

# Atlantic Lessons: Cross-border cooperation between Galicia and the Region of North Portugal

Celso Cancela OUTEDA<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

*In Europe, cross-border cooperation between sub-national organizations offers many experiences, driven by organizations such as the European Union. Today, these experiences present different profiles derived from antiquity, the participating agents (local, regional, national), the level of institutionalization, the economic product or socio-economic reality, the type of interstate relations (friendly and hostile), etc. Basically, this contribution contains a case study that refers to the experience developed by Galicia and the Region of North of Portugal. The main objective is to present its historical evolution, its current institutions and the actors involved. In this way, lessons for other places and areas can be obtained.*

*Keywords: cross-border, Galicia, Portugal, border region, cross border, Euroregion, eurocities*

## 1. Introduction

This contribution is oriented to offer one concrete experience in which participates as key partners two regional entities of the two Iberian states. Local authorities, universities and private groups (companies, trade unions and so on) take part too. Methodologically, this work is a case study that tries to present in detail a concrete cross-border cooperation experience. In this way, we hope to offer to Moldova's public a source of inspiration both in relation to the organization and structures as well as to the projects and initiatives adopted.

As we know, in the European continent, cross-border cooperation among subnational bodies (local and/or regional) has traveled a long journey (Domínguez, 2011). The cross-border cooperation, fostered by organizations such as the Council of Europe and the European Union, presents heterogeneous

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<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor of Political Science, University of Vigo (Galicia-Spain) [ccancela@uvigo.gal](mailto:ccancela@uvigo.gal)

profiles (Trillo and Lois, 2011). There are a lot of cases and experiences, as well as a vast heterogeneity derived from the seniority of the experience, the participating agents (local, regional, national), the level of institutionalization, the economic output or the socioeconomic reality... (Durá, *et alii*, 2018)

Among these European cooperative experiences is the case of Galicia (Spain) and the North Region of Portugal (G-RNP, in Spanish). The interrelations between these border regions have been an historic constant (informal nature). Besides its geographic proximity and a generally uniform relief, the cultural affinity and the linguistic proximity of the G-RNP is tangible, which contributed to the creation of numerous contacts and relations between both territories. Nevertheless, approximately three decades ago (80s), common needs and opportunities arose and promoted the formal cross-border cooperation.

Situated in the North-western region of the Iberian Peninsula, Galicia and the Region of North Portugal enjoy a common historical and cultural-linguistic heritage. They are neighbouring border territories, divided by the River Minho along stretches of their common frontier, belonging to the Spanish and Portuguese states respectively. Therefore, their relationships were framed in a classic international style pattern up until the decade of the Eighties in the twentieth century. As a result, in their territories (border zones) the negative impact of being border regions was still notorious (scarce communications routes, for example) at the beginning of the Nineties. The first institutional contacts between the Galician and Portuguese authorities were a result of so-called cross-border cooperation, which was seen as a tool of correcting these negative effects. In other words, they saw the cross-border cooperation as an opportunity.

The Galicia-North of Portugal Working Community (first formal instrument) is in operation since 1991. Later other agreements and entities arose (the Eixo Atlántico, *Atlantic Axis*, the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation Galicia-North of Portugal, etc.), promoted by different agents (regional and local) and with the immediate, shared initiative of European programmes (Cancela, 2010).

Despite their relative youthfulness and beyond the specific, tangible operations (building of bridges, improvement of roads, educational and cultural exchange...), there is an outstanding intangible heritage associated with this initiative: the creation of a mainly political and institutional context which encourages cooperation amongst the diverse political-administrative and socioeconomic agents, thus surpassing what could be considered to be purely

cross-border, in the strictest sense of the term, and acquiring a euroregional (or interregional) dimension. This evolution involves the need to make the most of opportunities (and face challenges) for socio-economic development, improving the competitiveness created by European integration (the EU single market) and economic globalisation. In short, an attempt to create a socially and economically attractive territory, thus reducing its peripheral character and promoting social cohesion (both on a European and Iberian scale).

The development of cross-border cooperation involved the erosion of political, social and cultural dynamics established over time and marked by misunderstandings, distrust and mutual suspicion. The decade of the Eighties in the Twentieth Century brought about a modification in the historical pattern of neighbours' relations. What was this change down to? Several different factors played a part in the initiation and consolidation of cross-border cooperation along the banks of the River Minho and its subsequent extension into fully-fledged interregionality.

