

I Introduction

1 The changing context of the high-speed train

Since its first operation in Europe in 1982, the relationship between the high-speed train and planning has experienced a considerable dynamization. This is not only due to the specific characteristics of this transport mode, but it is also based on societal changes at large that have decisively modified its interpretation and perception by social actors. In consequence, the high-speed train (HST) has become one of the most important triggers for large-scale transformations of spatial and urban structures, considering the long-term implications, project dimensions and investment volumes related to its integration. What exactly has happened in the meantime?

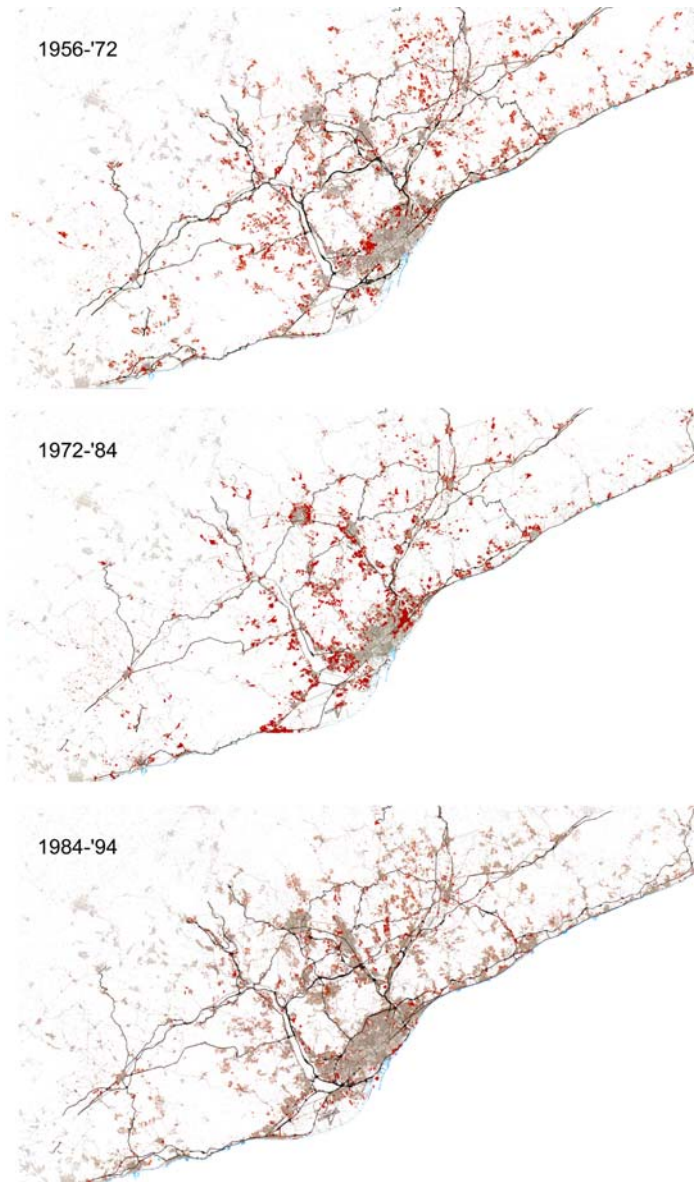
1.1 Modernization as condition

The basic references in this respect are the process of globalisation and the deployment of information and communication technologies (ICT). Global capital markets, changing production structures and location choices of enterprises and households, as well as new forms of employment organization, stand for essential implications. The rise of an economy of “flexible accumulation”¹ has been accompanied by a transformation of urban settlement structures. The main features of this transformation are a selective concentration of functions and parallel continuation of sub-urbanisation, urban sprawl and socio-economic segregation. New transport patterns have emerged, characterized by growing average travel distances and a “crisscross” mobility in urban agglomerations. Last but not least, social structures have also become transformed. With the processes of individualisation, changing value orientations and time structured urban lifestyles have become diversified, attributing an increasing importance to the quality of the environment and leisure activities.

