

Fernanda de Lima Lourencetti – *From a Railway Junction to a Corridor - Évora's railway history through Iberian Railway Connections*. História. Revista da FLUP. Porto. IV Série. Vol. 15 nº 2 2025. 221-248.

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From a Railway Junction to a Corridor - Évora's railway history through Iberian Railway Connections¹

De Entroncamento a Corredor Ferroviário - A história ferroviária de Évora através das ligações ferroviárias ibéricas

D'un nœud ferroviaire à un corridor - L'histoire ferroviaire d'Évora à travers Iberian Railway Connections

De nudo ferroviario a corredor - La historia ferroviaria de Évora a través de Conexiones Ferroviarias Ibéricas

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Abstract: As a contribution to expand and promote knowledge about Évora's railway heritage, at a time of modernization and cultural appreciation, this article chronicles the Évora railway junction, and presents the new railway corridor built between Sines and Madrid, to describe the current situation of the first railway infrastructure. Considering that, in parallel with the construction of the new railway line, the city is in preparation to become European Capital of Culture in 2027, this article concludes that Évora's railway history is relevant in the context of Iberian railway connections as a complement to historical transport studies of the city.

Keywords: railway history; Évora; International Southern Corridor; Railway junction; Railway corridor.

Resumo: Como um contributo para ampliar e promover o conhecimento sobre o património ferroviário de Évora, numa época de modernização e valorização cultural, este artigo começa com um relato histórico do nó ferroviário de Évora, para, posteriormente, apresentar o novo corredor ferroviário construído entre Sines e Madrid e descrever a situação atual da infraestrutura antecedente. Considerando que, paralelamente à construção da nova linha férrea, a cidade se prepara para ser Capital Europeia da Cultura em 2027, este artigo conclui que a história ferroviária de Évora é relevante no contexto das ligações ferroviárias ibéricas como complemento dos estudos históricos sobre transporte na cidade.

Palavras-chave: história ferroviária; Évora; Corredor Internacional Sul; Entroncamento ferroviário; Corredor ferroviário.

Résumé: Afin d'élargir et de promouvoir la connaissance du patrimoine ferroviaire d'Évora, à une époque de modernisation et de valorisation culturelle, cet article fait la chronique du nœud ferroviaire d'Évora, puis présente le nouveau corridor ferroviaire construit entre Sines et Madrid, afin de décrire la situation actuelle de la première infrastructure ferroviaire. Considérant que, parallèlement à la construction de la nouvelle ligne ferroviaire, la ville se prépare à devenir capitale européenne de la culture en 2027, cet article conclut que l'histoire ferroviaire d'Évora est pertinente dans le contexte des connexions ferroviaires ibériques, en complément des études historiques sur les transports de la ville.

Mots clés : histoire ferroviaire ; Évora ; Corridor Sud International ; Jonction ferroviaire ; Corridor ferroviaire.

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Resumen: Como contribución para ampliar y promover el conocimiento del patrimonio ferroviario de Évora, en un momento de modernización y valorización cultural, este artículo hace una crónica del nudo ferroviario de Évora, y a continuación presenta el nuevo corredor ferroviario construido entre Sines y Madrid, para describir la situación actual de la primera infraestructura ferroviaria. Teniendo en cuenta que, paralelamente a la construcción de la nueva línea ferroviaria, la ciudad se prepara para convertirse en Capital Europea de la Cultura en 2027, este artículo concluye que la historia ferroviaria de Évora es relevante en el contexto de las conexiones ferroviarias ibéricas como complemento a los estudios históricos del transporte de la ciudad.

Palabras clave: historia ferroviaria; Évora; Corredor Internacional del Sur; nudo ferroviario; corredor ferroviario.

Introduction

In Portugal, railway construction began later than some other European countries, such as England and France. This delay can be explained by the political and economic instability in which the country found itself at the beginning of the 19th century, mainly due to the Portuguese Civil War (1828-1834), the lack of capital and technicians available and the rugged terrain that required the construction of bridges and viaducts². Thus, until 1850, the most widely used means of transport of goods in Portugal was shipping (Isidoro *et al.*, 2018). The so-called “Railway Age” began in the second half of this decade, when the Portuguese railway system experienced significant growth.

Despite the delay in implementing the railway, plans had been drawn up in the 1840s. In 1844, the Public Works Company was set up with the aim of developing roads and railways. However, the construction of railway infrastructure only began in the 1850s, during the Regeneration Government (1851-1910), and the first branch was inaugurated in 1856, between Lisbon and Carregado, which allowed the construction of *Linha do Leste* (to Badajoz in Spain) and *Linha do Norte* (to Oporto). By the end of the 19th century, the main railway lines of Portugal had been completed³. Évora is located in the interior of Alentejo, in the south of Portugal. In this region, the railway connection with Spain serves as a symbol to reinforce the duality between the coast and the hinterland⁴.

² The Portuguese railway history has been lively discussed in the past few years – see for instance Pinheiro (2021); Cardoso de Matos (2023); Pereira (2018); Lourencetti (2025).

³ On the general history of Portuguese railway, it is worth turning to classic literature, namely Quadro (1956); Pinheiro (1979) and Alegria (1990).

⁴ Expression used to refer to a land far but connected to a port.

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Although some experts like Gaspar (1972) and Carvalho (1990) argue that the Évora railway did not promote the city in the urban-regional sphere, nor did it significantly influence the development of its urban grid, the regional producers had a clear interest in building the railway. Furthermore, according to Simplício (2009), the railway has favoured the city's development. Évora's extra-mural growth began in a southerly direction, i.e. towards the railway station of Évora, where Barahona Avenue and Combatentes da Grande Guerra Avenue were built; therefore, between the railway station and the historic centre, neighbourhoods such as Baluarte, Ferroviário and Rossio Ocidental were constructed.

