

# Tourism and high speed rail in Spain: does the AVE increase local visitors?

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## **Abstract**

This paper analyses from an empirical point of view the relationship between the provision of high-speed rail services (HSR) and the evolution of tourism at the local level in Spain. We have built a database of 124 municipalities during the 2005-2012 period to study the effects of the introduction of new HSR corridors on the number of visitors and their total and average stay at several end-line and intermediate cities as compared to similar counterparts not having such an infrastructure. We combine both difference-in-difference and panel data techniques to find that these effects are, in general, extremely weak or just restricted to larger cities, once other determining factors are controlled for.

**Keywords:** high speed rail, local tourism, difference in difference, panel data.

**JEL codes:** R42, R53, L83.

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## 1. Introduction

Amongst the multiple determinants of the attractiveness of a particular location from the point of view of tourism, accessibility usually ranks between the first two or three positions. A beautiful landscape, a historical monument or a sunny and fine sandy beach hardly becomes a successful tourist destination if transport infrastructure does not allow a convenient, comfortable and safe way to get there and return. At the local level, the endowment of roads, or the existence of rail and bus stations nearby – not to mention – an airport, makes a significant difference in the number of visitors that a city or a municipality receives each year.

This issue is particularly relevant for Spain, a country that shares the feature of being a world's favourite tourist destination and the fact of having Europe's largest high-speed rail network (second in the world only after China). According to **UNWTO (2015)**, nearly 65 million visitors arrived into Spain in 2014, contributing with more than €64 billion to the country's GDP (6.5% of total). Most visitors came from the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Scandinavia, and – although 80% of them arrived by air – road and domestic rail transport also played a significant role in facilitating their movements from airports to final or transit destinations (**FRONTUR, 2015**) and short excursions to surrounding areas. In fact, the road network density in Spain (in terms of motorway km per km<sup>2</sup> of land area) is well above the EU-28 average, and the country has spent over the last 25 years nearly €50 billion in developing a relatively dense HSR network connecting more than 80 large and medium-size cities.

From a technical point of view, the Spanish HSR (known as AVE, *Alta Velocidad Española*) is widely regarded as a success, since it has served to improve the service standards and the technical quality of infrastructure and rolling stock. Politicians also argue that it has progressively prompted a social and territorial cohesion effect, by reducing the generalized costs of travelling from/to the centre (Madrid) to the periphery (coastal provinces). However, several economists and academics have long questioned the opportunity costs of many HSR developments, particularly in very low demand routes where the induced effects were also weak or inexistent at all.<sup>1</sup>

Since the seminal paper by **Bonnafous (1987)**, many studies have attempted to justify the expensive investments associated to high speed rail projects by appealing to the so-called 'attraction effects', also studying the complementarity/substitution effects that emerge with respect to alternative transport modes. When a (usually, mid-sized) city becomes a member of the 'HSR club', its visibility within the transport network is enhanced and its attractiveness for outsider visitors is notably increased. (Only) If this happens, the investment pays out and the tale becomes a story of self-fulfilling success. However, it is not always clear that changes in local tourism figures can be always attributable to the development of a nearby HSR station and, therefore, empirical measurements of these real spillover effects are urgently required.

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<sup>1</sup> Although the criticisms started with the initial projects, this literature has been largely ignored by mainstream HSR supporters (see, for example, **De Rus and Inglada, 1993, 1997; De Rus and Nombela, 2007; De Rus, 2011**, or, more recently, **Betancor and Llobet, 2015**). The international experience also doubts of political interference on high-speed projects, as suggested in **Albalade and Bel (2012)**.

This is precisely the gap this paper intends to fill. Its major contribution is to try to empirically ascertain – with a panel database of Spanish municipalities for the 2005-2012 period – to what extent AVE affects local tourism when other explaining factors are adequately controlled for. To do so, we use a contra factual ‘difference in difference’ methodology to identify the cities and towns with or without high-speed stations in their vicinity and then estimate the real (economic) impact of these projects on them.

Thus, in general, our results suggest that there are several positive (and relevant) effects, but they are mostly restricted to larger cities (Barcelona, Málaga), with pre-existing tourism amenities or attraction factors. For medium-sized and smaller towns the effects of AVE on local tourism cannot be detected from a statistical point of view (and, in some cases, they are even negative). These results are also confirmed when the dependent variable is the visitors’ average stay instead of the number of visitors.

To carry out this analysis, and after this short introduction, the structure of the paper is as follows. **Section 2** provides an extensive literature review on the impacts of HSR on tourism, focusing on the relationship between this mode and alternative ones. **Section 3** introduces the database and defines the main variables used in this study. In **Section 4** we explain our empirical strategies and models and perform the estimations, subsequently discussing the results. **Section 5** is finally devoted to conclusions.

