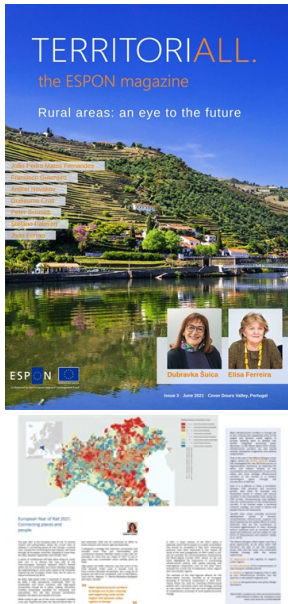




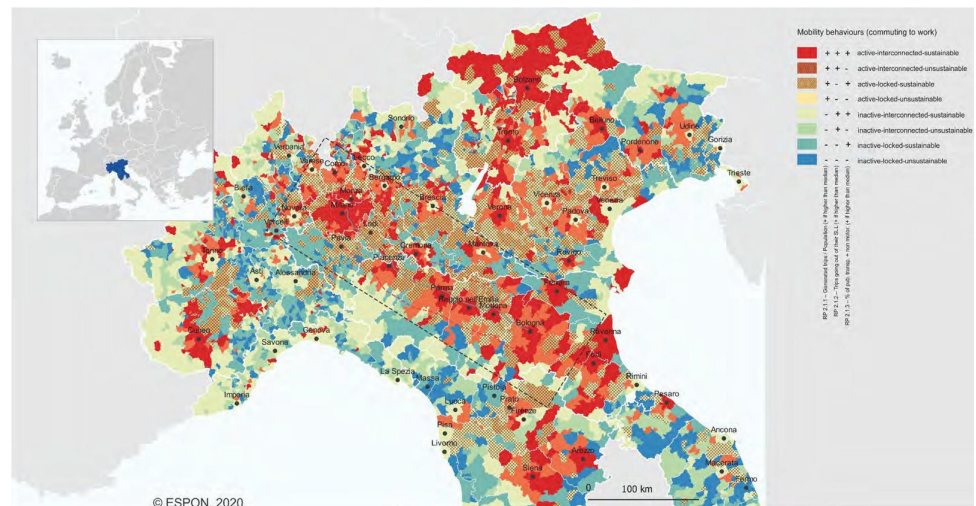
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European Year of Rail 2021. Connecting places and people



Valeria Fedeli

The year 2021 is the European year of rail. To remind citizens and policymakers about the crucial roles of railways in connecting places all over Europe, a special train, named the Connecting Europe Express, will travel through 26 European countries, stopping in more than 40 cities, between September and October 2021.

A series of conferences will take place along its route; their aim is to discuss the new role of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) framed within the EU Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy. By implementing an action plan based on 82 initiatives inspired by the European Green Deal, the EU aims to reduce emissions by 90 %.

By 2030, high-speed traffic is expected to double, and by 2050, a fully operational, multimodal TEN-T for sustainable and smart transport with high-speed connectivity should be in place, making interurban mobility sustainable, available for everybody and everywhere. This will also increase connections between the places and people of Europe.

While trying to get out of the most consistent mobility crisis ever experienced after the Second World War, in late December 2020 the EU confirmed its effort to build cohesion and reduce regional disparities.

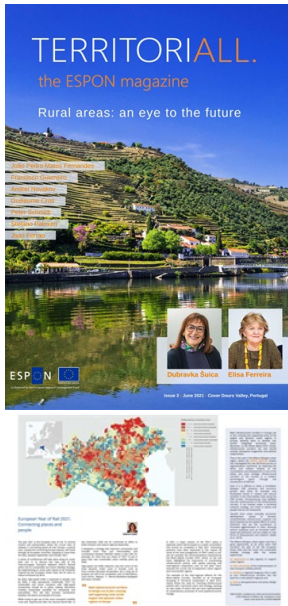
It designed a strategy that improves connectivity and includes more than just intermodality and coordination between Member States: It also calls, for example, for

cities that are nodes of TEN-T to put in place their own sustainable urban mobility plans by 2030.