Until the mid-20th century, all the branches and lines that were installed in Évora had the ultimate goal of linking the city to Spain. However, as will be shown, despite the various proposals, only one link managed to achieve this goal, the *Ramal de Portalegre*. Furthermore, in the second half of the 20th century, as happened with other Portuguese railway lines, much of the railway infrastructure in Évora was decommissioned. Currently, despite the conversion of part of a rail route into a greenway, the railway remnants once linked to Évora are in a state of decay.

At the beginning of the 21st century, rail transport gained renewed interest at a global level, becoming one of the main instruments for achieving sustainability, due to a possible reduction in the consumption of oil derivatives and air pollution with substances harmful to health and the environment. In this context, Portugal was included in new international railway plans. Évora began to be seen as part of the competitive Iberian hinterland, becoming part of the International Southern Corridor.

“The transport corridor provides the physical capacity for movement and favours the accessibility and circulation of production, distribution and consumption flows. Corridors have become the main structure for accessibility to the hinterland and through which ports gain access to distribution systems. Strategies are therefore increasingly involving the control of distribution channels in order to ensure the unimpeded movement of containerised cargo” (Moreira, 2013:9) [translated by the author]

This railway corridor is under construction and, initially, its operation aims to guarantee the efficiency and reliability (as a consequence of intermodal freight transport) of the freight flows between the Port of Sines and Madrid. In addition, the

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aim of strengthening the Portuguese railway network is to reduce road traffic, at a time when value-added investment companies are settling in Évora, particularly aeronautical industry. To this end, the possibility of reactivating part of Évora's old railway network was raised, but the investment was not considered to be economically viable and many of the municipalities opposed the proposal, since the old railway routes have over time been incorporated into the urban grid.

The railway works on the International Southern Corridor are scheduled to be completed on 2025. This can possibly change Évora's urban and economic dynamics. To be able to understand the railway's role in the city and in its region, its history should be understood. Why did Évora become a railway junction? How was Évora's first railway connection with Spain established? How is the city managing its railway heritage? What are the general expectations for the new railway link between Évora and Spain?

In 1986, Évora's historic centre was included on the list of World Heritage Sites by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). In 2023, the city was elected European Capital of Culture 2027. This last classification means that Évora should receive initiatives to expand and promote knowledge about its cultural development beyond its 17th-century walls. Thus, at a time of modernisation and concern for the appreciation of the city's culture, it is important to draw attention to Évora's railway history.

In this context, and with the aim of promoting the relevance of Évora's railway history, this article aims to highlight its participation in the Iberian railway connection by: reconstructing Évora's railway history; reflecting on the impact of the city's new railway link to Spain and; promoting and valuing its remnants. Technical documents drawn up by the Évora City Council, historical documents found at the Évora District Archive, at the *Diário da República*, and at the Portuguese Environment Agency, as well as historical press and current press will be used as references. It will be concluded that the value of Évora's railway history goes beyond its own infrastructure, justifying its promotion throughout the Iberian railway connections.

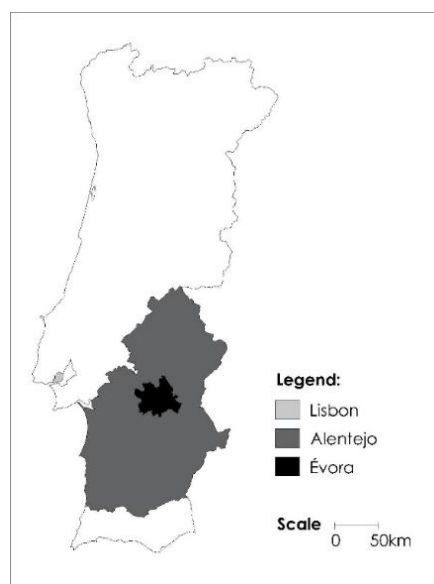
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The Construction of Évora's Railway Junction

Évora is part of the urban network crossed by railway links between the coast (Lisbon) and the hinterland of Portugal, and Europe (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Map of Portugal with the location of the Alentejo region and the Évora municipality



Source: Designed by the author

If in the late 19th century and early 20th century, the railway served to extend the trade of goods, in the second half of the 20th century, its lines promoted a territory transformation, greatly influenced by the connection with Spain. As pointed out by an article published in 1905, the expectation of connecting the Portuguese railway network with Spain had been a goal since the second half of the 19th century.

“It is certain that in every period of our network's constitution, the best spirits have not shied away from this mirage, often sacrificing internal conveniences to it. Since 1845 we have been trying to build a railway towards the border”⁵.

⁵ Hemeroteca Digital de Lisboa, *Gazeta Dos Caminhos De Ferro*, n.416, 8º do 18º anno, April 1905, 113 [translated by the author].

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The first hypotheses for a railway link between Portugal and Spain considered running the tracks through the Alentejo. Drawn up by the chief engineer of the *Companhia Central Peninsular*, Thomás Rumball (1824-1902), the railway plans initially consisted of three proposals:

- Continuation of the *Linha do Leste* from Carregado towards Mora, Estremoz and Badajoz, through the Sorraia River region;
- A railway line from Santarém;
- A railway line towards Badajoz via Abrantes.

Eventually, there were five railway connections between Portugal and Spain during the late 19th century: the *Linha do Leste* (1868), the *Linha de Cáceres* (1880), *Linha da Beira Alta* (1886), *Linha do Minho* (1886) and the *Linha do Douro* (1887). Nevertheless, before the Portuguese-Spanish railway connections were established, the rails arrived in Évora (1863) and throughout its history the city became a junction for railway branches.

Évoras' railway history started with the first plan for the south-eastern railway, developed by Jayme Larcher's⁶ (1826-1889). Eventhough, in his plan the railway was supposed to cross Évora municipality, it did not consider the connection with the Alentejo as one of the main goals, but rather as a complement to the Portuguese network. In 1844, Benjamin de Oliveira had proposed a link between Portugal and Spain via a rail track from Lisbon through Alcácer do Sal to Évora, but this line was never built.