## **2. The impact of HSR on tourism: a literature review**

Previous literature has studied the link between new HSR stations and tourism outcomes under different approaches. In general, improvements in accessibility of a touristic destination are expected to promote the revitalization of urban and business tourism due to a reduction of the generalized cost of transportation. At least, this positive expected impact is common in the approach of recent studies (see **Delaplace and Perrin, 2013; Masson and Petiot, 2009; Bazin et al. 2010**) and also appears in the motivation of HSR projects when presented by policy makers and HSR promoters. In fact, tourism gains are among the most common economic positive externalities that are often claimed to be associated with HSR investments. For this reason anticipated gains from HSR due to tourism are present in many recent studies analysing prospect HSR projects (see **Murakami and Cervero, 2012; Edwards, 2012; Chen and Haynes, 2012**, among others). No doubt, this expected improvement of the touristic attractiveness of destinations, if true, becomes an opportunity to renew the tourist supply for the industry (see **Delaplace et al. 2014; Feliu, 2012**) and a positive external boost for the local economy (see **Hernández and Jiménez, 2014**).

Nonetheless, the ex-post evaluation of the relationship between HSR and its effects is much more modest. **Bazin et al. (2006)** studied impacts of the French HSR (TGV) new services in France on different economic sectors between 1990 and 1999. Among them, they found that they do not stimulate curiosity, except for a sporadic initial demand to become familiar with the service. The analysis of the available experience shows that the availability of HSR gives value to already known and popular tourist destinations but is not sufficient on itself to promote further development.

Although initial impacts on visitors' figures may be positive, a surprising result is that several authors have found a decrease in the number of overnight stays (acknowledged, for example, in **Bonnafous, 1987** or **Klein and Claisse, 1997**) and a restructuring in the type of visitor, now more oriented to business travel. In some cities this even produced that small hotels with limited attractions disappeared, while large national chains increased their offer, providing better quality, more appropriate to the characteristics of business tourism. HSR impacts on purely leisure tourism are much more limited, and several projects developed under the expectation of a visitors' increase had to be abandoned. Interestingly, **Bazin, et al. (2013)** restricted their analysis to the TGV effect in tourist destinations reachable in a less than 1.5 hour trip to/from Paris and found that the effects of TGV openings were not long lasting. They also confirmed that improved accessibility had the effect of reducing the number of overnight stays. This suggests that an increase in traffic volume does not imply an increase in demand for local services.

In some other recent works focused on tourist areas in Spain, results are also consistent with this modest impact. For example, **Clavé et al. (2015)** show that the influx of tourism due to the AVE connection is irrelevant in the area of the coast of Tarragona. In Alicante, **Ortuño-Padilla et al. (2015)** estimate an increase of just over 20,000 tourists per year in the province after the link to Madrid and Valencia was opened, and the total gross economic impact was about €3-4 million, which is irrelevant in relation to the cost of the line. Finally, **Albalade (2015)** shows that the number of tourists grew more over the last years in destinations (Spanish provinces) not connected to the HSR network than in destinations connected to it, indicating that factors other than the availability of this service may have a higher influence on tourist attraction.

On the other hand, it is also well known that HSR generates a centralization effect of economic activities towards big nodes (**Givoni, 2006; Haynes, 1997; Van den Berg and Pol, 1998**). This effect has also been identified in tourist activities because city size appears to be a relevant determinant of HSR impacts on tourism (see **Delaplace, 2012** and **Bazin et al., 2013**). According to **SEEDA (2008)** few cities experienced a significant increase of tourist arrivals after HSR openings in Europe, but particularly small and medium-sized cities received very limited increases of tourist arrivals, whereas larger effects could be only identified in some larger cities. Among intermediate cities, only those pre-equipped by tourist amenities enjoyed significant impacts, a result which was also typically observed in the Japanese, Taiwanese and Chinese experiences (**Okabe, 1979; Cheng, 2009; Wang et al. 2012** and **Chen and Haynes, 2012**).

A reason for this unexpected lack of significant impact at the local level should be found in how HSR availability affects destination choice. **Pagliara et al. (2015)** studies the impact of HSR in Madrid on tourist destination choice by means of a revealed preference survey. Results indicate that the presence of HSR does not seem to be a key factor influencing the destination choice of tourists because most of them are international tourists that can only arrive by air transportation. However, the use of HSR appears to be attractive to international tourists to visit nearby locations only. A similar conclusion is reached by **Chen and Haynes (2015)** when investigating the impact of the Chinese high-speed rail systems on its international tourism demand.

These authors find very small demand elasticity with respect to the existence of HSR stations of 0.057 in international arrivals. Thus, tourism does not seem to be influenced by HSR availability and this becomes a major barrier to anticipate positive impacts from rail transport onto the tourism industry.

As noted by these studies, tourism decisions may be determined by the interaction between HSR and air transportation. Positive impacts from HSR are expected from increasing the overall number transport users or by promoting a given type of visitor (high income, longer stays, etc.). However, HSR usually exerts a substitution or even predatory effect on air transportation. Indeed, a growing literature has emerged on the modal competition between high-speed rail and air transportation in recent years (see **Givoni and Dobruszkes, 2014** for a review). HSR harms air transportation above all alternative modes due to its ability to attract a relative large market share in medium distances. For this reasons HSR becomes one of the main determinants of market power loss for traditional carriers (**Zhang et al., 2014**) and a strong entry barrier for new airlines (**Kappes and Merkert, 2013**). Since the relationship between air transport and tourism as two deeply interconnected activities is well established in the literature, the potential damage that HSR may exert to the airline industry will definitely affect net tourism outcomes (**Rey et al., 2011; Dobruszkes and Mondou, 2013**).