## **2. The cooperation's origin: key factors**

Political and legal factors related to the democratisation of the two Iberian states were present at the beginning. Indeed, this brought about a reorientation of their respective foreign policies towards a common space: Europe, and especially towards European Communities striving for democratic consolidation and looking to take full advantage of opportunities for socio-economic development (Palmeira, 2004). In relation to the foregoing, the bilateral relationships between both states entered a new stage in 1977 with the signing of the Spanish-Portuguese Treaty for Amity and Cooperation. Generally speaking, this treaty established the foundations for greater inter-state cooperation, including cross-border initiatives in several sectors (use of natural resources, improved communication routes, etc.). Since 1986 Iberian Summits have been held between the two states, with the participation of the respective heads of government and other ministerial representatives (with the Presidents of the border region Spanish Autonomous Communities also normally attending the summits). In keeping with this vein of cooperation, in 1988 and 1990 respectively, Portugal and Spain ratified the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (1980) which manifested a different political approach in this area. Nevertheless, until the year 2002 Spain and Portugal did not sign the so-called bilateral Treaty on cross-border cooperation between territorial entities and authorities (which

entered into force in 2004) which helped clarify the legal framework and reaffirmed political commitment to transfrontier cooperation between regional and local authorities.

Another key political-administrative factor for the commencement of transfrontier cooperation was, on the one hand, the political decentralisation of the Spanish state (establishment of the Autonomous Communities) and, on the other hand, the local and regional administrative restructuring undertaken in Portugal (the effective strengthening of these administrative levels). As a consequence of the above, new political-institutional players came to the fore, who, despite the asymmetry of their relative authorities, were capable of forging coordinated initiatives and strategies. More specifically, in the case of Galicia, political leaders arose (the President of the Galician Government and the President of the Coordination Commission for the Northern Region of Portugal) who backed and actively encouraged cooperation initiatives. The influence of other players involved in cooperation was also notable (Central Government in Madrid and Lisbon, and local entities in both regions (although, in this case, local authorities were not the leaders in the cooperation field).

Lastly, as in the case of other European experiences of transfrontier cooperation, the process of European integration has directly and indirectly had both a negative (elimination of state borders) and positive (European Commission initiatives, notably INTERREG, establishing the single market) influence on the commencement and evolution of cooperation between Galicia and the Region of North Portugal.

### **3. Approaching a euroregional reality**

Nowadays, this political-institutional cooperation is not limited to cross-border questions, but has acquired an interregional dimension, a wider ranging aspect that is developing within the framework of the so-called Galicia-North of Portugal Euroregion, with this region seen not as a legal entity but rather as a space for socio-economic interrelation. Let us take a brief look at this space, examining it from a series of different standpoints.

From a European perspective, the Galicia-North of Portugal Euroregion is a peripheral territory located along the southwest of the continental Atlantic seaboard. It includes the region of Galicia (NUTS 2) (A Coruña, Lugo, Ourense and Pontevedra, NUTS 3) and the region of North Portugal (NUTS 2) (Minho-Lima, Cávado, Alto-Trás-os-Montes, Grande Porto, Ave, Tâmega, Douro, Entre Douro e Vouga, NUTS 3). The region covers a total surface area of 50,700 km<sup>2</sup>.

**Figure 1. Euroregion Galicia-Norte de Portugal Map**

**Source:** <http://clustermadeira.com>

The Euroregion has 6.2 million inhabitants (6.292.914 inhabitants, 2017), with 2.7 million of these corresponding to Galicia (2.701.743 inhabitants, 2018) and 3.6 to the North of Portugal (3.584.575 inhabitants, 2017). Galicia has an aging population whilst the North of Portugal has a younger population. In addition, the dynamics of the respective population pyramids are contrasting in nature (see more data in *Observatorio transfronteirizo/Observatório transfronteiriço Galicia-Norte de Portugal*).

The average population density is 125 people per km<sup>2</sup>. As for its spatial distribution, we can observe a marked trend for coastal concentration in clear detriment to inland areas. A factor common to both regions is population dispersion (the number of population centres is high in number), which makes it difficult and costly to provide certain public services (health, social or educational) or to provide infrastructures, especially in the border area. It is worth noting that in comparison to the rest of the Spanish-Portuguese border (practically uninhabited), the population density between Galicia and the North of Portugal is very high.

Related to the above there is a point of singular interest: the high daily cross-border traffic of individuals (this section of the border accounts for 49% of all heavy-goods and car traffic along the entire Spanish-Portuguese frontier). This is due to factors such as geographical proximity, easily navigated terrain (the absence of significant landforms hindering communications), plus the existing cultural affinity and linguistic proximity. These interchanges cause problems of different types (health, occupational, crime, etc.) which have brought about the

need for coordinated operations with the involvement of public (at different administrative levels) and private players.