In 1854, Eugénio de Almeida, an owner of cereal land in the Alentejo, and Marquês de Ficalho, another landowner in the same region, proposed the construction of a railway line linking Aldea Galega, now Montijo, to Vendas Novas, which could be extended to Setúbal, Évora and Beja. However, as the area between Aldea Galega and Vendas Novas would have been too sandy, this idea was abandoned (Lourencetti, 2022:6).

⁶ Archive of the University of Coimbra. Portugal, RC MNCT 65 CMA, *Caminho de ferro do sul e sueste: esclarecimentos sobre a administração do governo: discussões sobre o local para a fixação dos terminos d'estas linhas: indicação de um novo traçado ligando a estação do Pinhal novo com o caminho de ferro de leste*, 1876:9.

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In the discussions about the location of the *terminus* station for the railway on the south of the Tagus River, Barreiro had been considered as a possibility. Studies by the French bridge and pavement engineer, Wattier⁷, identified the most direct route between Lisbon and Spain as the one starting in Barreiro and reaching Badajoz, passing through Vendas Novas, Montemor, Évora and Redondo. Finally, after Barreiro was chosen as the obligatory starting point for the railway, a law of 30 April 1855 gave the *Companhia do Caminho de Ferro ao Sul do Tejo* (created on 6 February 1855) the concession to build the lines on the south of the Tagus River. After receiving a subsidy of 7,900\$000 Réis (currency at the time) per kilometre to be built, in 1861, the railway branch between Barreiro and Vendas Novas was opened for operation⁸.

Meanwhile, in 1857, a year after the inauguration of Portugal's first railway section between Lisbon and Carregado, the Council of Public Works decided not to award the concession to extend the line from Vendas Novas to Évora and Beja to the *Companhia do Caminho de Ferro ao Sul do Tejo*. A public tender was launched on 8 August 1859 (Pereira, 2018), but no applications were received for it. Finally, on 3 January 1860, a provisional contract was drawn up with British investors: John Sutherland Valentine, Charles Edward Mangles, John Chapman, Robert Russel Notman, Hardy Hislop and George Bernard Townsend. As shareholders of the South Eastern Railway Company of Portugal, they passed on their concession rights to this company. Edward Price was the contractor in charge of the works, with C. F. White being the engineer responsible for the works of art (bridges). The tracks reached Évora on 14 September 1863⁹, the same year that Linha do Leste, reached Elvas, on the border of Portugal.

On 11 June 1864, the South Eastern Railway Company of Portugal was granted the concession to build the Évora-Estremoz line, known as the *Linha de Évora*. However, on 13 March 1869, before the completion of the line's construction, the government took possession of the company. Although the tracks between Vendas Novas and Évora were in good condition, this company was in a precarious financial

⁷ Évora District Archive, *Governo Civil de Évora, Secção H – Inspecção, licenciamento, fiscalização e seguranças, subsecção H/E – Obras Públicas, Circular sobre a construção do caminho de ferro*, 1850.

⁸ Hemeroteca Digital de Lisboa, *Gazeta Dos Caminhos De Ferro*, n.342, 6º do 15 anno, Mar. 1902, 81.

⁹ Évora District Archive, *Livro de Inauguração da Via Férrea*, 1863.

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state, and the rights of the railway lines between Barreiro, Évora and Beja were transferred to the *Direção dos Caminhos de Ferro de Sul e Sueste*¹⁰. Under government administration, the Évora-Estremoz 52km rail branch was completed and opened for operation on 22 December 1873, passing through the following locations: Comenda, Garraia, Souza da Sé, Azaruja, Vale do Pereiro, Vimieiro, Aranha, Évoramonte (officially called: Évora Monte) and Ameixial.

During this period, Évora received a goods depot and had its station renovated. These improvements had a positive impact on local industries, for example, as in Pinhal Novo and Beja, there was still a large tree nursery in Évora supplying acacia, cedar and eucalyptus saplings to the plantation forests in the region. With the extension and improvements to the railway, the average annual income of the railway operation increased around 20 per cent.

“The railway crosses one of the richest, least populated and most unexploited provinces, even considering only its great mineral wealth (but with fair tariffs and not the current ones, which in general are barely enough to cover the costs of traction and maintenance of the equipment) will be enough to sustain an explanation of the advantage of its construction in the future”¹¹.

In 1876, trains travelled from Barreiro to Évora at an average speed of 60km/h and from Évora to Estremoz at 45km/h. Passengers “confessed that it was one of the fastest journeys they had ever made”¹². Although it was noted that the south-eastern railway had a greater commercial function than passenger transport, due to the extensive cultivation of the Alentejo region, the railway between the Tagus River and the country’s hinterland had the aim of “transporting passengers from the Alentejo to the

¹⁰ Hemeroteca Digital de Lisboa, *Gazeta Dos Caminhos De Ferro*, n.342, 6º do 15 anno, Mar. 1902, 82.

¹¹ Archive of the University of Coimbra. Portugal, RC MNCT 65 CMA, *Caminho de ferro do sul e sueste: esclarecimentos sobre a administração do governo: discussões sobre o local para a fixação dos terminos d'estas linhas: indicação de um novo traçado ligando a estação do Pinhal novo com o caminho de ferro de leste*, 1876:8 [translated by the author].

¹² Archive of the University of Coimbra. Portugal, RC MNCT 65 CMA, *Caminho de ferro do sul e sueste: esclarecimentos sobre a administração do governo: discussões sobre o local para a fixação dos terminos d'estas linhas: indicação de um novo traçado ligando a estação do Pinhal novo com o caminho de ferro de leste*, 1876:30 [translated by the author].

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shores nearby, freeing them from the varied and painful inconveniences and accidents of travelling through the heathlands and sandy territory”¹³.

Between 1876 and 1898, the *Direção dos Caminhos de Ferro de Sul e Sueste* was under the management of João Pedro Tavares Trigueiros¹⁴. During this period, the improved railway infrastructure and reduced journey times contributed to the development of agricultural production in Alentejo based on: wool, cattle, cork, charcoal, wine and olive oil. Thus, at the beginning of the 20th century, with the aim of expanding this development, plans for a rail connection from Évora to Reguengos de Monsaraz, in the south east, an extension of the *Linha de Évora* to Vila Viçosa to the north east and a rail connection between Évora and Ponte de Sôr to the north were drawn up. The latter, “which put the capital of the Alentejo, as its geographical and commercial centre”¹⁵, would connect Évora to the first Portuguese railway line (Figure 2).