The substitution effect evidence has been extensively recognised for all countries with HSR lines,<sup>2</sup> and beyond national experiences and pre-post comparisons, **Clewlow et al. (2012), Dobruszkes et al. (2014)** and **Albalate et al. (2015)** also confirm this substitution effect with a sample of European routes and a variety of econometric techniques. Similar impacts on air transportation are documented for Asian experiences, as happened in Korea (**Suh et al., 2005; Lee et al., 2012**), China (**Fu et al., 2012; Wu 2013**) and Taiwan (**Yung-Hsiang Cheng, 2010**).

Although several papers have explored the cooperation possibilities between both modes (see, for example, **Givoni and Banister, 2006** and **Dobruszkes et al., 2014**), and some have even found several specific cooperation programs between HSR and air carriers (**Dobruszkes, 2011**), most HSR network designs have been oriented to replicate routes and compete with air transportation. Therefore, it is not surprising that empirical research has been unable to find systematic complementarities, even though some potential for them seems available in hub airports due to the airlines feeding strategies and the presence of HSR stations within airport premises (**Albalate et al., 2015**).

In sum, most of the previous works have focused on the role of HSR on city-route tourism case studies, or integrated within the national transport system. They have mainly considered the (expected) changes pre-HSR inaugurations, but most of these expectations to enhance local tourism have not been proven. This study contributes to this literature by being the first to estimate empirically the impact of

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<sup>2</sup> The evidence covers from the first lines in Japan (**Taniguchi, 1992; Clever and Hensher, 2008**), to the EU countries that followed: France (**Vickerman, 1997; Klein, 1997**), Spain (**COM, 1996; Román et al., 2007; Martín and Nombela, 2008; Jiménez and Betancor, 2012; Pagliara, Vassallo and Román, 2012**), Italy (**Cascetta et al., 2011**) and Germany (**Ellwanger and Wilckens, 1993; Dobruszkes, 2011**).

HSR on local tourism using a sample of municipalities and considering all HSR lines in a large and touristic country as Spain. We also intend to provide some novel empirical evidence on this issue using a quasi-experimental setting based on both the ‘differences in differences’ methodology and a panel data analysis that allows us to measure the impact of HSR availability and its territorial effects by considering the distance from/to HSR stations. A description of our database and empirical strategy follows in next sections.

### 3. Database and variable description

To study the local effects of high-speed rail projects in Spain, we have built a database that encompasses all the relevant tourism information both of those municipalities where new AVE stations were built or enhanced and of those (contra factual) municipalities without HSR entry. Our monthly database covers the period 2005-2012, when six major HSR projects started to operate, connecting at least 12 provinces capital-cities and more than 30 other medium-sized and smaller towns (see **Figure 1**).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In particular, these new HSR projects represented in **Figure 1** arrived at the following cities and towns at the given dates: **Toledo** (November 2005; pop. 75,533), **Tarragona** (December 2006; pop. 131,158), **Valladolid** (December 2007; pop. 316,564); **Malaga** (December 2007; pop. 561,250), **Segovia** (December 2007; pop. 55,942), **Barcelona** (February 2008; pop. 1,616,000), **Albacete** (December 2010; pop. 170,475), **Cuenca** (December 2010, pop. 55,738), **Valencia** (December 2010; pop. 809,267), Ourense (December 2011; pop. 108,002), **A Coruña** (December 2011; pop. 246,028) and Santiago de Compostela (December 2011; pop. 95,207). The line connecting Barcelona and the French border was opened in 2013 and is not included in this paper.

Figure 1. High-speed rail (AVE) lines inaugurated between 2005 and 2012 in Spain



Source: [www.adifaltavelocidad.es](http://www.adifaltavelocidad.es) (Spain's rail network manager).

Thus, for those 12 cities and other 112 municipalities with tourism relevance (known as 'tourism interest point', as defined by the Spanish National Statistical Office – [www.ine.es](http://www.ine.es) – attending to their tourism supply facilities), we have collected the following main variables:

- **VISITORS<sub>imt</sub>**: total number of overnight visitors (spending one or more nights) at the tourism interest point *i*, during month *m* of year *t*. This variable can be separated into national (i.e., Spanish) and foreign visitors and its main source is the 'Hotel Occupancy Survey' (*Encuesta de Ocupación Hotelera*, available at [www.ine.es](http://www.ine.es)), which describes tourism demand in Spain.<sup>4</sup>
- **TOTAL OVERNIGHT STAYS<sub>imt</sub>**: total number of nights spent by the total number of visitors (also separated into national and foreign) at hotels and other tourism

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<sup>4</sup> It is relevant to note that we are just considering overnight visitors, excluding one-day excursionists. Our underlying assumption is that most excursionists rely on bus, taxi or car rental as their main transport mode, instead of rail services (for one-day return trips). We do not have detailed information on the transport mode chosen by each traveler. Similarly, we do not have detailed expenditure surveys and consider therefore that most of this (tourist) expenditure is proportional to the number of nights spent at destination.

accommodations at tourism interest point  $i$ , during month  $m$  of year  $t$ , with the same data source.