The large urban agglomerations, in particular, have come to be featured at the intersection of these dynamics. Here, the concentration of important control functions, a favourable accessibility by different transport modes, diversified economic structures and a qualified employment market appear to be combined with a high standard of public facilities, housing offer, leisure options and personal services. At the same time, however, these areas also have to deal with a concentration of the problems that this development implies. High resource consumption, noise emission and pollution, traffic congestion, urban decay and dis-urbanization, as well as demographic shifts, unemployment and social conflicts equally characterize the policy agenda of cities and urban agglomerations (Fig.I.1).

¹ Harvey 1995, 49

Fig.I. 1: The Àrea Metropolitana de Barcelona as an example: Urban growth and transformation 1956-94; Source: Font/ Llop/ Vilanova 1999 – The phases identified by the authors are described as “aggregation”, “dispersion” and “polarization” (*ibid.* 102-8).



1.2 Shifting paradigms and modes of planning

In this rapidly transforming context, the orientations of policy making and planning have necessarily become reconsidered and complemented. A strong *economic imperative* has started to pervade all sectoral policies, promoting the strategy of “liberalisation” and a new confidence in (global) market control for improved economic efficiency. Furthermore, with the UN world summit on environment and development in 1992, the concept of “sustainability” has started its policy career, following the ambition to answer the questions of (global) resource consumption and intra-/inter-generational equity. Yet a comprehensive paradigm change has not been achieved and the contradictions between the new claims remain unresolved.

These general orientations are reflected to a different degree in the strategies, processes and measures of spatial and urban planning that have been developed. In this, the inter-sectoral character of planning involves the notion that even opposing claims have mutually influenced each other, thus leading to particular forms of “combined” instruments. At the strategic level, the increasingly integrative approach to urban & transport development, the gradual liberalisation of the transport sector, or the introduction of an obligatory environmental impact assessment (EIA) for new projects may serve as examples here — all of which have also had a particular relevance for the integration of the HST.

As an implicit consequence for the processes of planning, a growing multiplicity of actors has become drawn in. The involvement of “new” actors is partly due to the extended role of the private sector in the financing and realization of urban and transport projects. But also the requirements for coordination between multiple interests have brought about changes in the institutional context, such as new agencies

or forms of cooperation. For the integration of the HST, the shifting status of the national railways has been of especially crucial importance here, since privatization and the division of tasks (infrastructure, operation, real estate) have substantially modified corporate orientation and priorities.

Finally, at the level of implementation the habitual planning practice has been complemented by new instruments. In particular, large-scale projects aiming to realize urban transformations “in one go” through specific public-private partnership constructions have become frequent approach. Yet, their position outside the regular frameworks, the divergent goals of the partners and the complexity involved make them a particularly risky task. At the other end of the spectrum, there has been an increasing demand for citizen inclusion and participation in planning, supported by the scheme for a “Local Agenda”. These processes provide a broad basis of legitimation, but collide with ambitions for enhanced large-scale urban transformations. Planning thus has to deal with these diverse types of plans, projects and procedures, guided by an equally diversified spectrum of principles and objectives.²

1.3 The “arrival” of the high-speed train: Opportunities and threats

The described context dynamics form the essential background against which the integration of the high-speed train — a transport mode specialised for the fast and direct connection between urban locations — needs to be assessed. Starting from a situation where only conventional railway links existed in Europe, a high-speed train network is currently being developed that selectively connects cities and regions (Fig.I.2).

Fig.I. 2: Europe after the integration of the HST: A contraction of geographical space through the selective improvement of accessibility; Source: GIP transalpes 1999, 10.

Therefore multiple hopes and fears are related to the “advent” or “arrival” of the HST as cities, regions and even countries see their relative (external) accessibility becoming modified — sometimes radically. As the axes and stations of the HST give rise to new schemes and plans at various scales, a key question becomes *where this vehicle will actually stop*. Apart from the present main stations, the establishment of new centers within the urban agglomerations and the connection of international airports, in particular, but also new “satellite” stations at the regional level could be envisaged, since the construction of new rail infrastructure offers various options.



² For a more comprehensive overview on contemporary urban transformations see e.g. Borja/ Castells 1997; Jouve/ Lefevre 1999; Bagnasco/ Le Galès 2000; Hall/ Pfeiffer 2000; Soja 2001

Consequently manifold hypotheses are linked to the new connections, regarding for instance economic development and structural change, the efficiency and safety of transport relations, but also functional development and urban revitalization in the HST station areas (Fig.I.3). In contrast, more critical voices emphasize the (selective) acceleration of the transport system, spatial polarization effects, the comparative neglect of the regional railways, or the mono-structuration of HST station area developments. Simply because of the *dimension* of change they initiate, HST projects appear as an enormous potential and an enormous risk at once. And this is exactly the strategic point where the subject of this study is situated.