Despite the diverging historical-political trajectories of the North of Portugal and Galicia, there are a series of socio-cultural affinities that continue to endure: religiousness; the organisation of fundamentally agricultural land; the division of land into small-holdings; subsistence and self-consumption economy; dispersion of the population; the parish as the basic relational centre; high population density; and emigration (Domínguez, 2004; Trillo-Lois, 2011). From a historical perspective these affinities find their roots in the pre-Roman period. The later occurrence of Romanization signified, amongst other things, the construction of an urban network (Braga, Lugo, and Astorga) and road communications, plus the introduction of the Latin language, Christianity, and political-administrative divisions (convents). During the Low Roman Empire the northwest of the Iberian peninsula was converted into an administrative entity called *Gallaecia* with internal subdivisions (convents) called *bracarense*, *lucense* and *asturiense* (the first two of these approximately coincide with what is currently Galicia and the region of North Portugal).

In the Fifth Century, invasions by the barbarian tribes destroyed the Romanic organisation. The Swabians settled in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, establishing a kingdom whose political-administrative, religious and intellectual centre was the current Portuguese city of Braga. In the year 585, this Kingdom was overrun by the Visigoths. Nevertheless, the former *Gallaecia* maintained a certain degree of political autonomy and complete cultural and linguistic unity throughout the Middle Ages.

From a territorial and political standpoint, this unity was fractured at the end of the Eleventh Century with the creation of the county of Portugal to the south of the River Minho, effectively breaking with the territory to the north (the current Galicia). From the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries onwards, the political border began to take form, coinciding with the transfer of political and cultural life to Lisbon as a result of the “Reconquest”. Both territories were progressively separated due to their insertion into independent political entities with separate and rival political trajectories (Leon and Castile versus Portugal). More especially, this distancing occurred as a result of the process for the construction of the Castilian and Portuguese monarchies (rivals), with their respective overseas empires and, ultimately, the nation-states. Thus, if we had to identify a date that definitively marked this distancing process, it would be 1640: Portugal restored its own monarchy and recovered its independence.

Historiography identifies the creation of a negative image of Portugal in Galicia as a result of ignorance, distrust and mutual suspicion (Rojo, 2007). Later, Portuguese nationalism, characterised by a fierce anti-Spanish sentiment (Spain had attempted to annex Portugal on numerous occasions) and the Portuguese international alliances with England or the Spanish alliances with France further reinforced the existing physical, political and mental frontiers (with the reciprocal manufacture of negative stereotypes).

In 1864 the Spanish-Portuguese frontier was definitively delimited by the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon. It is an old, pacific (with no recent military conflicts having occurred) and consolidated border (it is Portugal's only border). It is also worth noting the absence of irredentist political movements in Portugal, despite a common past and the linguistic and cultural links that exist with Galicia. With the exception of small political groups, Galicia has also failed to see any demands for re-inclusion in the Portuguese state (which is not the case in linguistic circles, as there have been, and continue to be, many advocates of bringing the Galician language closer into line with Portuguese, known as reintegrationism). Nevertheless, pro-Iberian positions (Iberianism) have been voiced, with varying degrees of associated prestige, postulating some form of Iberian union, but with zero practical import.

From a European perspective it is a region that is far from the main continental financial axes. In terms of economics both are objective 1 regions (currently, convergence objective with a per capita GDP less than 75% of the EU-25 average) and, as such, are recipients of European funds. They have a low level of economic development. This can be seen, amongst other aspects, in the existence of structural-style debts which have conditioned cross-border cooperation, orientating it towards infrastructures, at least during the initial years.

Their respective economic structures are, generally speaking, complementary in nature. In addition to this we should add the high regional interdependence caused by an increase in commercial exchanges (40% of trade traffic between Spain and Portugal is concentrated along the northern border, more specifically, between the towns of Tui and Valença); an increased degree of economic integration (reciprocal investment: from 2004 to 2008 Galicia was ranked the second Autonomous Community in terms of the amount of Portuguese investment it attracted); and an increase in journeys and social relations. The above provided sufficient justification for euroregional bodies (the Working Community and the *Eixo Atlántico*) to defend certain strategic euroregional initiatives before their respective state governments and the European

Commission, such as, for example, the building of a high-speed rail link between the cities of Vigo and Oporto. The agents have adopted a cooperative, non-competitive dynamic.