- **AVERAGE STAY $_{imt}$** : defined as the ratio between the total overnight stays and the total number of visitors, and provides the number of nights that on average each visitor spends at destination. A larger average stay is usually associated to a higher level of expenditure.
- **OCCUPANCY RATE $_{imt}$** : this variable (given as a percentage) is the ratio between the total overnight stays and the tourism supply (temporary and permanent hotel beds multiplied by the days they are available), as provided again by the 'Hotel Occupancy Survey'.
- **HOTEL PRICE INDEX $_{jmt}$** : this index summarizes the monthly evolution of hotel prices taking into account their location and category. It is specifically calculated by the Spanish National Statistical Office for the 'Tourist Accommodation Survey' (*Encuesta de Alojamientos Turísticos*, also available at [www.ine.es](http://www.ine.es), which describes tourism supply in Spain. The subscript  $j$  refers to the corresponding region (Autonomous Community) since this index is not disaggregated at local level.
- **POPULATION $_{it}$** : total number of residents in municipality  $i$  at the end of year  $t$ , according to the *Anuario Económico de La Caixa* (La Caixa Yearbook), a database which contains information on more than 3,000 municipalities in Spain, and is online available at [www.anuarioeco.lacaixa.comunicacions.com](http://www.anuarioeco.lacaixa.comunicacions.com)
- **AIRPORT $_{imt}$** : binary and own-elaborated variable that takes value 1 after the enlargement or major enhancement of airports located at municipality  $i$ , in order to capture potential effects on tourism associated to other transport modes.
- **HSRINXKM $_{imt}$** : binary variable that takes value 1 at those neighboring municipalities that are located within  $X$  kilometers of an AVE station in municipality  $i$ , during month  $m$  of year  $t$ , according to our own elaboration.

In addition to this standard set of main variables on tourism and transport, we needed to build ad-hoc variables for testing our empirical strategy in the difference-in-difference (*DiD* hereafter) methodology. In particular, three specific variables were used:

- **TREATED $_{imt}$** : is a dummy that takes value 1 if it refers to a municipality where the AVE entered in the 2005-2012 period (see **footnote 3**, for details). The objective of this variable is to control for a potentially different behaviour between these municipalities and the remaining ones (defined as the control group), although we can also consider those municipalities that already had an AVE connection *before* the 2005-2012 period.
- **AFTER $_t$** : is a covariate that controls for potential seasonal effects on the endogenous variables (i.e., tourism figures) that could affect all the municipalities included in the treatment group (i.e., those that benefitted from an AVE project). It takes value 1 for all these municipalities after the AVE inauguration. Note that in the *DiD* analysis we will have to deal with six different 'AFTER' variables, due to different inauguration dates ( $t$ , see again **footnote 3**).
- **DiD $_{imt}$** : is the double difference, that is, the actual difference-in-difference estimator and takes value 1 for the treatment group in the 'AFTER' period. This

variable shows how the endogenous variables are changed for the municipalities affected by the AVE as strictly compared to those not affected by it.

**Table 1. Summary of average monthly data by type of municipality (2005-2012)**

	Total number of visitors	National visitors (%)	Foreign visitors (%)	Total Overnight stays	Average stay (nights)	Occupancy rate (%)
<i>In municipalities <b>with a new AVE</b> project in the 2005-2012 period</i>						
Before the HSR project	48,328	50.6	49.4	132,162	2.73	48.9
After the HSR project	47,768	50.0	50.0	159,439	3.33	47.5
<i>In municipalities <b>without a AVE</b> project in the 2005-2012 period</i>						
For all the period	32,588	50.4	49.6	144,702	4.44	48.2
<i>In municipalities <b>with a AVE project before</b> the 2005-2012 period</i>						
For all the period	185,684	54.9	45.1	352,356	1.89	46.9

**Source:** Own elaboration.

**Table 1** summarizes some of the descriptive values of our main tourism-related variables by separating them into three different groups: those corresponding to municipalities that enjoyed a new AVE project in the 2005-2012 period, those that did not, and those that had a previous AVE development. As mentioned above, we only focused on 'tourism interest points', which excludes very small municipalities that could distort the results. In fact, the average population in the first group (not showed in the table) is 355,928 inhabitants, whereas in the other groups is 145,762 inhabitants. In addition, the distribution of coastal vs. interior municipalities is almost 50-50 in all three groups and there are not significant differences in their (regional) average hotel prices, adjusted per quality.