¹³ Archive of the University of Coimbra. Portugal, RC MNCT 65 CMA, *Caminho de ferro do sul e sueste: esclarecimentos sobre a administração do governo: discussões sobre o local para a fixação dos terminos d'estas linhas: indicação de um novo traçado ligando a estação do Pinhal novo com o caminho de ferro de leste*, 1876:59 [translated by the author].

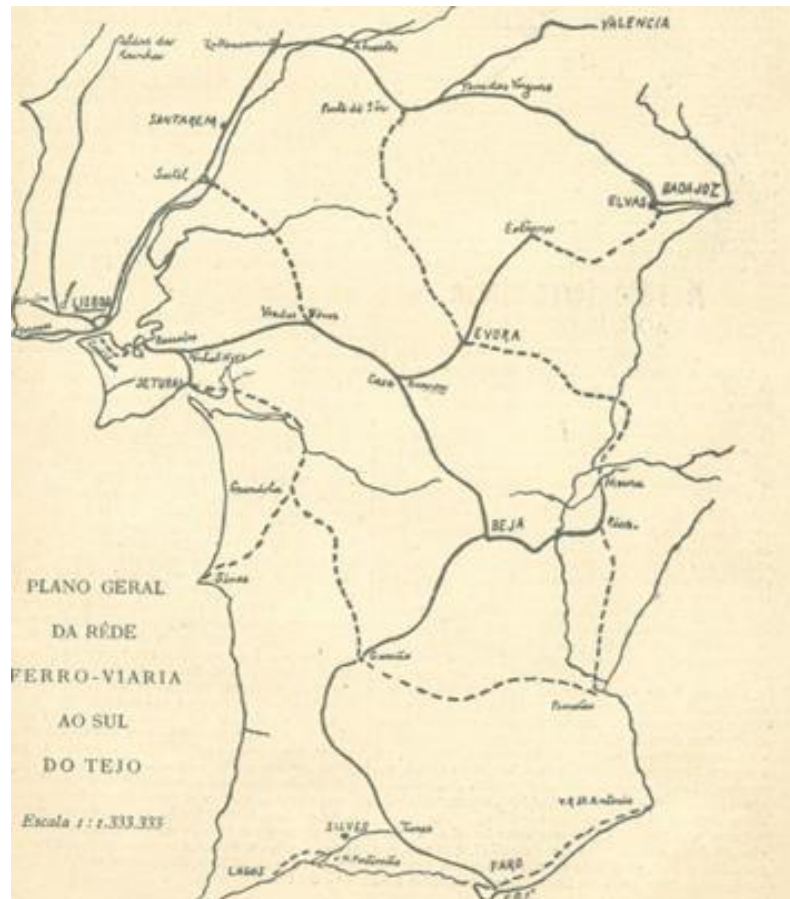
¹⁴ Hemeroteca Digital de Lisboa, *Gazeta Dos Caminhos De Ferro*, n.342, 6º do 15 anno, Mar. 1902, 81.

¹⁵ Hemeroteca Digital de Lisboa, *Gazeta Dos Caminhos De Ferro*, n.342, 6º do 15 anno, Mar. 1902, 83.

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Figure 2 – General Plan of the Railway Network on the South of the Tagus (1902)



Source: Hemeroteca Digital de Lisboa, *Gazeta Dos Caminhos De Ferro*, n.359, 23º do 15º anno, Dec. 1902, 83

The Figure 2 represents planned connections between Évora and Spain:

- By extending the Reguengos de Monsaraz branch line to Zafra;
- Linking the Cáceres branch line and *Linha do Leste* through Ponte de Sôr;
- By extending the line from Estremoz to Elvas and Extremadura.

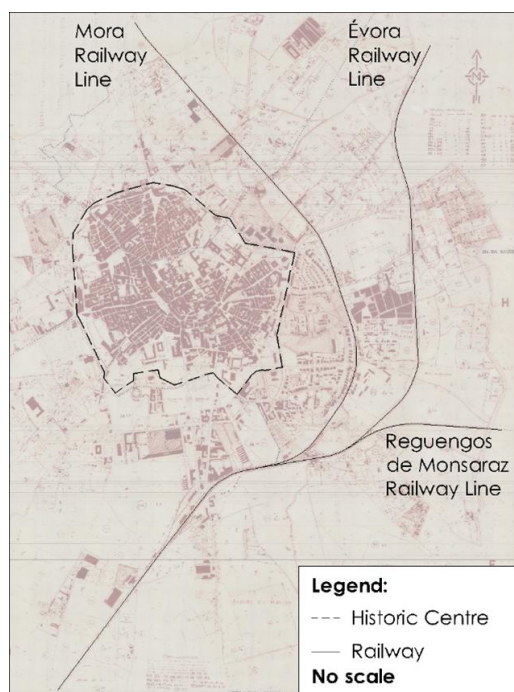
The connection between Évora and Zafra was proposed in 1884 and was supposed to link Reguengos de Monsaraz, Redondo and Mourão in Portugal. The aim of this branch was to connect Évora to the Spanish Mérida-Seville railway (André, 2018: 16). After other proposals had been drawn up, the Reguengos de Monsaraz council was

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authorised by decree on 27 January 1912 to take out a loan for the construction of the rail branch between Évora and Reguengos de Monsaraz. The Agricultural Union, represented by the president Dr. Joaquim Rojão, facilitated the necessary expropriations. In 1913, the construction of this branch began. Its tracks departed from the kilometre 116.6 - Évora railway station - creating a fork at kilometre 117.6 (Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Representation of Évora's railway junctions



Source: Archive of the Urban Planning and Rehabilitation Division of Évora City Council, DORU - *Évora in 1951*. Adapted by the author

Eventually, the Reguengos de Monsaraz branch line was opened to public use on 6 April 1927 (André, 2018: 22) and served the following locations: Paço Saraiva, Machede, Santa Suzana, Balancho, Montoito, Falcoeiras and Caridade. This rail branch never reached its intended final destination due to diverging economic interests with Spain, which believed that the country would lose part of its export market if the railway link between Portugal and Andalusia was completed.

