

Notes

CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN THE GALICIA-NORTHERN PORTUGAL EUROREGION^{1 2}

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Foreword

After centuries of mistrust and rivalry, territorial cooperation relations – and, specifically, cross-border cooperation – between Portugal and Spain are nowadays characterised by an increasing dynamism. Indeed, since the second half of the 1970s, we have watched a gradual evolution and consolidation of such relations. The creation of Eurocities, Euroregions, Working Communities and European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation in the Cross-border Area of Spain and Portugal³ clearly illustrates such vitality.

According to Araújo and Varela (2014: 807), 'territorial cooperation emerges as a political objective to promote development and cohesion at the local, regional, national or even transnational levels'. In this context, the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion stands out due to its 'institutional longevity' (Araújo and Varela, 2014: 805), thus deserving a deeper reflection. Some authors even go as far as mentioning that 'the joint territory

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³ The Cross-border Area of Spain and Portugal covers 37 NUT III (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) in both sides of the border.



composed by Galicia and the Northern Region is [probably] the best defined cross-border area in Europe' (Pardellas and Padín, 2017: 32).

Located in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion includes Portugal's Northern Region (composed of the Alto Minho, Cávado, Ave, Alto Tâmega, Tâmega e Sousa, Terras de Trás-os-Montes, Douro and Porto's Metropolitan Area NUT IIIs) and the Autonomous Community of Galicia (composed of the Pontevedra, Ourense, Corunha and Lugo provinces), stretching over an area of 51 thousand sq km.

According to Cancela (2013: 89-90), besides the tangible elements (such as bridge building and the revamping of communication routes), the rapprochement of Northern Portugal and Galicia bears a huge intangible heritage, namely the creation of a context that promoted the cooperation between several political, administrative and socio-economic players, in an attempt to found a socially and economically attractive and cohesive territory and to reduce its peripheral character (in relation to the main political and economic centres) – thus giving rise to a true Euroregion.

In Medeiros' conception (2010: 6), an 'Euroregion' can be defined as

a region or subregion, usually with an area under 200,000 sq km, which spreads beyond the borders that separate one or more European countries, and that: (i) is currently the target of a common development strategy, with permanent and reinforced intervention characteristics, and with a significant participation and collaboration of several players at the local and regional levels, specially from civil society. [...] (ii) the barrier effect, in all its dimensions, is considerably limited, allowing for intense cross-border flows that help to structure the territory and promote positive socio-economic effects in both sides of the border; (iii) the sharing of social and cultural facilities is a reality; (iv) there's an intense and networked cooperation between the main research hubs, urban centres and cross-border business entities.

As stressed by Varela *et al.* (2015: 82-83), with the participation of subnational players in international relations

there's a new space generated in parallel to the formal, centralised diplomatic spaces, generating a network which is formal, but also peripheral and paradiplomatic, in which interdependencies and cooperation feed themselves, multiplying and, in some cases, producing impact through successive cross-border, interregional and territorial cooperation initiatives.

Thereby, the adoption of the 'paradiplomacy' concept points to the 'study of the external relationship of social players distinct from the centralised powers of the national states'



(Curto *et al.* 2014: 115). Consequently, beyond the contextualisation and characterisation of the cooperation between the Northern Region and Galicia, we also want to understand if the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion presents itself as a relevant player in this non-governmental diplomacy.

Thus, first we will clarify the elements that motivated cooperation between Northern Portugal and Galicia; secondly, we'll identify the stages in the institutionalization of the cross-border cooperation between the two regions; next, we'll highlight the strategic areas of cooperation, as well as the projects and initiatives implemented in the Euroregion; later, we'll assess the cooperation between the Northern Region and Galicia, foreseeing some of the future challenges; finally, we'll try to find if we can speak of a paradiplomacy in the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion.

Elements that motivated cooperation between Northern Portugal and Galicia

Historically, the coexistence and exchanges between Northern Portugal and Galicia have benefited from the geographical contiguity and the cultural and linguistic affinities (Cancela, 2010: 152). Furthermore, as stated by Trillo and Lois (2011: 129), 'the demand of benefits through wage differences, housing prices, soil, raw materials, manufactured products or leisure activities explain the daily or frequent cross-border movements, which can only occur on border areas'. Nevertheless, there are other political and institutional elements that favour such cooperation.