Some interesting features deserve a final comment. Firstly, the third group is the most relevant from the point of view of tourism, since it includes the initial and most successful lines (which started in 1992 with the Madrid-Seville). Secondly, the municipalities with new AVE projects did not experienced a substantial tourism growth (in fact, a -1.1% decline), although their total and average stays increased. Finally, the municipalities without AVE had also large average stays and occupancy rates. Since it seems that the effects of AVE are not so clear, additional statistical analysis is performed in the following section.

## 4. Quantifying the impact of AVE on local tourism

The quantification of the impacts of high-speed projects on local tourism can be focused from different point of views (see **Section 2**). In this paper we have specifically chosen a quasi-experimental approach that compares Spanish municipalities that benefitted from AVE projects in the 2005-2012 period with those that did not (either because they already had them or because they did not receive such investments at all).

From an empirical point of view, our strategy relies on two complementary approaches: one based on the ‘difference-in-difference methodology’ (DiD), and other on standard panel data. The DiD technique is appropriate when the ‘treatment’ cannot be considered random or only depending on observed characteristics.<sup>5</sup> Thus, it evaluates policy impacts by accepting the existence of pre-intervention differences between the treated and the control group that may be observable and unobservable. This unobserved heterogeneity is assumed to be constant over time, so computing the difference between the within-group variation of the outcome variable from the pre-treatment period to the post-treatment period may be enough to identify an unbiased treatment impact.

In addition to this strategy, we also use panel data methods in order to better account for heterogeneity. Panel data methods allows us to evaluate the HSR impact on all municipalities considered simultaneously. The unobserved heterogeneity may be also considered by introducing a fixed effect that identifies each municipality using the standard fixed effects model. This strategy can also be considered a generalisation of the DiD method to Panel methods.<sup>6</sup>

In both cases, our endogenous variables are those related to tourism inflows on a particular municipality (TOURISM), namely, the total number of visitors (separated into national and foreign), the total number of overnight stays, the average stay per visitor and the occupancy rate. Note that, as discussed above, we are implicitly assuming that tourism expenditure is proportional to the number of nights spent at destination and therefore, these TOURISM variables indirectly calibrate the impact of high-speed rail projects on local economies.

Thus, with regard to the DiD model, it is based on the following equation, where the first line on its right-hand side captures the ‘difference’ effects, the second line refers to the existing transport infrastructure, the third one corresponds to other factors related to city-size and tourism demand (population and hotel prices) and the last line captures cycle and seasonal effects;  $\varepsilon_{imt}$  is the usual error term:<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Under this assumption simple matching and propensity score matching would be more appropriate.

<sup>6</sup> Note that these fixed effects should capture both idiosyncratic effects (local history and monuments, cultural ties, local gastronomy, etc.) and the specific endowment of infrastructure (e.g. roads) and other effects (weather conditions) that do not change every year.

<sup>7</sup> Model estimation has been performed ensuring robustness with regard to heterokedasticity problems, and clustering municipalities to avoid heterogeneity issues.

$$\begin{aligned} \ln(\text{TOURISM})_{imt} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{After}_{mt} + \beta_2 \text{Treated}_i + \beta_3 \text{DiD}_{imt} \\ & + \beta_4 \text{Airport}_i + \beta_5 \text{HSR10km}_{imt} + \beta_6 \text{HSR20km}_{imt} + \beta_7 \text{HSR50km}_{imt} \\ & + \beta_8 \text{Population}_{it} + \beta_9 \text{Population2}_{it} + \beta_{10} \text{Hotelprices}_{jt} \\ & + \sum_{h=11}^{20} \beta_h \text{Year effect}_t + \sum_{h=21}^{32} \beta_h \text{Monthly effect}_t + \varepsilon_{imt} \end{aligned}$$

**Table 2** summarizes some of the estimation results of the DiD model. The columns correspond to the (log of the) TOURISM dependent variable, and each row reflects the impact of high-speed rail on selected municipalities. According to **Figure 1** (and **footnote 3**) there were six major new AVE undertakings in the 2005-2012 period but we split them into separate estimations by municipalities. We focused our attention on the province capitals reported in **Table 2**. Then, in order to isolate the specific effects of HSR, for each of these we excluded (on each estimation) the municipalities where the AVE projects started later, before or simultaneously. The average R<sup>2</sup> for all estimations is close to 0.35.

