
Planning high speed railway station in Rabat : Neoliberalistic state versus neoliberalistic urban perspectives : new logic or the more of the same ?

Nacima Baron*¹

¹Laboratoire Ville Mobilité Transport UMR 9403 (LVMT) – LVMT Ecole nationale des Ponts et Chaussées 6 - 8 Avenue Blaise Pascal 77455 Marne la vallée cedex 02, Unknown or Invalid Region

Abstract

It may seem surprising to propose a paper addressing a topic which deals with a city, mainly Rabat, which is out to the European realm *sensu stricto*, to T.S. 6.10. *Europe's Face to the global crisis: Neoliberalism and the Changing Role of Cities*. Anyway, Morocco may be viewed as a dynamic margin of Europe, from a geographical point of view as well as from the institutional point of view (Troin JF, 2010). Since 2000, Morocco enjoys a status of association and has privileged commercial and political relations with EU, thanks to EU's *neighbourhood policy* and its financial instruments targeted toward Morocco and sustaining infrastructure development.

EU and France support a new high speed railway line to be constructed from Tangier to Casablanca (a first part should be open next year). In the public discourse permanently fuelled with arguments in the defense of this huge investment, this infrastructure symbolises the growing interdependence between european metropolises and their moroccan urban partners. The new line is supposed to support and reinforce flows of passengers, capital and informations on both sides of the Detroit. Despite the omnipresent propaganda (Mouloudi H. 2012), this macro-project has triggered ten years of conflicts of interests. This infrastructure and namely new high speed railway station (that is to say the most urban part of the railway infrastructure) sustains the hypothesis of a changing role of moroccan cities confronted to neoliberal policies and state and re-regulation processes in times of crises.

Here's an interaction between the overall crisis and the historical event represented by high speed insertion in cities, mainly for the capital of Morocco, confronted to processes of globalization and localization (Bargach J. 2008). In Rabat, the construction of new railway leads to the necessity readapting former railway stations. This signifies much more than a functionalistic redimensioning or refurbishing of stations. The new station is used by authorities as a way to adapt the production of land value to the post-crisis moment. Conveying programs of new housing, retail and office buildings, it modifies the spatial, political and social urban order and disrupts the vernacular conception of morrocan city. Carried out on state-owned land and operated by national railway company, the station figures metonymically the captation of city spatiality by the highest level of state, for its own interests. Hence, the communication shows how a critical urban geography perspective may help understanding the changing State - local leaders confrontation and the production of new political arrangements meant to redistribute wealth and powership over Rabat.

*Speaker

Capitalizing on existing literature will help to achieve this goal. The relationship between railway infrastructure, restructuring of state power, urban politics and urban governance has been studied for a long time in Europe (Pucci P. 2011, Peters D., Novy J., 2012, Bellet C., Sanfeliu J, 2016) and gives us support to contextualize it in North Africa, even if Moroccan towns have not a similar historical and socioeconomical background. Following Koenrad Bogaert investigation, (Zemni S., Bogaert K, 2011), transcalar analysis, glocalization perspective and state - urban relationship study present key elements to interpret the role played by railway station in the metropolitan Moroccan fabric.

The empiric material focuses on Rabat in Agdal's district, just beside the main speculative zone near to the Atlantic waterfront. Maps help interpreting the way this station reterritorializes urban powers while creating exceptional areas (in terms of construction rights)(Bogaert K, 2011). Neoliberalistic urbanism, accumulation mechanisms, anticipations of valuable deals underpin the strategies of state agency ONCF and show the changing role of an traditional transport equipment into a powerful tool.

Endly, Agdal's station doesn't only epitomizes a new neoliberalistic order over Rabat, but the clash of several capitalist forces emanating from public realm and connected to a network of other transport and urban entities imbricating local, national and transnational strategies and scales.

References

Bargach J. 2008, Rabat from capital to global metropolis in Y. Elshestawy (ed) *The evolving arab city : tradition, modernity*, London Routledge, p 91- 117.

Bellet C., Sanfeliu J, 2016, The high speed rail project as an urban redevelopment tool, *Belgeo*, No 3.

Bogaert K, 2011, *Urban politics in Morocco Uneven development, neoliberal government and the restructuring of state power*, PhD, Gent University.

Bogaert K, 2012, New new state place formation in Morocco: the exemple of the Boureg valley, *Urban studies*, vol 49, no 2, 255-270.

Mouloudi H., Reactions from below to big urban projects : the case of Rabat, *Built Environment*, no 36, vol 2, 230 - 244.

Peters D., Novy J., 2012, Rail Station Mega-Projects: Overlooked Centrepieces in the Complex Puzzle of Urban Restructuring in Europe, *Built environment*, Volume 38, Number 1 (thematic issue).

Pucci P. 2011, Large infrastructures and conflicts in Italy: searching "boundary objects", in *International research conference planning / conflict - Critical perspectives on contentious urban developments* Berlin 27-28 October 2011.

Troin JF " Régionalisation et mondialisation au Maroc: interférences positives ou déséquilibres accrus? ", *Méditerranée* [En ligne], 116 — 2011, mis en ligne le 01 juin 2013, consulté le 04 janvier 2015. URL : <http://mediterranee.revues.org/5401>

Zemni S., Bogaert K, 2011, Urban renewal and social development in Morocco in an age of neoliberal government, *Review of African Political Economy*, 38:129, 403-417

Keywords: urban planning, urban production, railway station, Rabat, Morocco