The democratic transition in Portugal and Spain in the second half of the 1970s decisively influenced the reshaping of their external policies, which boosted cross-border cooperation between the two states. Indeed, in 1977 both countries signed the *Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Portugal and Spain*, aiming to 'strengthen the existing friendship and solidarity bonds between the two countries'. It stated that the reinforcement of cooperation between the Iberian states and the prosecution of good neighbourhood practices would contribute to international peace and security, as well as to the 'harmonious development of the relationships which derive from the shared historical and cultural heritage'. It thus attempted to encourage mutually beneficial economic relations – specifically in industrial sectors, trade, mining, agriculture, fishery, transportation and tourism –, to develop new areas of cooperation and to 'promote the protection and rational exploitation of the shared natural resources' (Articles 3, 4 and 7).

It's equally important to mention the decentralization of the Spanish state (after the passing of the 1978 Constitution), which led to the establishment of autonomous communities. In fact, Galicia is, since 1981, an Autonomous Community whose political powers derive from its Statute of Autonomy. It has its own political institutions – a Parliament, a Regional Government and a President – and its territory is divided into provinces and municipalities.

On the other hand, Pardellas and Padín defend that (2017: 12) 'the process of European integration constituted an inflexion point in border history', starting with the lifting of the borders and the integration in the European single market (which allows the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital). Portugal and Spain joined the then called European Economic Community in 1986 and in 1988 and 1990, respectively, ratified the 1980 *European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between*



Territorial Communities or Authorities, according to which the signatory states committed to 'facilitate and foster transfrontier co-operation between territorial communities or authorities within its jurisdiction' (Article 1). Consequently, cross-border cooperation is defined as

any concerted action designed to reinforce and foster neighbourly relations between territorial communities or authorities within the jurisdiction of two or more Contracting Parties and the conclusion of any agreement and arrangement necessary for this purpose (Article 2).

Furthermore, the European Union's cohesion policy – whose main objective is to reduce the economic, social and territorial disparities between regions (Article 174 of the *Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union*) – has strengthened regional cooperation, namely as regards cross-border cooperation. In this context, INTERREG stands out. This community initiative consists of an array of programmes financed by the European Regional Development Fund, which aim to promote the cooperation between European Union regions. Started in 1989, it's currently undergoing its fifth programming period (2014-2020)⁴.

Stages in the institutionalization of cross-border cooperation between Galicia and Northern Portugal

Using Cancela's systematisation (2010), we can distinguish two stages in the institutionalization of cooperation between the Northern Region and Galicia: an informal stage, between 1981 and 1991, and a formal one, which the author places between 1991 and 2008, but which can be extended until the present day. In this way, the informal stage was characterized by preliminary contacts between the Government of Galicia and the North Regional Coordination and Development Commission (CCDR-N) – the two main players and stimulators of the cooperation processes –, culminating in the Technical Seminars between Galicia and Northern Portugal (1988 and 1990). Starting with the 2nd Technical Seminars, the need was determined to establish a framework that favoured the continuity, coherence and increase of cross-border cooperation, framed in a structured work programme at the functional and institutional levels (CTGNP, 2019).

Thus started the formal stage of cooperation. Indeed, in October 1991 the President of the Government of Galicia, Manuel Fraga Iribarne, and the President of the CCDR-N, Luís Braga da Cruz, signed the *Agreement Establishing the Working Community Galicia-Northern Region of Portugal*. This Agreement recognised that 'cross-border cooperation is one of the most effective ways of securing the proximity of the border populations, of overcoming the challenges the whole border faces and of boosting development in the

⁴ In the context of INTERREG V-A Spain-Portugal (POCTEP) 2014-2020, the territorial cooperation strategy between the two states is based on the following thematic objectives: to reinforce research and technological development; to improve the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises; to promote the adaptation to climate change and risk prevention and management; to preserve and protect the environment and to promote efficient use of the resources; and to strengthen the institutional capacity.



border areas'. To this end, the creation of the Working Community Galicia-Northern Portugal (CTGNP) aimed to reinforce the good neighbourly relations, 'with the triple aim of contributing to the development of both regions, to the European integration and to improve the situation of border populations'. Thus, through the action of Sectoral Commissions, the Working Community would favour economic and rural development; transportation, communications and tourism; culture, education and innovation; agriculture and cattle breeding; the environment and regional planning.