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In 1902, a committee of farmers and landowners from Évora, Arraiolos, Pavia, Cabeção and Mora had been set up to encourage interested parties to lobby the government to build the railway to Ponte de Sôr¹⁶. Mr J. Cecilio da Costa and Mr J. Nepomuceno de Lacerda were commissioned to present a project for the rail branch between Évora and the river Raia¹⁷. Three proposals were made for the starting point of the tracks: Évora station; the Xarrama gate; the Degebe gate. The first proposal proved to be most expensive due to the need for numerous expropriations and the third was considered the longest, so it was decided that the second plan should be carried out. This consisted of a fork in the *Linha de Évora* before kilometre 119.00, with its starting point at kilometre 116.57 (Figure 3).

To build the line, a number of expropriations were made and three bridges were built. Its route would run down the valley of the river Divor, reach Arraiolos and then Pavia and Mora, from where its continuation would meet the river Raia. However, the river became an obstacle; it was not feasible to build a bridge to cross it. Thus, the tracks that were supposed to reach Ponte de Sôr and be connected with the *Linha do Leste* (linking Évora to Spain) never reached their final destination¹⁸. Finally, this rail branch stopped at kilometre 177.60 in Mora, passing through: Loredó, Sr. Dos Aflitos, Nossa Senhora da Graça do Divor, Arraiolos, Vale de Paio, Pavia and Cabeção. Although the section of this line between Évora and Arraiolos began operation on 20 April 1907, the *Ramal Ferroviário de Mora* was completed in 1908.

On 1 August 1905¹⁹, before the construction of the rail branches described above, the railway from Estremoz reached Vila Viçosa. Until the first half of the 20th century, anyone in Elvas or Campo Maior who wanted to use the train that ran through Évora had to go to Borba Station, located 30 kilometres from Elvas and 50 kilometres from Campo Maior, thus the tracks of Vila Viçosa were supposed to reach Elvas, which would link Évora to the *Linha do Leste* too. However, the aforementioned engineer Wattier identified some disadvantages in establishing the link between Évora and Spain from Vila Viçosa; they were essentially based on the high cost, due to the natural

¹⁶ Hemeroteca Digital de Lisboa, *Gazeta Dos Caminhos De Ferro*, n.366, 6º do 16º ano, Mar. 1903, 71.

¹⁷ Hemeroteca Digital de Lisboa, *Gazeta Dos Caminhos De Ferro*, n.370, 10º do 16º ano, May 1903, 169.

¹⁸ Hemeroteca Digital de Lisboa, *Gazeta Dos Caminhos De Ferro*, n.377, 7º do 16º ano, Sept., 295-297.

¹⁹ Hemeroteca Digital de Lisboa, *Gazeta Dos Caminhos De Ferro*, n.1638, ano LXIX, Mar. 1956, 145.

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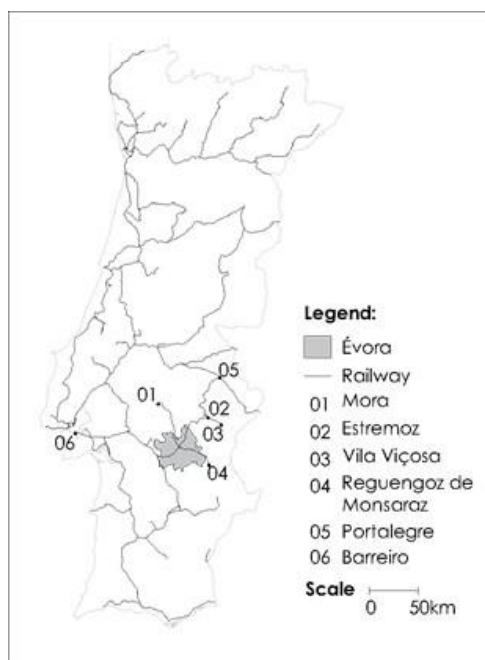
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characteristics of the terrain, and the lack of a direct link to Lisbon, since, as already described, the railway that served Évora started in Barreiro²⁰. With this same opinion, in 1876 the Portuguese engineer Souza Brandão stated that:

“Our communication with Badajoz would be better served if it starts at the railway on the south of the Tagus River and travels to Guadiana, via Évora, Redondo, Bencatel, Alandroal, Jerumenha and Badajoz, a shorter line designed for high speeds and of a different destination from the railway between Évora and Estremoz, which continues to the east”²¹.

Finally, Évora was linked to Spain by the Portalegre railway branch, between Estremoz and Portalegre. The design works of this connection started in May 1903, and its first branch, between Estremoz and Sousel was opened to the public on 23 October 1925. The Reguengos de Monsaraz branch line was the last one to be inaugurated, and Évora’s railway junction and its connection with Spain were completed in the second decade of the 20th century (Figure 4).

Figure 4 – Representation of Évora’s railway network in the second half of the 20th century



Designed by the author

²⁰ Hemeroteca Digital de Lisboa, *Gazeta Dos Caminhos De Ferro*, n.1640, 3º do 69º ano, Apr. 1956, 192.

²¹ Hemeroteca Digital de Lisboa, *Gazeta Dos Caminhos De Ferro*, n.1649, ano 12º do 69º Ano, Sept. 1956, 399.

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The *Corredor Internacional Sul* as the Future of the Railway in Évora

From the 1950s onwards, as happened in other regions of Portugal, Évora experienced the closure of its branch lines. The passengers transportation of Mora and Reguengos de Monsaraz branches was considered to be loss-making, thus these rail lines started to be used only for freight transport, but this did not affect the gradual decommissioning of the tracks over the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 2000s. Only the railway line that reached Évora via Casa Branca, linking the city to Lisbon, remained in operation.