**Table 2. DiD coefficients on the effects of AVE on selected cities**

Dep. variable Effect of AVE on...	Visitors	Overnight stays	Average stay	National visitors	Foreign visitors	Occupancy rate
...Toledo	-0.07 (0.05)	-0.09 (0.08)	0.007 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.24 (0.09)**	-0.05 (0.02)**
...Tarragona	-0.25 (0.04)***	-0.20 (0.05)***	0.03 (0.02)	-0.34 (0.04)***	0.02 (0.07)	-0.05 (0.01)***
...Valladolid	0.07 (0.04)	0.05 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.02)	0.12 (0.04)***	0.009 (0.07)	-0.04 (0.02)**
...Segovia	0.10 (0.04)**	0.12 (0.05)**	0.02 (0.02)	0.15 (0.04)***	0.02 (0.07)	-0.05 (0.02)***
...Málaga	0.44 (0.12)***	0.28 (0.14)**	-0.16 (0.07)**	0.49 (0.14)***	0.54 (0.18)**	0.11 (0.06)*
...Barcelona	0.24 (0.15)*	0.42 (0.35)	-0.30 (0.18)*	0.98 (0.19)***	0.71 (0.39)*	0.25 (0.09)**
...Valencia	0.07 (0.07)	0.02 (0.09)	-0.06 (0.04)	0.15 (0.05)***	0.03 (0.11)	0.07 (0.03)***
...Cuenca	-0.11 (0.04)**	-0.18 (0.05)**	-0.07 (0.02)***	-0.09 (0.03)***	0.12 (0.06)*	-0.18 (0.02)***
...Albacete	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.19 (0.05)**	-0.13 (0.02)***	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.06)	-0.38 (0.02)***
...Santiago	0.12 (0.29)	-0.23 (0.41)	-0.35 (0.17)*	0.53 (0.23)**	-0.17 (0.51)	0.04 (0.09)
...Coruña	-0.22 (0.04)***	-0.15 (0.05)***	0.07 (0.02)***	-0.16 (0.03)***	-0.15 (0.06)**	-0.12 (0.02)***

**Note:** \*\*\*1%, \*\*5%, \*10% significance test. Standard deviation in brackets. Ourense was not finally included in the estimations because 2011 data were not complete.

The first row in **Table 2**, for example, compares the (mid-sized) city of Toledo (see **Figure 1**), where the AVE arrived in November 2005, with the remaining municipalities that never enjoyed this investment. The effect of HSR is negative with regard to almost all the dependent variables, although only statistically significant in the last two columns. In the smaller city of Tarragona (December 2006) the estimated coefficients are also negative with respect to most dependent variables (particularly, the number of national visitors), whereas in other cities positive and negative signs are more evenly distributed. Interestingly, positive effects of HSR are more clearly visible in the case of the largest city (Barcelona), where the total number of visitors increased by 24% with respect to the control group (+98% national visitors, +71% foreign visitors) and the occupancy rate grew by 25% (although the average stay fell 30%). Another large city, Málaga, also enjoyed positive effects, but these are more diffuse in the remaining ones.

In general, the DiD estimates in **Table 2** allows us to quantify (if any) the impact of AVE projects in the 2005-2012 period on selected Spanish municipalities as compared to control groups where these undertakings did not take place or they did in other periods. As discussed above, a complementary approach to focus on this issue consists in estimating a panel equation that simultaneously considers all the municipalities, but adding a dummy variable **AVE PROJECT<sub>t</sub>**, to capture the specific existence (value 1) or not (value 0) of an AVE project on each city every year and from that onwards. The new equation would be in this case:

$$\begin{aligned} \ln(\text{TOURISM})_{imt} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{AVE project}_{imt} + \\ & + \beta_2 \text{Airport}_{imt} + \beta_3 \text{HSR10km}_{imt} + \beta_4 \text{HSR20km}_{imt} + \beta_5 \text{HSR50km}_{imt} \\ & + \beta_6 \text{Population}_{it} + \beta_7 \text{Population2}_{it} + \beta_8 \text{Hotelprices}_{jt} \\ & + \sum_{h=9}^{18} \beta_h \text{Year effect}_t + \sum_{h=19}^{30} \beta_h \text{Monthly effect}_t + \varepsilon_{it} \end{aligned}$$

where the interpretation of the endogenous and exogenous variables is similar to that in the previous equation. In fact, as showed in the following tables, for each of the six TOURISM dependent variables (total number of visitors, overnight stays, average stay, national visitors, foreign visitors and occupancy rates) three different panel models have been estimated. **Model 1** includes all the dummies, plus the fixed year and monthly effects, but excluding all the municipalities that had AVE during the entire sample period (that is, we consider only the municipalities where some change did occur in 2005-2012). **Model 2** includes all the remaining independent variables in this sample, and finally, **Model 3** also includes all the municipalities.

**Table 3** summarizes the results from these estimations when the dependent variable is the total number of visitors. Again, confirming (as expected) the results from the DiD model, we find no clear trends, since the estimate coefficients for the impact of the AVE project (first row) are positive and negative in each model, but not statistically significant. In **Table 4**, where we intend to assess the AVE effect on overnight stays, again the key coefficients are not significant, although – on the contrary – airport enlargements seems to play a more relevant role of tourism (a 15%

effect according to *Model 3*). **Table 5** confirms – once more – that the AVE has no significant impact on the average stay at destination, whereas the airport does have it (generates a 6% increase), although the model reduces its significance. Similar results appear in **Table 6** with respect to the number of national visitors and only in **Table 7** with respect to foreign visitors we find a relevant effect (+9%) of the AVE (although the impact of the airport is still higher, with 15%). Surprisingly, our final estimates in **Table 8** find a negative effect of AVE on the occupancy rates (-8%) and positive (in the same amount) associated to airport investments.

