

High-speed mobility and social justice

The Italian State Railways between liberalization, high-speed train and abandoned railways: tools for critical assessment and identification of alternative models of mobility.

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Introduction

This paper reports the preliminary results of two studies¹ published by the Authors. The goal of the first study is to analyse the relation between the speed of transport and the achievement of social justice. The aim of the second study is to analyze the territorial effects of railways policies in the era of liberalization / privatization which has been taking place in many countries of European Union since the mid-Nineties. The common objective is to conclude evaluating tools for railways policies and for the current patterns of transport mobility. The final goal is to suggest possible sustainable measures.

1. About mobility and social justice

Is it possible to determine how systems of transport contributes to the achievement of social justice through mobility behaviours?

As a matter of fact social justice can be considered also a field of study between political economy, transport economy and urban planning (Figure 1).

As we know, infrastructure and territory are strongly related. Innovations in transport modes and travels management produce visible urban, economical and social changes. These changes are an alteration of pre-existing space balances. Also the development and the consolidation of a society mostly regulated by the laws of a global market, rather than by a civil economy, produces such changes, in that this facts may attracts new infrastructures and different individuals needs and wants. This inevitably produce an alteration of territorial balance.

In this context the high-speed mobility is both an instrument for integration, as a support for the global economy, and its own product, because it is a link between the strategic nodes, as global cities, and it can satisfy a certain type of transport demand.

¹ Ilaria Panato, “*Velocità Energia e Territorio. Modelli di mobilità e giustizia sociale. Trasformazioni urbane a Roma e Buenos Aires nell’era del libero mercato*”; Mario Cerasoli, “*Ricadute territoriali dei processi di liberalizzazione/privatizzazione delle infrastrutture*”.

In fact it is difficult to evaluate if the high-speed mobility generates a territorial, economic and social gap, or if it is the geographical expression of it. The reasons of this space unbalance can lie in geography *governance* and political economy. Italy is an example, because the space unbalance caused by TAV (*Treno Alta Velocità*) is the results of a specific transport policy which aimed to connect only strategic nodes without giving the possibility to medium cities to reach the main stations.

In this case the transport speed can be considered a variable that affects individuals freedom and opportunities as well as the ability of the market to redistribute the economic and social costs-benefits. This is also visible on territory as a space gap, caused by the important infrastructure.

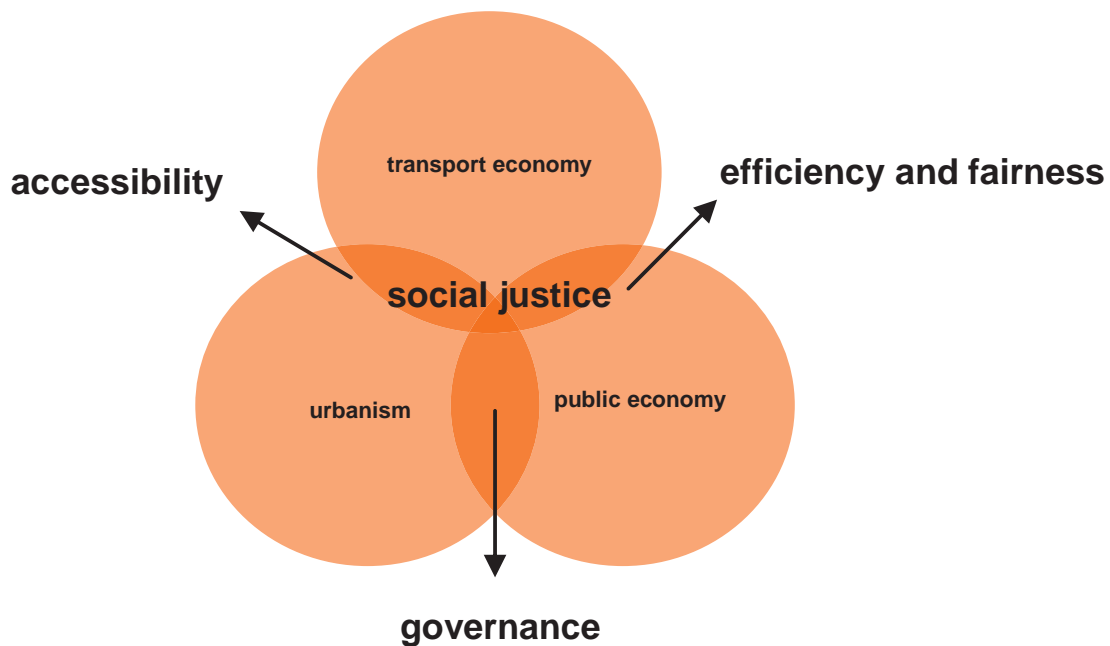


Figure 1: Common language.

