The commercial role of the border area
The case of La Jonquera

Katarzyna Nawracała
Laura Bąkowska
Natalia Smela
Carles Puig
Miia Kaartinen
Tiina Juntunen
Plan of the presentation

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- Human geography
- Economy of La Jonquera
- Research questions
- Car observation
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- Conclusions
- What did you learn?
Theoretical background

Border as opportunity

- Borders are institutions, not only lines on a map
  - Laws and rules
    - Limitation of trans-boundary movement

- From closed borders to open borders
  - Important bridges

- Trans-boundary activity
  - Social meaning of the border strengthens
  - Borders as meeting places
Theoretical background
Borderlands in the economic geography point of view

- Traditionally, borders are seen as barriers to economical development of borderlands
  - Cutting natural market areas
  - National peripheries in economic terms
    - No investments
Theoretical background
Borderlands in the economic geography point of view

- When borders are permeable and there are no political barriers, it is possible to join two national market areas to a one common market area
  - Increases the customer volume
  - Differences in prices and labour costs may create new commercial activity in the borderland
Physical geography

Location
La Jonquera region, including el Portús, is located in French and Spanish border, in North Catalonia and Western Pyrénées on the west coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

The region is located in 110 meters above sea level and make up a passage in high mountains.

94% of the La Jonquera contains of forest, the crops make up 2% and productive area is 4%.
Two aerial photographs of La Jonquera

The first photograph was taken in 1956 and the other in 2012. We can see visible differences in how the town had changed over past 50 years. Looking at the photographs from the commercial point of view we can see the increase of infrastructure.
Number of inhabitants in La Jonquera
Human geography

- Nowadays the population of La Jonquera is 3,100 inhabitants.

- During the last 15 years the population has increased due to immigration. Immigrants come from Africa, South America and Eastern Europe.
Economy of La Jonquera (last 20 years)

Now is specializing in services to carriers that use the road axis.

As a result in La Jonquera there are more than:
- 300 shops
- 16 supermarkets
- 6 smoke shops
Research questions

▪ How does infrastructure influence the landscape in La Jonquera?

▪ How has the landscape changed over the past 50 years in the commercial point of view?

▪ Who are the people who visit the area and why do they come to La Jonquera?

▪ How do the commercial area affect to the everyday life of the people?
We made interviews with customers and sellers and asked following questions:

**CUSTOMERS**
- Where do you come from?
- How far do you live? How long was the trip to the city?
- How often do you come here?
- Why are you coming here? Are you coming somewhere else?
- What do you buy usually?
- How did you arrive here?
- What do you think about the landscape in La Jonquera?

**SELLERS**
- Where do you come from?
- What do you think about the expanding infrastructure?
- How many languages do you speak? What languages?
- Do you live here? If yes, how long? If no, where?
- What do you think about the landscape in La Jonquera?
Customers think that:

- those who live close to el Portús claim that the landscape is very degraded,
- moreover the lack of space complicates the smoothness of traffic and walking around the centre.

El Portús workers said that:

- they have a different perception of the landscape,
- some of them have lived in el Portús more than 10 years, they know perfectly what are the environmental problems in the area.

The natural environment was hit by a fire on 22 July 2012 where a total of 13,000 acres burned.
Which languages can sellers speak?

All the interviewed seller can speak:
- Spanish
- French
- five of them can also speak Catalan

- Other mentioned languages were native languages of the foreign sellers (Romanian, Wolof and Moroccan)
- None of the sellers told that she or he can speak English.
Car observation

The number on the right side of the registration inform about the French department from which the car is.
People tend to compare infrastructure in La Jonquera and el Portús. They claim that La Jonquera has better infrastructure and has more room for shopping malls, supermarkets and parking for cars and trucks, but in el Portús people can visit many shops in a shorter time.
Tendencies in buying goods

- In the base of interviews, photographs and visual observation people visiting La Jonquera are mostly French - the prices compare to those in France are much lower.

- In result mostly purchased goods are: alcohol, cigarettes, perfumes, clothes and food.
Tendencies in buying goods
Conclusions

- Importance of the borders to the commercialism

- Nationalities of the people visiting and working in el Portùs vary
  - Customers mainly French
  - The area seems to be mainly directed to French and Spanish customers
Conclusions

- Reasons to visit el Portùs
  - Holidaymakers
  - Shoppers
  - Spending free time

- Commuters
Conclusions

- The opinions on the landscape were diverse

- Infrastructure
  - Some customers said traffic is badly organized
  - The opinions of the sellers varied
To sum up

- Without the closeness of the French-Spanish border the commercial area of La Jonquera would not have been developed
What did we learn?

- Researched border became a ´bridge´ for development of La Jonquera district.
- Nowadays the border area has an important commercial role for both bordering countries.
- Commercial area in La Jonquera creates new opportunities for inhabitants in the region, makes new jobs and upgrades the economic situation of region.
References


- Cabezas, Jordi & Andreas Cufí (2013). Border landscapes around Europe: La Jonquera. Presentation held on 14th May 2013 in La Jonquera.


Thank you for your attention! 😊