Due to the remaining line (Casa Branca – Évora), Évora's railway history in Iberian connection context did not end. As a matter of fact, The modernisation and extension of the Évora railway is part of the railway network planning that goes beyond even the Iberian connections. This new railway is now associated with the Atlantic Corridor, a trade corridor that involves the link between the ports of Sines, Lisbon and Leixões with the port of Le Havre (France) and the cities of Strasbourg and Mannheim.

At national level, the *Corredor Internacional Sul* was part of the National Railway Network's upgrading and modernisation programme – Ferrovia 2020²² – and was included in the Strategic Transport and Infrastructure Plan – PETI3+ (2014). However, this corridor is related to a much broader railway spectrum than the national railway network, forming part of the Trans-European Network Priority Project No. 16²³ and the already mentioned Atlantic Corridor, which involves Portugal, Spain, France and Germany.

The *Corredor Internacional Sul* is being co-financed by the European Union under the ‘Connecting Europe Facility’ projects, which aims to coordinate the implementation of central transport networks, under the motto ‘Core Network Corridors’; this corridor has strategic value at different levels²⁴:

²² Arquivo Histórico de Portugal, *Plano Estratégico De Transportes E Infraestruturas (PETI3+)* [accessed 03/01/2024]. Available at: <https://www.historico.portugal.gov.pt/pt/o-governo/arquivo-historico/governos-constitucionais/gc20/os-temas/peti3mais/peti3mais.aspx>.

²³ Agência Portuguesa de Ambiente, *Nº SAP 10003677389-323, versão 00, RECAPE – Projeto de Execução, vol. 3 Via Férrea, Tomo 3.1 – Peças Escritas, Memória Descritiva*, 30 Sept. 2019.

²⁴ Infraestruturas de Portugal PETI 3+: <https://www.infraestruturasdeportugal.pt/pt-pt/infraestruturas/investimentos/programas/planos-estrategicos/peti3> (accessed 3 January 2024).

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- European: the integration of Portugal into the Atlantic Corridor and the main European logistics chains;
- Iberian: the connection of the Portuguese harbour arch (Sines, Setúbal and Lisbon) with Spain, which is Portugal's largest trading partner;
- National: the promotion of the growth of the Port of Sines and the market associated with rail traffic.

For the construction of the line between Évora and Elvas (Caia), called *Évora Norte*, four studies were drawn up: two made partial use of the old railway route of the *Linha de Évora*²⁵; one proposed the construction of a railway bypass to accompany IP2 (Main Route n.2); and the other proposed a bypass crossing an area between the first two solutions, laying a railway line nearby but outside the urban grid of Évora.

As the last study described above does not have a considerable impact on the consolidated urban grid, nor on the landscape along its tracks, it was chosen as the best solution. The decision was taken on 27 July 2018. With just over 80 kilometres between Évora and Portugal's border, the project selected resembles the route proposed by Souza Brandão in 1876. The railway line leaves from Évora station, passes through Redondo, Alandroal (but further south and not through Bencatel as Brandão proposed) and continues to the border via Elvas and Caia (Figure 5). Between Alandroal and the country's border, the railway passes through the vicinity of Juromenha, where, according to the 1876 proposal, the rail line would cross the border. Currently, as already mentioned, the connection is made by a railway junction between *Évora Norte* and *Linha do Leste*, located before Elvas, where the railway reaches the border via Caia.

²⁵ One of these proposals was planned within the urban grid, and would have become a barrier to the road and pedestrian traffic between the city centre and some suburban neighbourhoods, such as Santo António and Santa Luzia.

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Figure 5 – *Corredor Internacional Sul*



Source: “Linha de Évora, Troço de Évora-Évora Norte”. *Infraestruturas de Portugal* [accessed 23/03/2024]. Available at: <https://www.infraestruturasdeportugal.pt/pt-pt/principais-investimentos/linha-de-evora-troco-evora-evora-norte>.

Adapted by the author

The main goals set for the *Évora Norte* Line were²⁶:

- Reducing the distance between Évora and Spain by 140 kilometres;
- Reducing the journey time by around 3 hours;
- Enabling electric traction on the entire route;
- Enabling the circulation of 750-metre-long freight trains;
- Increasing towed load capacity to 1400 tonnes with single electric traction;
- Provisioning railway interoperability conditions at national, Iberian and European level;
- Improving infrastructure reliability and availability;
- Reducing accidents at level crossings.

The route outlined for the *Corredor Internacional Sul* was divided into four sections for construction and financing purposes:

- A first segment between Sines, Ermidas and Grândola, where it will meet the existing railway network;
- A second segment between Évora and *Évora Norte*;

²⁶ Agência Portuguesa de Ambiente, *Nº SAP 10003677389-323, versão 00, RECAPE – Projeto de Execução, vol. 3 Via Férrea, Tomo 3.1 – Peças Escritas, Memória Descritiva*, 30 Sept. 2019.

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- A third segment connecting *Évora Norte*, to Portugal's boarder via Elvas (Caia);
- A fourth segment between *Évora* and the European Rail Traffic Management System of Caia.

Of these sections, only the branch between *Évora Norte* and Portugal's boarder (Caia) was newly-built. The other branches have been modernised, particularly to accommodate heavier loads, the electrification system, the European control system for traffic safety and the signalling system²⁷. The new branch *Évora-Évora Norte* is around 10km long, starting at kilometre 117.70 of the old *Linha de Évora*, it has the Iberian gauge (1.668m) and a width of 400m²⁸.

On 5 March 2018, the beginning of the *Évora-Caia* branch was announced by the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, Pedro Marques²⁹. On 5 March 2020, the work to modernise the branch of *Linha Leste* between Elvas and Caia began. Subsequently, on 29 June 2020, IP³⁰ launched the tender for the modernisation of the railway link between Sines and the southern railway line³¹.

