stakeholders (beyond the circle of interest of the transport community) for deliberation in a formalized way. It seems to have been a lost opportunity to improve the transport planning process: for the time being, little if any discussion is progressing on the governance of TEN-T, in spite of the emergence of new players like INEA. The environment remains as a good option to widen the circle of debate on transport and to change planning processes, but the evidence from the early 2000s show the barriers for reform at the EU level. Existing tools, such as SEA, could serve to reform the TEN-T planning process if conducted early enough and well before the network components and the priority projects are approved. At the very least, this could serve to request from member states to make further progress in their own SEA processes in transport planning with a TEN-T component.

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