Fig.I. 3: Urban transformation through the HST: The large-scale project "Euralille", literally "built on" the accessibility change by the new HST line London/Paris/Brussels. In the background, the old downtown area of Lille. Source: Ville de Lille 1994, 4

2 Case studies: Questioning planning in practice

From the outset, the integration of the HST is a *European* topic that is dealt with in practically all EC countries,³ involving public and private actors from all levels. They have been working on the opportunities and threats that the integration of the HST represents and have elaborated plans and projects according to their respective conceptions. To enter this multi-sectoral planning process, and as an empirical basis for detailed analysis, a cross-national comparative study of various European cities represents the only promising approach. Contrasting different local, regional and national planning processes for the integration of the HST can underscore similarities and differences, but also illuminate the role of the European level.

Drawing on concrete case studies, the objective is thus to reconstruct the respective planning processes in order to identify the strategic orientations that have marked their development and outcomes. Against the background of the ongoing transformations of spatial planning and urban structures sketched above, this analysis will seek to provide answers to the following key questions:

³ In Central and Eastern European countries plans for HST lines are still in a very early stage. Yet the schemes of the International Union of Railways (UIC) already consider this development. See chapter IV.0.3

Planning programmes

- What (strategic) objectives for spatial- and urban planning have been linked to the integration of the HST?
- Which sectoral policies are concerned by these strategies and how do they relate to each other?

Planning processes

- How are the key decisions about the plans and their implementation arrived at, and what are they based upon? Which resources are important for the power position of the different actors?
- What conflicts arise between actors and how are they being resolved? Who are the leading actors, and who forms their opposition?
- What shifts can be observed in respect to the role of certain actor types in planning practice (e.g. nation state, regions, local authorities, operators, developers, etc.)?

Trans-national comparison

- What are the differences and similarities between the local, regional and national approaches from a trans-national perspective? What is the influence of local or regional cultures and specificities?
- What is the role of European policies and actors? Do they bring more conformity, or do local, regional and national characteristics prevail?

3 Towards a discursive notion of “planning”

Regarding the issues at stake, the integration of the HST is thus a main concern of *planning*. Here the focus will be on *spatial* planning i.e. the subject of planning is *space* and its production, structuration and consumption. Spatial planning involves multiple actors from different sectoral fields such as urban development, transportation, environment, economic development, and social affairs, but also from the different levels (local, regional, national and European) with their respective legislations, planning cultures and practices. The fact that all of these different actors with partly diverging interests clash in spatial planning processes raises the question of what forms the basis of the *rationality* that can lead from conflict to consensus?

Planning history is often portrayed as a history of ideologies or *models* for urban transformation that have provided the necessary coordination and agreement between actors for implementation.⁴ It is equally a history of the successes and (most of all) failures of these models, and the resulting quest for the parameters that have altered the desired outcome. As a consequence of this process, the complex social and political practices that planning is immersed in have become recognized increasingly. Thus, while planning rationality *does* rely on the creation of theoretical models, the mechanisms of social interaction and power-play that shape them and their implementation is what actually needs to be analysed.