In the proposal for *Évora-Évora Norte* 10km branch were foreseen (Figure 9):

- Six housing demolitions;
- The construction of a technical station between the Ribeira Vale de Figueira bridge and the Main Route n.2 (IP2);
- The installation of an overpass near the Nutrimonte factory (kilometre 120);
- Two level crossings classified as Agricultural Crossings at kilometres 121.600 and 122.200;

²⁷ Arquivo Histórico de Portugal, *Plano Estratégico De Transportes E Infraestruturas (PETI3+)* [accessed 03/01/2024]. Available at: <https://www.historico.portugal.gov.pt/media/12289858/20150618-peti3-anexo-vi-mapa-rede-ferroviaria.pdf>.

²⁸ Agência Portuguesa de Ambiente, *Nº SAP 10003677389-323, versão 00, RECAPE – Projeto de Execução, vol. 3 Via Férrea, Tomo 3.1 – Peças Escritas, Memória Descritiva*, 30 de Sept. de 2019.

²⁹ (2018), “Ferrovia 2020 - Corredor Internacional Sul Início da Obra do Troço Évora-Caia Elvas, Intervenção do Ministro do Planeamento e das Infraestruturas, Pedro Marques”, [accessed 3/01/2024]. Available at: <https://www.portugal.gov.pt/download-ficheiros/ficheiro.aspx?v=%3D%3DBAAAAB%2BLCAAAAAAABAAzMbI0AQA%2BNJWBAAA%3D%3D>.

³⁰ Infraestruturas de Portugal is a public company that manages and invests in road, rail and telecommunications networks.

³¹ Diário da República, Depósito legal n.º8815/85, II série, n.124.

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- Extension of the Xarrama viaduct near the railway station;
- The repositioning of water and sanitation infrastructures at four different points of location;
- The construction of three bridges: over the River Xarrama (PK 118.368, 195.4 metres long); over the River Degebe (PK 126.291, 97 metres long) and; over the Ribeira de Vale Figueira (127.245, 34 metres long).;
- The intersection with eight different locations of the highway;
- Infrastructure to minimise noise and vibration at around eight different locations along the railway.

These forecasts, many of which have already been realised, show that Évora is acquiring a new railway landscape in its vicinity. We cannot fail to mention the construction of a 20.5 km railway platform between Évora Norte and Freixo, which will take place between kilometres 126.000 and 146.500. Thus, Évora's surrounding landscape is changing by the new infrastructure, which includes the construction of bridges and viaducts; even the road routes in the countryside have had to be adapted. All this territorial intervention will result in the structuring of a new space use dynamic, which may directly or indirectly influence the consolidated urban grid, as well as the economic potential of the region.

The Remnants of the 'Eborensis' Railway Junction

According to Conde (1994), concern for historical monuments in Portugal dates back to the 15th century, when King Afonso V intervened in the removal of some stones from the Roman Temple of Évora in 1467. However, it was the Royal Charter of King Afonso V (1721), influenced by the Portuguese Academy of History, that interceded for historical monuments, preventing the destruction of any building, regardless of its condition, before a preliminary analysis of its historical value by the Royal Academy.

Over the years, the concern for the preservation of historical monuments increased. In 1880, the Royal Association of Architects and Archaeologists drew up the

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first proposal for the classification of historical monuments. In 1901 the Council of National Monuments was created and from then on the classification and management of historical monuments was outlined. As was the case internationally, industrial buildings, as the railway infrastructure, only began to receive attention in the second half of the 20th century.

Thus, it was during the period of decline in railway transport that Portugal implemented a policy of identifying and collecting vehicles and other relevant elements of railway heritage, and using them for museological purposes, i.e. to set up exhibitions. In 1976, the Railway Museum Study Commission was set up, which became responsible for this extensive collection of equipment, requiring the use of large spaces for its exhibition and conservation. For this purpose, railway buildings ‘scattered around the country have been reused, and since the 1970s they have formed the museum sections’ (Silva 2008, 130-133). In 2015, the Ginestal Machado National Railway Museum was inaugurated in Entroncamento and, together with the Lousado Railway Museum (Vila Nova de Famalicão municipality), was included in the European Route of Industrial Heritage (ERIH).

In 1998, in parallel with the development of Portuguese railway museums, the European Greenways Association was created in Belgium. Among other goals, the association aimed to encourage and to contribute to the preservation and conversion of disused linear infrastructure, namely railways, canals and historic routes (Roman roads, pilgrimage routes, etc.) reusing them as routes for non-motorised transport. In 2015, Portugal reached around 250 kilometres of greenways.

Influenced by this policy, by 2022 Portugal had converted close to 14 railway sections into greenways, with a total of 755km sub-concessed, 422km in use and 268km under construction. These routes are managed by *Infraestruturas de Portugal S.A.* (IP)³², who were awarded, the ‘Bicycle Mobility’ Award, promoted by the Portuguese Federation of Cycle Tourism and Bicycle Users (FPCUB), in September 2023, and the “Recognition of Practices in Social Responsibility and Sustainability”

³² This company is responsible for managing Portugal's infrastructure network, which includes the national railway and road systems.

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Award, promoted by the Portuguese Association of Business Ethics, in the Community category, in October 2023.

In Évora, according to a report developed by the Évora City Council (CME) in 2015³³, following the decommissioning of the railway and the removal of the tracks, a protocol was established with REFER³⁴ in which the section of the old Mora branch line was converted into a greenway. The inauguration of the first section, between the city of Évora and the old Nossa Senhora da Graça do Divor station, took place in 2005 and in 2006 another section until Sempre Noiva was opened, creating a 21km route in total.

A similar conversion took place on the old Reguengos de Monsaraz railway branch, but the new path was intercepted by the new railway, which means that it is not connected to Évora's consolidated urban grid. IP announced the start of work on converting this former railway branch into another greenway on 30 July 2023³⁵. The 37-kilometre stretch is the responsibility of the Intermunicipal Community of Central Alentejo (CIMAC), through a contract with IP – *Património*; the IP group responsible for property management³⁶. This initiative is part of a larger project, being integrated into a pedestrian route with a tourist and environmental component called the *Grande Rota do Montado*, together with the *Ecopista do Montado*, the aforementioned *Ecopista de Mora* and a future greenway that will occupy the former Évora to Estremoz rail route and the Estremoz to Vila Viçosa railway branch.