**Table 3. AVE effect on total number of visitors: panel data estimation (fixed effects).**

Explanatory variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
AVE project	-0.002 (0.04)	0.03 (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)
Airport enlargement	0.08 (0.07)	0.07 (0.07)	0.09 (0.07)
HSR (in 10-20 km)	-0.18 (0.02)***	-0.11 (0.02)***	-0.13 (0.02)***
HSR (in 20-50 km)	-0.02 (0.03)	0.02 (0.04)	0.008 (0.03)
Population	–	-7e-6 (2e-6)***	-3e-6 (2e-6)*
Population squared	–	4e-12 (1e-12)***	8e-13 (3e-13)***
Hotel prices (regional)	–	0.007 (0.003)**	0.006 (0.003)***
Year effect	Yes	Yes	Yes
Monthly effect	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	9.39 (0.04)***	9.34 (0.40)***	9.31 (0.42)***
Observations	10,296	8,096	8,576
Sample	All sample	Excluding municipalities with HSR in all period	All sample
Period	2005-2015	2005-2012	2005-2012
R <sup>2</sup> (within groups)	0.42	0.43	0.42

**Note:** \*\*\*1%, \*\*5%, \*10% significance test. Standard errors are shown in brackets.

**Table 4. AVE effect on overnight stays: panel data estimation (fixed effects)**

Explanatory variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
HSR project	-0.009 (0.04)	0.01 (0.05)	0.02 (0.05)
Airport enlargement	0.12 (0.08)	0.12 (0.07)*	0.15 (0.07)**
HSR (in 10-20 km)	-0.11 (0.02)***	-0.05 (0.02)**	-0.07 (0.02)***
HSR (in 20-50 km)	-0.04 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)
Population		-7e-6 (2e-6)***	-4e-6 (2e-6)**
Population squared		4e-12 (1e-12)***	9e-13 (3e-13)***
Hotel prices (regional)		0.008 (0.003)***	0.008 (0.003)***
Year effect	Yes	Yes	Yes
Monthly effect	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	10.40 (0.05)***	10.37 (0.42)***	10.38 (0.45)***
Observations	10,296	8,096	8,576
Sample	All sample	Excluding municipalities with HSR in all period	All sample
Period	2005-2015	2005-2012	2005-2012
R <sup>2</sup> (Within groups)	0.40	0.40	0.39

**Note:** \*\*\*1%, \*\*5%, \*10% significance test. Standard errors are shown in brackets.

**Table 5. AVE effect on average stay: panel data estimation (fixed effects)**

Explanatory variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
HSR project	-0.008 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
Airport enlargement	0.04 (0.03)	0.06 (0.03)*	0.06 (0.03)**
HSR (in 10-20 km)	0.08 (0.008)***	0.06 (0.01)***	0.06 (0.01)***
HSR (in 20-50 km)	-0.02 (0.04)	-9e-4 (0.04)	0.001 (0.04)
Population		-7e-7 (1e-6)	-1e-6 (1e-6)
Population squared		-1e-13 (6e-13)	1e-13 (2e-13)
Hotel prices (regional)		9e-4 (1e-3)	0.001 (0.001)
Year effect	Yes	Yes	Yes
Monthly effect	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	1.00 (0.01)***	1.02 (0.28)***	1.06 (0.31)***
Observations	10,298	8,098	8,578
Sample	All sample	Excluding municipalities with HSR in all period	All sample
Period	2005-2015	2005-2012	2005-2012
R <sup>2</sup> (within groups)	0.12	0.13	0.12

**Note:** \*\*\*1%, \*\*5%, \*10% significance test. Standard errors are shown in brackets.

**Table 6. AVE effect on national visitors: panel data estimation (fixed effects)**

Explanatory variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
HSR project	0.01 (0.04)	0.02 (0.05)	0.03 (0.05)
Airport enlargement	-0.005 (0.06)	-0.01 (0.06)	0.008 (0.06)
HSR (in 10-20 km)	-0.21 (0.02)***	-0.15 (0.02)***	-0.16 (0.02)***
HSR (in 20-50 km)	0.09 (0.04)**	0.07 (0.05)	0.06 (0.04)
Population		-7e-6 (2e-6)**	-4e-6 (2e-6)*
Population squared		4e-12 (1e-12)***	8e-13 (3e-13)**
Hotel prices (regional)		2e-4 (3e-3)	3e-4 (3e-3)
Year effect	Yes	Yes	Yes
Monthly effect	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	8.88 (0.05)***	9.58 (0.43)***	9.58 (0.45)***
Observations	10,298	8,098	8,578
Sample	All sample	Excluding municipalities with HSR in all period	All sample
Period	2005-2015	2005-2012	2005-2012
R <sup>2</sup> (within groups)	0.38	0.39	0.37