If we continue to look at the defining characteristics of this Euroregion we need to consider its political-organisational diversity, as this has a bearing on cross-border and euroregional cooperation. Since 1981 Galicia has been an Autonomous Community with political powers defined by its Statute of Autonomy. It has its own political institutions: Galician Parliament (legislative powers), the Galician Regional Government and President (executive power) and public authorities. Its territory is divided internally into provinces (A Coruña, Lugo, Ourense and Pontevedra; with the latter two provinces bordering Portugal) with their governing bodies (provincial councils); and lastly, at a local level we have the municipal councils (315) with their elected governing bodies. In the realm of transfrontier cooperation the players involved are, besides the state authorities (ministries), regional government, provincial councils and the municipal councils.

The North of Portugal Region is one of the five administrative regions into which the territory of mainland Portugal is divided. As an administrative region, since 1979 it has had a Commission for Regional Coordination and Development –North (CCDR-N) with powers pertaining to questions of regional macroeconomic coordination and planning, the management of EU funds, plus supervision and technical advice for local authorities. Nevertheless, it is a decentralised body and is not a legal entity per se, lacking, above all, its own decision-making capacity. At an infra-regional level, in first place, we have the districts (8 in the Region of North Portugal), the metropolitan areas, and associations of different councils. Next, we have 86 municipalities that have two elected bodies. In this case the political-administrative players involved are central government, regional government, and supra-municipal and municipal authorities. The Portuguese municipalities are, in general, larger than the Galician councils. From the above we may conclude that there exists an institutional and organisational asymmetry between both regions which, at times, hinders and obstructs cooperation.

#### **4. Institutions for the cooperation**

The initial formal contacts between the Galician and Portuguese authorities date back to the first years of the decade of the Eighties in the Twentieth Century, after the series of transformations already mentioned above. At first, the meetings

and encounters generated jointly-drafted documents and preparatory studies for specific cross-border initiatives that were presented to the respective governments of Madrid and Lisbon.

Later on it was decided that these initiatives would have to be institutionalised in order to provide them with continuity and coherence and to increase the number of initiatives required to face the upcoming challenges presented by the Internal European Market. In 1991, the President of the Galician Regional Government and Chairman of the CCDR-N signed an agreement to set up the Galicia-North of Portugal Working Community (thus overcoming resistance from the governments of Madrid and Lisbon who favoured the creation of a single working community for the entire Portuguese-Spanish border). Unlike other or similar working communities, the creation initiative came from two regional entities (NUTS 2), and not from local entities. On the one hand, this facilitated its functioning, with decisions taken by two members alone (decisions taken by consensus) and, on the other hand, it added political weight (with regard to higher level players such as central authorities), whilst also allowing strategies to be designed and interregional level projects to be undertaken.

In this case the Working Community is a forum and not a legal entity, with its own staff and budget (it receives funding in equal measure from both partners). It was created in order to help with the development of both regions in the framework of growing interregional interdependence and solidarity and to help improve the situation of both border populations. What does it do? It deals with matters of common interest, promotes information exchange, coordinates initiatives and addresses problems by means of agreed solutions. In which actual areas does the community act? In sectors such as economic development, transport and communications, agriculture, the environment, natural resources and land planning, fishing, health and social affairs, local development, regional and local administration, education, training and employment, scientific research and universities, culture, and heritage and tourism.

The Working Community combines both political and technocratic dimensions. Its organic structure is based on a Chairmanship (held for alternating two-year periods), vice-chairman, the Board (an equal plenary body), the Coordination Committee (consisting of two general coordinators) and the Secretariat. There are also four sector committees (Sustainable Development and Planning, Economic Development and Tourism, Innovation and Energy Efficiency, and Civil Responsibility), a specific committee for the *Eixo Atlántico* (including cities from the Euroregion) and Territorial Cooperation Communities

(with a local base and which allow local and provincial authorities to be involved in the management of initiatives and programmes). Lastly, there is also a Cross-border Observatory and a Strategic Analysis and Reflection Group.

The Working Community is a milestone in recent history because, for the first time in centuries, both banks of the River Minho have a common forum for debating shared business and promoting a certain degree of coordination, allowing common problems to be addressed, with the use of resources and the creation of combined strategies over the short, medium and long term.

Besides the above listed initiatives, the Working Community has performed a driving role in the relationships between the Galician and Portuguese authorities, designed to promote cooperation that was initially cross-border, but which is now euroregional in nature. In practice, it has established itself as a territorial based lobby which acts before the authorities of Madrid, Lisbon and Brussels.