In 2006 this Agreement was adapted to include the provisions of the *Convention entered between the Portuguese Republic and the Kingdom of Spain on Cross-border Cooperation between Territorial Bodies and Entities (Valencia Convention)*, signed in 2002. This Convention aims to 'legally promote and regulate cross-border cooperation between the Portuguese territorial bodies and the Spanish territorial entities' (Chapter I, Article 1). Thereby, in 2006 the *Convention on Transfrontier Cooperation between the North Regional Coordination and Development Commission of Portugal and the Government of Galicia* was signed. This Convention has since ruled the functioning of the CTGNP. According to the terms of the Convention (Chapter I, Article 3), the actions of the CTGNP should focus on the following areas of cooperation: economic development; transportation and communications; agriculture, environment, natural resources and regional planning; fishery; health and social affairs; local development; regional and local government; education, training and employment; scientific research and universities; culture, heritage and tourism.

Also in 2006, aiming to remove the obstacles to territorial cooperation, the European Union introduced tools of territorial cooperation with legal status – the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation⁵. In this context, in 2008 the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Galicia-Northern Portugal (GNP-AECT) was created through the *European Territorial Cooperation Agreement between the Xunta de Galicia and the North Regional Coordination and Development Commission* – opening a new historical stage in cross-border cooperation between Northern Portugal and Galicia, referred to as 'second generation' cooperation (Cancela, 2010: 155).

According to Cancela (2010: 151), such cooperation presumes 'the deepening and institutionalization of cooperation and the renewal of the political compromise of the Government of Galicia and CCDR-N with this joint undertaking'. The GNP-AECT was established in 2010 and aims to facilitate and promote territorial cooperation between Galicia and Northern Portugal in several fields of work, generating an ever more integrated euro-regional area. Thereby, the GNP-AECT declares as its main objectives: to foster and simplify cross-border relations; to expand the territorial and corporate competitiveness; to promote the transfer of skills, know-how and innovation; to develop access to basic transportation systems; to strengthen social and institutional cohesion in the Euroregion; to ensure sustainable development; to rationalize the cross-border resources, promoting its shared use. In the end, it's an agent entrusted with establishing communication, investment and convergence bridges between institutions, companies and citizens on both sides of the border (GNP-AECT, 2019).

⁵ Regulation (EC) No. 1082/2006.



Consequently, there are currently two institutional tools in the space of euro-regional cooperation: the CTGNP, acting as a political and strategical entity, and the GNP-AECT, which works as a *de facto* performer of cooperation projects (Cancela, 2013: 97).

Strategic areas of cooperation, projects and initiatives

Regarding the measures consolidating the relations between Northern Portugal and Galicia, we see that the GNP-AECT implements an annual plan of activities, and is currently executing the Joint Investment Plan (PIC) for 2014-2020 (Table 1).

Table 1 - Joint Investment Plan of the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion 2014-2020, with its activity areas and strategic priorities

Areas	Strategic priorities
Research and transfer of know-how	Consolidation and potentiation of research hubs; Potentiation of the transfer of results to the productive sector.
Competitiveness and employment	Attraction of productive investment; Promoting the Euroregion's economic internationalisation.
Environmental quality and heritage	Enhancement and protection of the natural and cultural heritage; Enhancement of the polycentric urban system; Promoting the efficiency of environmental resources.
Institutional capacity building, fostering citizenship	Promotion of cross-border cooperation between public authorities as an effective tool to improve the quality of life of citizens.

Source: own elaboration based in data from the PIC.

