

Mediterranean countries offer fewer urban transport options than Central European ones

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The cities that operate their own public transport tend to provide a range in excess of market requirements. Credit: SINC

Catalan researchers have studied the factors relating to urban transport service provision in 45 European cities, including Barcelona, Bilbao and Madrid. The study, published in the latest issue of *Transportation research part E-logistics and transportation review*, concludes that Central European cities have the best urban transport service provision in Europe. Capital cities are at the head of the league, both in terms of supply and demand.

"The geographic variables we studied show that Mediterranean countries have the least developed (offer the poorest range) in terms of urban

transport systems, even though our demand for transport is not significantly lower than in the central countries", Daniel Albalate, who co-authored the study with Germà Bel, tells SINC. Both researchers work at the University of Barcelona (UB).

The study, published in the latest issue of the journal *Transportation research part E-logistics and transportation review*, analyses the socioeconomic features and institutional and regional urban transport factors of 45 European cities with very different characteristics.

"The countries of Central Europe have greater provision of urban transport in relation to population size than the Mediterranean and Nordic ones", explains Albalate. The so-called Eastern countries (which are also Central European) have better urban transport provision than Germany, Holland and France. "We have interpreted this result as a reflection of their Soviet legacy, with greater State intervention in the economy, and also in transport", the expert adds.

The 'public choice' theory

The results also throw light on other issues. "The cities that operate their own [public transport](#) tend to provide a range in excess of market requirements. However, cities with private incentives within their urban transport system tend to cut back on this over-provision", the researcher says.

"This would be confirmed by public choice theory, which anticipates that privatisation and competition for contracts should create fewer incentives to over-provide services. This is positive, but only if it doesn't lead to a reduction in quality or accessibility in certain areas. We found it does not affect demand, which leads us to believe that the privatisation of transport does not affect the quality of the service", Albalate adds.

Meanwhile, the study also confirms something that may seem obvious - the capital cities of European countries have the largest transport systems. "We were interested to see whether the state capitals had more provision but less demand, to see if they were receiving any favourable treatment. What we found is that there is both greater supply and demand in the capitals, so there is in fact a balance".

More information: Daniel Albalade y Germa Bel. "What shapes local public transportation in Europe? Economics, mobility, institutions, and geography", Transportation research part e-logistics and transportation review 46 (5): 775-790, Sept 2010. [doi:10.1016/j.tre.2009.12.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tre.2009.12.010)

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