In 2008, in Santiago de Compostela, the European Territorial Cooperation Agreement was signed between the Galician Government and CCDR-N which resulted in the establishment of the GNP-AECT (its articles of association were also passed). Its objective is to facilitate and encourage territorial cooperation (transfrontier, transnational or interregional) amongst members with the exclusive purpose of strengthening economic and social cohesion. It is a legal entity and has the legal power to act in the respective states. It has its own staff, a joint management team (with the chairperson originally being Portuguese and the Secretary-assistant director being Galician). It also has its own budget provided in equal shares by the Galician Government and CCDR-N.

The AECT-GNP allows us to overcome difficulties which have dogged transfrontier cooperation (the lack of a legally established entity which can intervene in relationships with other players, clarification of the legal framework) and it also provides a joint, flexible, agile vision of daily management. In the past all common projects had to be validated by the respective central governments of each country and were carried out and managed in each territory in an independent manner. Now the programmes can be defined, presented to Brussels, and directly managed by the GNP-AECT, as it is a legal entity with administrative authority, with the power to tender, contract and perform public works, to expropriate land, and to jointly manage facilities and run services of general interest. From the time of its creation its tasks have been orientated towards the execution of the 2007-2013 Galicia-North of Portugal Cooperation Plan (see also Dura, *et al.* 2018).

The creation of the GNP-AECT cooperative instrument marks a before and after in the history of the relationship between Galicia and the North of Portugal Region, who now have a common institution. Two entities coexist in the area of cross-border cooperation since the creation of GNP-AECT. On the one hand the Working Community, which acts as a political body, and on the other hand, the GNP-AECT which functions as the effective executor of the cooperative projects financed with its own funds or funds awarded in funding calls (the taking of decisions and the composition of the bodies has to observe the principles of consensus and equity in the case of bodies formed by multiple members).

The main drawback that affects cross-border cooperation is political-institutional asymmetry. The lack of a true regional political power to the south of the River Minho constitutes one of the most notable obstacles. The CCDR-N is a decentralised body of the central government, which slows down and hinders the initiatives because consultations and decisions from Lisbon are unavoidable. Despite this political asymmetry with respect to the autonomous Galician institutions, the CCDR-N has an excellent understanding of the regional reality and the ability to act as a mobiliser of local and supra-local players in its territory. We can also observe this institutional asymmetry at the local level where Portuguese local authorities are stronger than Galician ones in terms of population, human and financial resources and administrative competences. Even so, the local powers are very active and dynamic in the cooperation's field.

### **5. Local authorities as dynamic actors. Special reference to the eurocities**

An example of the local intervention (NUTS3) is offered by the North-western Peninsular Atlantic Axis (*Eixo Atlántico*). It began in 1992 as a private-law association started by an initiative by a dozen cities in Galicia and the region of North Portugal. At present two political-institutional players are operating with a euroregional vocation: Working Community/AECT-GNP and the *Eixo Atlántico*. This entity has progressively increased its members: the 12 founding cities have now become 34, which means that the number of initial members has almost tripled.

The *Eixo Atlántico* maintains its own operations in a series of priority areas: infrastructures, transport, urban development, the environment, tourism, sport and culture. Its main objective consists in organising a common territory that allows advances to be made in terms of internal cohesion, favouring interregional and cross border cooperation at a local level and, more generally, contributing to the development of the European urban element and European integration. In

practice, it acts as a transfrontier lobby in relation to public (European, state, regional, etc.) and private agents and as a promoter of diverse projects and initiatives. Its presence provides makes the cooperation more than merely cross-border in nature, favouring an interregional or euroregional approach, whilst also involving urban public players in a more intense manner, making them more dynamic and closer to citizens' needs. And all without forgetting its importance in demographical, political and economic terms.

Nonetheless, recently it has been created some entities acting in a strictly cross-border scope in this same territorial scenario. They are cooperative instruments in narrower and more specific territorial areas. First, the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation of the River Miño (*EGTC-Río Miño*) was established on 24 February 2018. Its partners are the Provincial Council of Pontevedra (Galicia) and the Intermunicipal Community of Alto Minho (Portugal). It aims to develop initiatives and projects on both sides of the Miño River (called Galicia-Portugal "wet border") in areas such as the promotion of transboundary resources (cultural, natural...), the boost of services and shared facilities between municipalities (16 Galician and 10 Portuguese) included in their territorial scope.

