

The Ambiguous Impact of Modern Roads on Landlocked Territories in Western Africa

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Main roads have always been the major mean of development. They have been taking an important place in the models produced by scholars to explain the process of globalization since the colonial times (Taaffe, Hoyle, Rimmer, Vance, Debie...). In western Africa, the lack of roads is still considered as a major explanation for understanding what are poverty and underdevelopment. It is a big challenge to the States in charge of mobility policies aiming at a better integration of people living in landlocked territories. Nowadays many projects of international roads are going on, so-called corridors linking up the major cities together and, by the way, opening the territories which they are going through, in spite of distance and borders. The African Union, with the help of international institutions, runs an ambitious program of interstate roads, especially in western Africa. It is not only a question of economic development which means an increasing of flows of people and goods, at the same time, to and from the territories concerned. It is also the best way to improve the access to water, health, education, jobs for all those who cannot reach them easily. However opening territories is ambiguous. Roads can strengthen countries and people on their way to development. Nevertheless they can also contribute to weaken territories without enough population, education, resources, unable to resist the attraction of the big cities' mirage, as they are becoming closer to them, thanks to modern roads. This proposal aims to emphasize the contribution of transportation infrastructures to new territorial organizations linked to human development. Theoretical approach will be complemented by examples, especially in landlocked territories in the Sahel part of western Africa, with a focus on the new road between Nouakchott and Nouadhibou in Mauritania, international road linking up North and West Africa, with strong impacts on the local population of Imraguen, living in the Banc d'Arguin.