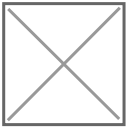




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Is transport infrastructure responsible for economic development?



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Texte

Introduction, by Emmanuel Ravalet

<blockquote>Put in this way, the answer seems fairly obvious. And yet, it is an important debate that continues – even today. Indeed, in local political milieus it is still common to hear talk of the need to build highways to improve access to regions, thus allowing for their development.</blockquote><blockquote>From where does this stance originate? There is a kind of link between economic development and increased transport flows (goods and people) that is recognized at the global level, and whose existence has not, as yet, been disproven at the local level. Hence, it is logical to say that transport infrastructure facilitates flows between territories as well as generating new ones, and thus contributes to development. However, the literature provides no conclusive evidence of this link. What evidence we do have, on the other hand, proves that this link is not inherent, and can sometimes even have negative consequences.</blockquote><blockquote>The debate intensifies when we add to it the highly political issue of limiting transportation flows (especially on roads) in the battle against environmental damage. Unfortunately, given that the latter goes hand in hand with the economic crisis, the impact on local development raises questions. The tenants of the New Economic Geography contend that building transport infrastructure promotes the development of network - or agglomeration - externalities (indirect economic gains by economic actors because of the proximity of other actors and various services aimed at them), and therefore supports competitiveness and innovation. We also find many defenders of transport infrastructure among economists and chambers of commerce and industry that have studied the costs of traffic congestion. On the other hand, the approaches inspired by the work of F. Plassard¹ defend the idea that transport is only one part of the economic system, and that changing the transportation supply does not necessarily determine a locality's economic future.</blockquote><p style="text-align: right;">Emmanuel Ravalet
Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne</p>

Chapô

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