Secondly, we must mention four eurocities (*eurocidades*): the *Eurocidade Chaves-Verín*, the *Eurocidade Tui-Valença*, the *Eurocidade Monçao-Salvaterra* and the *Eurocidade Cerveira-Tomiño*. Furthermore, from experience and political-institutional support, these initiatives of cooperation have their origin in the institutional imitation and the interterritorial competition (capture of resources, strategic positioning...). Unlike other cases, the latter show a genuine cross-border character because they are developed in territorial delimited, contiguous and border areas, involving local authorities in direct management (municipalities). They are oriented to share services and to carry out common projects in various fields (tourism, education, transport, environment, health or culture), more specifically. They intend to provide common resources, through the joint management of the services and facilities in both municipalities, avoiding unnecessary and costly duplications. They present affinities such as the presence of local authorities and disparities such as the level of institutionalization and development. They are experiences of cooperation of "second generation" or "proximity cooperation", which aims to improve the conditions of their citizen's daily life. This surpasses the mere functionally oriented institutional cooperation ("first generation"), that is, the one destined to the solution of problems caused by the dysfunctions caused by the border

(Oliveras, Dura, Perkmann, 2010:24). It was oriented to the overcoming of the impediments derived from the border situation, to reduce or eliminate the physical or real barriers (construction of physical infrastructures like bridges or roads) or to the cooperation in matters of tourism promotion, education etc.

"Second generation" cooperation goes beyond that. It involves the joint management of shared services that are oriented towards the socioeconomic development and the improvement of the living conditions of the citizens. The question consists in equipping the frontier territories with endogenous growth mechanisms, to turn the frontier fact into an opportunity, into an advantage. The goal is to take advantage of the endogenous potentials offered by frontier territories in various fields. Socio-economic development (increased competitiveness) and quality and standard of living are pursued in the territories involved. Shortly, let's expose these cases.

### **5.1 *Eurocidade* Chaves (P)-Verín (S)**

The narration of the origin of this *Eurocidade* (Eurocity) should begin with the incorporation of Verín (a municipality) to the *Eixo Atlántico* in July 2007 (the Portuguese partner, Chaves, belonged to this association of cities since its constitution in 1992). In this way, it can be appreciated the leadership and commitment and the support given, particularly by the *Eixo Atlántico*. Immediately, in September 2007, an institutional working group was constituted (although it lacked legal personality), composed of representatives of the aforementioned institutions and the municipalities of Chaves and Verín. In January 2008, the tasks for the preparation of a Strategic Agenda of the *Eurocidade* began with the aim of defining its profile. In order to achieve this, a methodology of work was adopted based on a bottom-up approach, taking into account the opinion of the social and economic agents, as well as of the citizens and the political and social leaders (development guidelines were set up to satisfy the expectations of the "eurocitizens").

In 2010, the two municipalities began the task for the Constitution of the EGTC *Eurocidade* Chaves-Verín. Later, on 15 of June, the Plenum of Verín approved the participation in the EGTC. At the end of July, the project obtained the approval of the Municipal Assembly of Chaves. This was the way to start the procedure before the respective central authorities located in Madrid and Lisbon. Almost three years later, the respective authorisations were obtained. In July 2013, the *Eurocidade* Chaves-Verín EGTC Convention was signed, by the president of the municipality of Chaves and by the mayor of Verín.

On the one hand, it is noteworthy that this is the first initiative of these characteristics set in motion at the borders of the Iberian Peninsula. On the other hand, it can be said that it is the fruit of Community programming 2007-2013 and the promotion and advice of the *Eixo Atlántico*, which originates institutional synergies and reinforces representation at different levels of government.

**Table 1: Territory and population**

	Area (Km <sup>2</sup> )	Population	Population Density (people per km <sup>2</sup> )
<b>Chaves</b>	591,2	41.243 (2011)	68,8
<b>Verín</b>	94,1	14.652 (2015)	155,7
<b>Eurocidade</b>	685,3	55.710 (2011)	81,3

Data source: INE, Portugal and IGE, Galicia. Prepared by the author.

As for the organisational dimension, the *Eurocidade* Chaves-Verín has government bodies: General Assembly and Director. The General Assembly is its deliberative body and is constituted by the members of the EGTC, represented by the respective presidents and by a delegation of six personalities, designated by the aforementioned presidents. As for the Director, it is a singular executive body that, alternatively, is the president of the municipal chamber of Chaves and the mayor of Verín. His term of office lasts two years and is aided by a deputy director, appointed by the president of the entity that is not acting as director. There is also a secretary (hired staff) for the management of the administrative services and the exercise of the purely executive functions attributed by the director or by the deputy director.