In order to better understand the phenomenon of TAV, social justice will be used as a tool to verify the existence of spatial equity.

Social justice represents a filter of analysis applicable to urban, regional, interregional and national levels.

In the research we use the *Capabilities approach* as a tool to answer the question mentioned at the beginning, related to social justice in transport. Amartya Sen² introduces a new economic approach, developing the theory of equality and opportunity-freedom, based on two notions, those of capabilities and functioning. He considers these concepts as the most appropriate measures for evaluating the quality of life and freedom.

We observed that transport has a special role in combining functioning because it has the property to connect individuals, markets and distribution, at many society levels. So, in order to evaluate social justice it becomes important to consider not only accessibility, but also the *circular* role of transport in the economy. Beyond the

² Nobel Prize to the economy in 1998.

ability to combine functioning, transport should ensure empowerment for all individual in the society through their own capabilities. This is the point. By connecting almost only strategic nodes, transport won't make his job because it leaves behind not infrastructured territory and individuals are obliged to use private transport or to move in the important nodes.

We also assert that *circular property* of transport has an intertemporal relevance. In fact in order to be considered fair it should be ensured to future generations at least the same level of infrastructure and accessibility.

For these reasons we would like to complete the concept of accessibility developed in the literature. The goal is to emphasize the importance of how transport has the property of circularity and the ability to empower individuals by ensuring "*relevant space region*"³ also to future generations. This is possible only by combining the political economy actions and the individuals mobility behaviours, by their *needs, wishes and entitlements*.

2. About infrastructures and liberalizations: the case of the Italian railways

The railways infrastructures liberalization process launched by the European Union in the early Nineties⁴, had the aim of creating a single European rail market. This reform had the purpose to vitalize the railways market conditions and to orient the supply more towards social needs rather than financial interests.

Actually today this reform can be seen as a complicating factor for territorial frameworks as a whole, which, if not managed properly, may not allow the same levels of access to the network. Consequently, this process can determine situation of abandonment and degradation of rail infrastructure that are an important resource of fixed social capital.

Italy transposed the EU Directives in an exemplary manner through the legislative decree 8 July 2003 n.188 which states that every European rail company can have access to the national infrastructure and it is able to perform any kind of traffic. The decree significantly extends the possibility to transit on rail network towards every entitled subject, either for passengers or cargo transport.

However despite the 49 railway companies currently having a license to transit on the railway infrastructure, the Italian railway market is characterized by some structural anomalies.

The first anomaly is due to the presence of a national railway company, Trenitalia SpA, founded by the (pseudo) privatization of the State railways. Trenitalia is now owned entirely by the Ferrovie dello Stato Group SpA, a private company where the State has the entire holding. The group occupies a predominant position in the market because it holds the 95% of the traffic market for passengers and the 92% of the traffic market for cargo.

The group holds other private companies, such as RFI (Rete Ferroviaria Italiana), totally owned by the State. In this way the holding can operate through the entire national railway network without other competitors.

³ Berg, L. van den & Pol, P.M.J., 1998.

⁴ Directive 91/440/EEC of 29 July 1991.

The separation between the network operator and the main railway company, required by EU Directive, hides a formal and a *de facto* rail monopoly controlled by the State. This matter, by the time, is causing conflicts between competitors especially regarding the management of the distribution of slot and in the preparatory execution activities (testing, rescue, etc.).

High Speed Railway (Figure 2) has been installed in this complicated market context.



Figure 2: “Freccia Rossa” high speed train (Trenitalia – TAV – Treno Alta Velocità).

3. About speed and social justice

Transport speed is a critical element between individuals and their space of movement and interaction: travel, space gaps and urban culture⁵. Some authors indicate a direct relation between individual social-status and transport speed. So from this point of view it is quite true that the faster an individual can travel the higher is its position in the social scale. And *vice versa*⁶. The speed can hide a different importance of individuals in society: to the lack of a social equity corresponds therefore a lack of [infra] structural equity⁷.

As we already mentioned before, speed has a significant role in the mobility of individuals, because it partly affects the ability to achieve their needs and wishes. But it can't be considered a determining factor. At the end the element of choice and sustainability (energy degradation) are the key variables in order to guarantee transport social justice.