High-speed rail (HSR) networks now link some of the most dynamic urban cores in Europe, such as Paris-London-Brussels-Amsterdam, but a long list of projects are still to be completed, such as Rail Baltica, Lyon-Torino, Basque Y, Vienna-Bratislava-Budapest and Seine-Scheldt.



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" MAIN INFRASTRUCTURAL CORRIDORS IN EUROPE ARE IN FACT CROSSING AND SUPPORTING SOME OF THE LARGEST AND DYNAMIC URBAN REGIONS IN EUROPE "

In 2021, a major revision of the TEN-T policy is expected, which will be based on a public consultation that should be completed in May 2021. Interesting positions have been expressed in this respect by some of the local protagonists of TEN-T policy so far; see, for example, the recommendations expressed by the Rhine-Alpine Corridor EGTC, which, on the one hand, highlighted the importance of coordinating infrastructural policies with spatial planning and interregional cooperation, and, on the other hand, stressed the crucial role of polycentric urban regions and cross-border regions.

The example of the inter-regional alliance for the Rhine-Alpine Corridor, founded as an European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation in April 2015, clearly shows the need for matching infrastructural policies with a territorial vision and strategy, working on new scales of action that are more representative of contemporary processes of socio-spatial-economic change.

Main infrastructural corridors in Europe are in fact crossing and supporting some of the largest and dynamic urban regions in Europe, allowing them to develop into further integrated functional areas. Moreover, as the Rhine-Alpine EGTC shows, infrastructural corridors can and should activate new' spatial imaginaries and political subjectivities?.

That is the case in the Milano-Bologna urban region, where the **ESPON IMAGINE** project has investigated the role of 'infrastructures as regionalization machinery' by exploring the direct and indirect impacts of the consolidation and development of one of the oldest and most strategic infrastructural corridors of the country in a modern technological space, through the introduction of HSR line.

Even if it is difficult to show a correlation between HSR presence and economic growth, data show, for example, new localisation trends in creative and cultural activities in the intermediate cities along the HSR corridor. Simultaneously, they highlight how the reinforcement of the infrastructural corridor, if not framed under a territorial cohesion strategy, can invest in places and people that do not necessarily "benefit from urban centrality (economic development, access to services, comprehensive infrastructure support) but [are] impacted by the spatial effects of urban extension that are the counterpart to increased agglomeration in cities, receiving various surpluses such as increased traffic, waste and pollutants, and are subject to new forms of dispossession and violence" (Addie et al., 2019).

The Milano-Bologna urban region now has a great opportunity, as do many other HSR corridors: the year of rail, the European Green Deal and the smart and sustainable mobility strategy offer the unique opportunity

to experience a new capacity to support urban regions

to take advantage of the implementation of new transport mobility policies

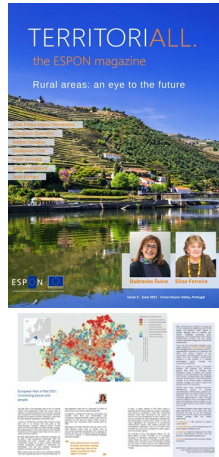
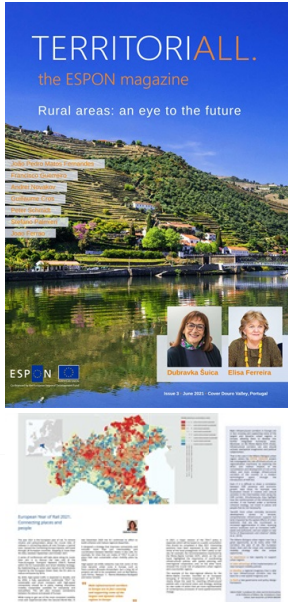
to develop a regional imaginary that is able to turn infrastructural corridors into the basis for a new spatial imaginary and

to feed a new governance and policy design framework.

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