In April 2016, the general Assembly of the EGTC agreed to expand its members to integrate the intermunicipal Community of Alto Tamega (6 municipalities), the Provincial Council of Ourense and the community of municipalities of Monterrei (8 municipalities). The most striking is the increase in the population of the EGTC that exceeds 120,000 inhabitants, which favours economies of scale and allows conceiving projects of greater magnitude. We are probably attending the birth of the first Iberian Eurodistrict, which could indicate the line to be followed by other experiences. Perhaps we are witnessing a momentous change in cross-border Iberian cooperation. Only time will tell.

The *Eurocidade* Chaves-Verín has a Strategic Agenda (2011) in which a series of actions have been programmed from three strategic axes: forging Eurocitizenship, a sustainable territory and economic dynamization. These

strategic axes are mentioned in the preamble to the Convention establishing this EGTC in dealing with the objectives of promoting cross-border territorial cooperation, “in the fields of agriculture, trade, tourism, heritage, land management, environment and natural resources, joint use and protection of the river Tâmega, transport and telecommunications, logistics, culture, sport, education, entertainment, health care, civil protection, among others”. The central and general objective aims to “reinforce economic and social cohesion within the respective territorial constituencies”.

It can be seen that it is inspired by the cross-border cooperation of “second generation” affecting the provision of services and common policies on both sides of the border and the promotion of growth and employment from the endogenous resources of a territory. It also seeks the elimination of intangible, administratively subsistence obstacles that have a negative impact on citizen quality of life, while affecting economic and business activity. The abolition of these barriers would mean the creation of a “social free zone”.

In general terms, this *Eurocidade* has been relatively active since 2010. Since then, it has developed numerous and varied activities: photography competitions, sports tournaments, thermal fairs, exhibitions, courses, commemorative days, etc. At this point it is necessary to mention, first of all, the implementation of the "Eurocitizen Card". Secondly, since 2009, the Week of Education and Road Safety of the *Eurociudade* Chaves-Verín was held (in 2013 the fifth edition took place). In January 2015, the *Eurocidade* Chaves-Verín was presented at the International Tourism Fair (FITUR) in Madrid (within the Galician stand) as the first cross-border tourist destination of the Iberian Peninsula: Chaves-Verín, the “Eurocity of Water” (Dura *et al.*, 2018). In 2015, this Eurocity won the RegioStars 2015 Awards in the category Citystar granted by the European Commission.

## **5.2 *Eurocidade* Tui (S)-Valença do Minho (P)**

This is also an experience of cross-border cooperation in a strict sense, as both cities are bordered and contiguous. They are separated by the river Miño, which was historically crossed through the only international bridge. It is an initiative after the *Eurocidade* Chaves-Verín since it dates from February 2012. On this date, the president of the Municipal Chamber of Valença do Minho, the mayor of Tui and the president of the Working Community Galicia-North Portugal, signed the *Cooperation agreement for the creation of the Eurocidade Tui-Valença*. It refers to the desire of strengthening the existing links in order to

develop and articulate cooperation between the two cities to provide a greater quality of life for their populations. It also mentions the development of cooperation projects in areas of common interest. In these areas, they have the intention to work together to develop investment promotion and opportunity actions commercial, productive and tourism, reinforce social cohesion, promote the appreciation of human resources, revitalize sports activities through common infrastructures, plan in a coordinated way new equipment and future actions to be carried out, promoting the joint cultural activity... These projects respond to the logic of "second generation" cooperation.

The cooperation between Tui and Valença do Minho presents a strategic character for both partners, as it must allow to enhance the values and capacities as a cross-border enclave, as well as the shared use of public services (firefighters, local police...). For example, the Portuguese Way to Santiago de Compostela (is the second in number of pilgrims to the Galician capital behind the French Way) runs through the *Eurocidade*, which provides an unbeatable resource for tourism promotion.

The geographical location of the *Eurocidade* Tui Valença is strategic because it is located in the main and most important route of communication of the border. The proximity between the two towns is another favourable point (there is a distance of approximately one kilometre between them). This is an almost continuous urban area, in contrast to Chaves-Verín. But, unlike this one that has about 55,000 inhabitants, Tui-Valença do Minho presents more modest numbers staying in the 31,000 inhabitants. Comparatively with this one, it is located in a lower stage development, being able to qualify itself of emergent micro-cooperation. Indeed, the EGTC has not yet been created, although, in the attention to the declarations, there is a willingness to do so.