In fact behind individual choice exists the following relation:

⁵ The speed is a real border, first cultural and then spatial: “Tell me how fast you go and I'll tell you who you are” (Ivan Illich, 1973).

⁶ J. Robert, 1992.

⁷ Ivan Illich, 1974.

pro capita infrastructure → accessibility → relevant space region.

Does the possibility to reach Milan from Rome in three hours really matter for all individuals? Can it be considered a necessary factor in order to combine functioning and give a significant fair distribution of freedom and opportunity to a relevant number of people? Evidently the needs of the “fast” social class are more important than those of the “slow” social class. However, it can’t be considered the only factor that influence social justice in transport, as we said before.

Speed, or *High Speed*, is a product of the global and virtual economy. It may respond the need to reach a destination in the shortest time, with the best comfort and the lowest -cost - opportunity. For this reason speed can be used for evaluating the efficiency of a transport system according to a space-time parameter.

So speed is a necessary but not a sufficient variable to evaluate the social justice in the transport system.

4. About TAV: “Fast” territories and “Slow” territories.

TAV started operating in 2009 connecting few main Italian cities, from Turin to Salerno. In fact travel time were significantly reduced and for the first time rail started to be in direct competition with the air transport market⁸.

Huge investments were entirely used for construction the TAV while the quantity and quality of the connections that continued to play and important role for the country (as the traditional railways) remained essentially unaltered or worsened⁹.

What happened in fact is that today all the others rail connections register travel times significantly higher than in the past. This circumstance shows a progressive loss of interest from the Ferrovie dello Stato Group for the “slow” rail network, mainly because it is less profitable: Ferrovie dello Stato couldn’t apply market rates to “slow” rail network (figure 3).

The [false] rail market privatization and the [pseudo] liberalization in Italy has produced only a clear separation between high profitability lines – basically those with AV – and low profitability lines - the remaining rail network¹⁰ (figure 4).

⁸ Milan and Naples are now connected with the high speed rail in 4 hours and 25 minutes.

⁹ On the line “old” Milan Naples the same connection now requires 8 hours and 54 when covered with an Intercity train compared to 6 hours and 50 minutes needed to an equivalent train “Rapido” in 1991.

¹⁰ The high-speed rail lines serving cities which together count 5,728,499 inhabitants that become 12,169,720 when you consider their provinces /metropolitan areas, respectively 9.7% and 20.6% of the 59,131,287 inhabitants of the entire nation. While the rest of the population must make do with a railway network more and more degraded.



Figure 3: “Slow” railway Sulmona-Carpinone (Regione Abruzzo).

The first territorial consequence, one can assume, is the demographic polarization of urban and metropolitan areas with the highest level of connection – “fast territories” – with the consequent increase of the phenomena of congestion of settlements and sprawl of constructions. To this we must add the increasing phenomenon of the left behind territories – “slow territories” – that progressively had been excluded from the fast mobility circuits determining a space gap.

This phenomenon is even more important if one considers that among the goals of the Community directives regarding rail transport, there was also the functional integration. We must say that the Italian rail network at the beginning of the liberalization process was certainly not an “integrated” network and still does not show homogeneous levels of technological evolution, with obvious consequences on the free movement of convoys.

5. Some concluding comments

The Italian railway network today does not guarantee the same level of accessibility and therefore individuals do not enjoys the same level of possibility to combine *functioning*. This means that social justice is not granted at different level in the social scale. Social justice should be the core goal of a transport system in order to satisfy the individual right of movement.



Figure 4: High Speed Railways (Alta Velocità).

But can we say that this is an effect of the process of privatization / liberalization in an absolute sense? Or can we identify some critical issues in the Italian formula?

The negative spatial effects are attributable more to - ineffective - transport policies adopted by the Italian government during the years than to ineffectiveness or wrongness of the European reference legislation.

Moreover, the lack of separation between the infrastructure operator (RFI – Rete Ferroviaria Italiana) and the rail company which, in fact, has the monopoly in passenger traffic (Trenitalia), didn't allow the effective liberalization of the railway market.

In fact many regions have preferred to invest their financial resources to the normal rail lines that they already owned or towards other models of transport (for example

road transport). This happened mainly because the network wasn't renovate before the starting of Italian liberalization process, It is therefore necessary to identify an innovative railways policy, coherent with the dynamics of territorial development and able to correct the distorted patterns of mobility. With the goal of socially "right" mobility .



Figure 5: The "Pendolino" high speed train (Trenitalia).

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