**Note:** \*\*\*1%, \*\*5%, \*10% significance test. Standard errors are shown in brackets.

**Table 7. AVE effects on foreign visitors: panel data estimation (fixed effects)**

Explanatory variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
HSR project	0.02 (0.04)	0.07 (0.04)	0.09 (0.04)**
Airport enlargement	0.12 (0.08)	0.12 (0.08)	0.15 (0.08)*
HSR (in 10-20 km)	-0.20 (0.03)***	-0.09 (0.04)**	-0.14 (0.04)***
HSR (in 20-50 km)	-0.17 (0.06)***	-0.05 (0.08)	-0.08 (0.06)
Population		-1e-5 (5 e-6)**	-6e-6 (4e-6)
Population squared		6e-12 (3e-12)**	1e-12 (6e-13)**
Hotel prices (regional)		0.006 (0.005)	0.004 (0.004)
Year effect	Yes	Yes	Yes
Monthly effect	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	7.72 (0.05)***	8.42 (0.75)***	8.32 (0.81)***
Observations	10,296	8,096	8,576
Sample	All sample	Excluding municipalities with HSR in all period	All sample
Period	2005-2015	2005-2012	2005-2012
R <sup>2</sup> (Within groups)	0.44	0.44	0.44

**Note:** \*\*\*1%, \*\*5%, \*10% significance test. Standard errors are shown in brackets.

**Table 8. AVE effects on the occupancy rate: panel data estimation (fixed effects)**

Explanatory variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
HSR project	-0.07 (0.04)*	-0.07 (0.04)*	-0.07 (0.04)*
Airport enlargement	0.05 (0.05)	0.04 (0.04)	0.07 (0.04)*
HSR (in 10-20 km)	0.04 (0.01)***	0.05 (0.02)***	0.05 (0.01)***
HSR (in 20-50 km)	0.005 (0.02)	0.044 (0.01)***	0.04 (0.01)***
Population		-3e-6 (1e-6)	-3e-6 (1e-6)*
Population squared		2e-12 (1e-12)*	6e-13 (2e-13)**
Hotel prices (regional)		0.009 (0.001)***	0.009 (0.001)***
Year effect	Yes	Yes	Yes
Monthly effect	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	3.47 (0.03)***	2.91 (0.27)***	3.03 (0.29)***
Observations	10,293	8,081	8,561
Sample	All sample	Excluding municipalities with HSR in all period	All sample
Period	2005-2015	2005-2012	2005-2012
R <sup>2</sup> (within groups)	0.46	0.47	0.46

**Note:** \*\*\*1%, \*\*5%, \*10% significance test. Standard errors are shown in brackets.

## 5. Conclusions

In spite of its relatively high degree of social acceptance and its undoubtable technical improvements as compared to conventional rail transport, high-speed rail (HSR) projects are still examined with great scepticism by a larger group of economists in many European countries, who question the opportunity costs of such an expensive infrastructure for thin corridors, where the demand will never pay out the required investments. To justify new developments, politicians and sector analysts often argue that local effects (mostly attributable to – always difficult to predict – induced demand) is a long-term benefit that always emerge, but the evidence on this position is, in most cases, anecdotal.

This paper has tried to shed some light on the reality of the expected impact of high-speed rail in Spain, the country with the highest HSR network in Europe. We have particularly focused on the effects of new lines and stations on local tourism, as one of the most relevant components of induced demand, and of special interest for a country that receives more than 60 million visitors every year. In fact, after a careful consideration of the existing literature, we opted for an empirical analysis that intended to assess whether these effects were reality or just a myth, and whether their magnitude was relevant enough in comparison to the economic costs of this transport mode as compared to more (socially) affordable alternatives.

Building a database of tourism and transport data for Spanish municipalities in the 2005-2012 period, our microeconometric model combined two methodologies. Firstly, a difference-in-difference (DiD) approach that compared those municipalities that received HSR investments (i.e., nearby rail stations were built or enhanced) during this period, with those that did not. Our results show that the positive effects of HSR on the number of visitors, the number of nights spent at destination and/or the hotel occupancy rates are mostly restricted, at best, to larger cities, but in most cases they are minimal or even negative. To explore additional implications, we also estimated a panel model that simultaneously considered the effects on all the municipalities but again, the results were disappointing: no clear positive effects were found with respect to the tourism dependent variables and, in many cases, airport investments proved to be a better alternative.

Of course, the main conclusion of this paper is not that more airports should be built everywhere or that all high-speed rail developments are wrong projects from a social point of view. Even if investment costs cannot be recovered or can be only in the long-term, we strongly support this transport mode for those cases where the social and economic justification sounds – at least – reasonable. This reasonability requires a detailed (and, preferably, public and open to discussion) analysis of existing and prospect demand, a study of all the possible alternatives to tackle the exiting transport problem (if any), and a realistic consideration of the limited effects that HSR provides from the point of view of social and territorial cohesion. In the meantime, we would recommend a highly suspicious view on those projects mainly grounded on (expected) large induced demand effects (at the regional and local level). On this issue, it is possibly better to err on the side of caution, than to leave our grandchildren a bequest that they will be never able to pay.

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