The PIC prescribed the design of an euro-regional Smart Strategy of Specialisation, which was achieved in 2015 with the adoption of the Cross-border Smart Strategy of Specialisation Galicia-Northern Portugal (RIS3T). The RIS3T is part of the new European Union's Cohesion Policy 2014-2020, which promotes economic development through support for research and innovation, aiming for the competitive economic specialisation of each region. To this end, the RIS3T Galicia-Northern Portugal specifies six strategic fields of cooperation: i) exploitation of biomass and sea energies; ii) improving the competitiveness of the agri-food and biotech industries; iii) strengthening the competitiveness of the industrial sector (industry 4.0); iv) fostering the competitiveness of the mobility industries; v) modernization of the touristic and creative industries, including the use of ICT; vi) development of advanced solutions for a healthy lifestyle and active aging.

Assessment of the cooperation between Northern Portugal and Galicia and future challenges

Based on a series of interviews with representatives of the CCDR-N and the GNP-AECT, we can say that the global impact of the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion is extremely positive.



However, regarding the perception of the Euroregion by the border population, the CCDR-N and GNP-AECT representatives recognise that there are difficulties in conveying the results of the actions undertaken. However, that does not hinder an active participation of the Euroregion population in the initiatives and programmes launched by the GNP-AECT. Summing things up, we can say that 'the citizens are strongly in favour of the Euroregion', more so when we think about cities such as Valença and Tui – separated by only 3 km –, where the populations live their daily lives on both sides of the border.

Regarding the assessment of the global impact of the actions undertaken, we verify that this has been predominantly of a qualitative nature (mostly interviews). According to the CCDR-N and GNP-AECT representatives, the assessment is hindered because there are several policies converging on the same territory, making it difficult to isolate the results of each (and, therefore, of the tools of cross-border cooperation). According to the respondents, it's urgent to delineate assessment indicators for the territorial impact of a cross-border nature, aiming to select the programmes that matter the most for the territory, assess their effects and reformulate them (if needed).

Finally, regarding future challenges, we come to the conclusion that the main weakness of the cooperation between the Northern Region and Galicia is institutional in nature, stemming from the skills imbalance between the Autonomous Community of Galicia – whose government has a political mandate and that has the autonomy and budget to implement policies – and the Northern Region – where the CCDR-N represents the central government (it's not a legal entity *per se*), and thus doesn't have the autonomy for a broader political intervention. This means that many issues related to cross-border cooperation must be discussed directly with the Portuguese Government, which may constitute a disadvantage, in the sense that there is a greater distance in Lisbon regarding the specifics of cooperation between the Northern Region and Galicia.

Conclusion: can we speak of a paradiplomacy in the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion?

Regarding the coordination of the external relations of the Northern Region with the priorities of the portuguese foreign affairs (defined by the central government), and based on the interviews, we came to the conclusion that two paradoxical dynamics coexist:

- i) There's a dependency towards the central government, resulting from the lack of autonomy of the CCDR-N. However, 'certain experiences that are real in the areas that endure the border impact are not immediately visible, in whatever ways, to the people, entities and bodies that have a centralised view – there is a huge distance'. The interviewee thus concludes that 'the regionalisation may be defensible at several levels, but from the perspective of the resolution of issues of a cross-border nature it is an obvious element'. In her opinion, it would facilitate a symmetric dialogue between the Northern Region and Galicia, as well as the implementation of actions that have already been designed and budgeted, but which execution has been facing obstacles.
- ii) There's an explicit will for autonomy in the prosecution of the cooperation relations in the Euroregion. In the words of the CCDR-N representative, 'many of the actions we undertake end up describing demands, wishes and intentions felt in the territory, for instance at the municipalities level, or at the NUT IIIs level, and not so much top



down'. At the internationalization level, the Euroregion is part of networks that 'don't follow a centralised logic'. The interviewee further adds that such actions are dictated by the recognition of the 'importance these actions have in the scope of our own Euroregion, in an autonomous way, according to our interests and what we perceive as an aim [...] to project the region, even if subject to the institutional constraints we may face'.

Summing up, we can conclude that the dynamics and vitality which characterise the cross-border cooperation processes in the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion do not translate into a real non-governmental diplomacy, or paradiplomacy. In fact, even if at some European forums for regions the Northern Region and Galicia present themselves as the Euroregion, acting in a concerted manner, this does not mean that the Euroregion constitutes a unitary player or an autonomous agent of internationalization. On the contrary, the international position of the Euroregion is still dependent on the external policies of the portuguese and spanish states.

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