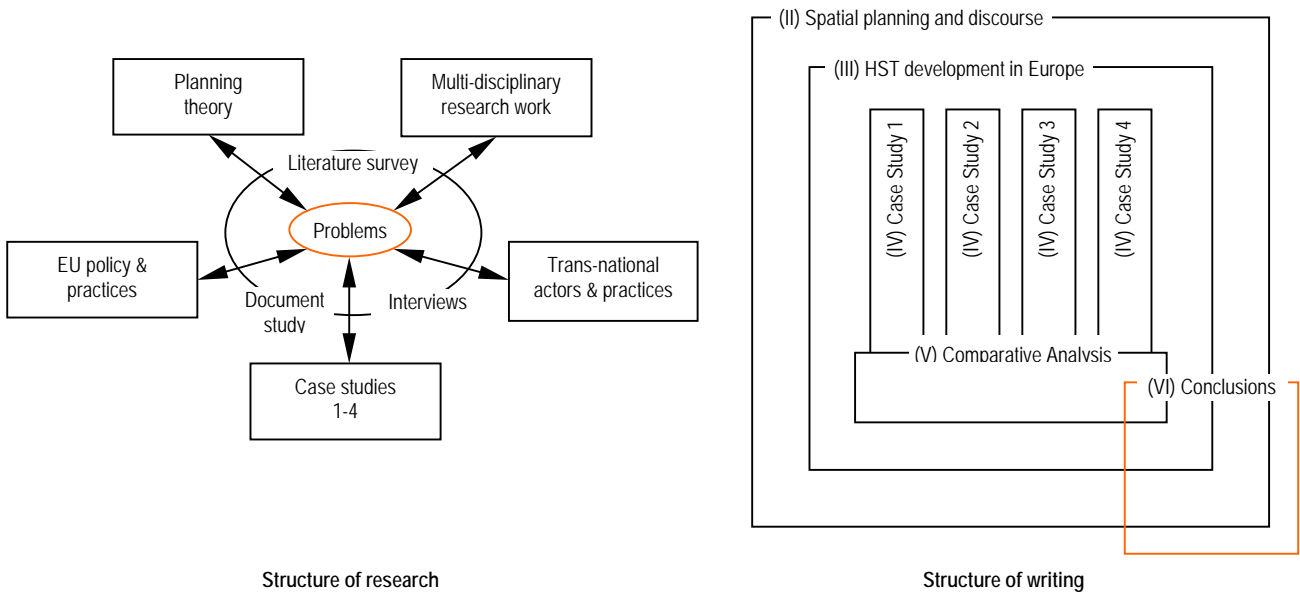
⁴ cf. Müller-Raemisch 1990; Albers 1997, 285-327

It is here that the concept of *discourse* will be developed to cast a critical view on the relation between knowledge, communication and power in planning. The continuous interaction of these three factors is what provides planning rationality with a *contingent* character that escapes any description through static models. The focus on discourses will be used to reveal how the particular knowledge for the social construction of problems and solutions in planning is created through communicative practice and power dynamics.

4 Reader's guide: How this study is structured

The division of this study into the five main chapters (II-VI) hardly reflects the actual (zig-zag) course of research work moving within a complex field of interrelated processes, but is intended to make the implicit "train of thought" best accessible and to allow the work to restate the conclusions drawn. It should however not suggest that a linear research scheme of the "theory-method-application-result" kind would have been followed. Rather, the analytical perspective adopted is a *consequence* of the insight obtained from investigation into HST integration and the successive delimitation of the essential problems. Thus, the following two schemes illustrate the different perspectives that can be adopted (Fig.I.4).

Fig.I. 4: Structure of the research process (focusing problems) juxtaposed with the structure of the study report (focusing conclusions).



To begin with, this chapter simply introduces into the subject of the study, positions it within the context of spatial planning theory and practice and underlines the key questions.

In chapter II, a theoretical framework is developed that allows the questions raised above to be addressed. This framework provides a conceptualization of planning through the notion of *discourse* and operationalizes it for the analysis of concrete cases.

The understanding of HST integration is then deepened in chapter III with the presentation of available knowledge from empirical research and analysis of the characteristics and implications of this transport mode. Furthermore, a chronological review of the development of the HST at the European level introduces the key actors, their motivations and the resulting policies and practices. This chapter thus provides the basic common elements of the planning discourse and sets the scene for the analysis of the cases.

Chapter IV then “dives in”, presenting a reconstruction of the planning approaches for the integration of the HST in four European regions and their capital cities. According to the concept of discourse, the analysis of the case studies focuses on the respective contexts, planning processes and texts that have marked the outcomes.

A comparative analysis of the insight obtained through the case studies is carried out in chapter V. This perspective highlights the essential similarities and differences and elaborates the empirical findings from planning practice in the four regions.

Finally, some conclusions are drawn in chapter VI, linking the case study analysis to the initial questions and the theoretical perspective adopted and providing an outlook for further research work related to the subject and methodology of this study.