According to the National Green Path Plan presented in 2022 and drawn up by the Manager of the National Green Paths' Plan, Paulo Rodrigues, some railway stations will be repurposed, as is already the case of Mora Railway Station, which has been converted into an Interactive Megalithic Museum. Therefore, the region is currently exploiting the potential of redeveloping its old railway infrastructure, along with programmes such as the *Fundo Revive Nature*. This type of initiative aims to transform

³³ Archive of the Urban Planning and Rehabilitation Division of Évora City Council, DORU_710 – Documento DWi 7966.2015, *Circulação na Envolvente da Escola Básica André de Resende*.

³⁴ REFER was created in 1997; in 2015 it merged with Estradas de Portugal, and gave rise to IP.

³⁵ (2023), “Início das obras da Ecopista do Ramal de Reguengos”. Infraestruturas de Portugal [accessed 23/03/2024]. Available at: <https://www.infraestruturasdeportugal.pt/pt-pt/inicio-das-obras-da-ecopista-do-ramal-de-reguengos>.

³⁶ (2023), “Antigo ramal ferroviário que ligava Évora a Reguengos de Monsaraz dá lugar a ecopista”. *Diana FM* [accessed 23/03/2024]. Available at: <https://www.dianafm.com/antigo-ramal-ferroviario-que-ligava-evora-a-reguengos-de-monsaraz-da-lugar-a-ecopista/>.

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the region into a tourist destination based on the observation of fauna and flora and cultural and gastronomic routes.

Despite the recurrent use of the greenway as an urban regeneration solution, the old railway areas in Évora have been greatly de-characterised and the railway remnants that could revive the railway memory are at risk of disappearing. Interventions and preservation strategies are needed to enhance the railway heritage so that greenways include in their operation the promotion and dissemination of the railway history, not only of Évora, but also of the connection between Portugal and Spain.

Within the urban grid of Évora, some remnants of the old railway can be identified along the route of the old lines. As shown in Figure 6, among the railway remnants close to the town are some infrastructures (crane and bridge), signs and buildings. Some of them are in a poor state of repair and others have been concessioned for private and association use. These buildings have received maintenance work and, in some cases, such as the guard post at kilometre 118,66, an extension³⁷.

³⁷ Archive of the Évora City Council Private Works Processes, *DOPE-17828*, caixas 1 e 2.

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Figure 6 – Railway remnants in Évora. Legend: a) Crane; b) Iron -Bridge kilometre 121,249; c) Junction Signs; d) Railway Guard House currently used as restaurant; e) Railway Station currently used as a dwelling



Photos taken by the author (2024)

Recently, a road accident caused the loss of one of the iron bridges on the old Mora railway branch, due to a collision with a heavy refuse collection vehicle. This centenary bridge (Figures 7 and 8), known to the locals as the “Iron Bridge”, was an urban landmark.

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Figures 7 and 8 – Évora Iron Bridge (2022)



Source: (2022), “Passagem da Ecopista na Ponte de Ferro Renovada”. *Câmara Municipal de Évora* [23/03/2024]. Available at: <https://www.cm-evora.pt/passagem-da-ecopista-na-ponte-de-ferro-renovada/>.

It had been adapted to make part of the *Ecopista de Mora* by maintaining its metal structure / beams with the addition of a wooden deck and guardrail. Unfortunately, since it is impossible to reuse this structure due to the damage caused by the weather and the collision itself, the bridge was replaced.

Conclusion

The first Iberian railway link was established by the *Linha do Leste* in the mid-19th century. Évora had been included in the first plans for this link, but the city only saw its railway route cross the Iberian railway connections only in the 1920s. Due to the several attempts to connect the “Eborenses” railway to Spain, consequently, with the rest of Europe, Évora became a railway junction.

Throughout this history, three railway branches were built departing from Évora. Even though, theorists affirm that the railway did not bring a great impact on the urban grid and the surrounding area of Évora, the agricultural investors seemed to have the greatest interest in the railway connections, and avenues and neighbourhoods were built on the lands between the railway station and the city centre.

The connection with Spain was established by only one of Évora's railway branches via Portalegre, a branch line that had been planned since 1903. Some decades

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later, at the end of the 20th century, Évora ceased to be a railway junction. Only the railway line between Casa Branca and the city remained in operation, while the others that distributed the movement to the hinterland of Alentejo, have been deactivated.

In the middle of the 21st century, Évora started to be a part of a railway corridor, also associated with a new railway connection with Spain. The landscape is changing, the general expectations for this new railway are based on faster trains, greater safety and an improvement in the national and regional economy. But, how about the old railways? There are some remnants of these infrastructures, but they are in a state of decay and they do not safeguard Évora's railway history.

The remnants of the railway junction do not seem to be in total abandonment, because a number of them have been reused to host alternative activities and another part has allowed for an urban regeneration project, with the old railway route being used as a greenway. However, many parts of the old railway infrastructure already disappeared, putting in danger the memories of its history. In order to guarantee sustainable regional development, it is necessary to conserve biodiversity and enhance the historical and natural heritage by upgrading these infrastructures, which can revitalise the Évora region and highlight the Alentejo as a destination for tourist and cultural activities.

A promising future awaits, which is why it is important to promote and spread knowledge about the impact that the railway infrastructure once had on the city. It is necessary to encourage the development of initiatives aimed at strengthening the preservation and conservation of Évora's railway remnants as an intrinsic part of national railway history, being highlighted not only as the city's railway cultural heritage, but as an important point in the history of Iberian railway connections. To promote a greater knowledge of the past can enable Évora's inhabitants and authorities to take better advantage of the new railway infrastructure, now configured as a corridor.

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