**Table 2-Territory and population**

	Area (Km <sup>2</sup> )	Population	Population Density (people per km <sup>2</sup> )
<b>Valença</b>	117,1	14 129 (2011)	117,9 )
<b>Tui</b>	68,3	16.884 (2014)	247,2
<b>Eurocidade</b>	185,4	31.013 (2011)	169,14

Data source: INE, Portugal; IGE Galicia. Prepared by the author

The economic geography of this frontier territory is, in this case, a highly urbanized area, with high rates of concentration of people, collective equipment

and economic activities and with a population, speaking in general and in relative terms, less aged, high levels of institutional and entrepreneurial density.

The current remarkable achievements are the following: Commemoration of the 125 anniversary of the inauguration of the international bridge over the river Miño and, at the same time, a twinning Protocol was signed between Valença and Tui (March 2011); Planting of trees (on both banks of the river Miño and with native species) in which a hundred schoolchildren from Valença do Minho and Tui took part (November 2011); Celebration of the joint program of Healthy Routes (which passed through Valença and Tui, 2012); "Circuito de Andainas da Eurocidade Tui-Valença" (2013); Elaboration of a *Guia da Eurocidade Tui-Valença* (2013); "June Active" Promotion Unit of Exercício da Eurocidade Tui-Valença "(2013); Organization of the international Cavalcade of Kings in the Eurocidade (2015); Organization of the I and II Rally Eurocidade Tui-Valença (the second was suspended) and the IV BTT Eurocidade Tui-Valença (2015). It is also remarkable the participation of civil entities and associations.

In addition, the maximum political representatives of Valença and Tui demonstrated against the closure of the railway line Porto and Vigo and demanded their modernization to increase the cohesion and mobility of the population (there have been declarations in favour of a commuter railway service between Viana do Castelo and Vilagarcía de Arousa). They have also referred to the implementation of tolls on the highway or the problem of mobile telephony and television.

### **5.3 Eurocidade Salvaterra de Miño (S)-Monção (P)**

It took his first steps in December 2014 with the signing of a protocol of collaboration between both municipalities and the EGTC Galicia-North of Portugal. This document represents the first stone in the construction of the *Eurocidade* Monção-Salvaterra de Miño collects the main areas of common interest (nowadays the *Eurocidade* is a label or denomination). A few months later, in March 2015, the mayors of the two towns signed a twinning protocol that, in addition to its symbolic value, shows the transformation operated in the field of ideas. This initiative is, for the moment, an example of emergent micro-cooperation. These areas include: The dynamization of the river Miño (taking advantage of the geographical situation in the Ribera), the joint empowerment of oenology and local gastronomy, the promotion and development of tourism through the dissemination of natural heritage and historical (natural and thermal

resources, visits to “pazos” (small palaces), museums, fortresses, churches, convents and “castros”) and the valuation of tourist routes and pedestrian paths. It is also mentioned the cross-border venture, the sport, cultural interchange (handicraft activities, festivals and concerts) and education, the sharing of collective equipment (swimming pool, museums, a library to increase the offer of services and to achieve optimum utilization of these equipment, in order to obtain economies of scale, as well as the submission of candidatures to European cross-border programmes.

Among the strengths of this *Eurocidade* we can find (in addition to the historical ties) the geographical proximity, as they are separated by the river Miño and connected, since 1995, by an international bridge that, in fact, act as an avenue of a single urban centre. The inspiring logic is the one of the second generation cooperation, which means that it aims to take advantage of the complementarities, the endogenous resources and the legacy of the historical coexistence to establish a strategic cooperation (sustained in time, overcoming the immediate need) for the management and increase the value of the territory (attracting and fixing population, creating employment, capturing investments).

**Table 3-Territory and population**

	Area (Km <sup>2</sup> )	Population	Population Density (people per km <sup>2</sup> )
<b>Monção</b>	211,31	18. 836 (2013)	88,1 (2014)
<b>Salvaterra de Miño</b>	62,5	9.619 (2015)	159,9 (2015)
<b>Eurocidade</b>	273,81	28.455	124

Data source: INE, Portugal; IGE Galicia. Prepared by the author

In this favourable climate for the cross-border cooperation, Salvaterra de Miño and Monção count from July 2015 with a tourist train. It intends to disseminate the natural, wine and gastronomic patrimony of the *Eurocidade* (visits to wineries, museums, spas, walls and parks are made). An agreement was also signed between the associations of businessmen and traders of Salvaterra and Monção, in May 2015, for the revitalization of local commerce. In particular, a Christmas campaign was carried out to promote a flow of buyers on both sides of the international bridge through a "joint purchase Passport" (this allows customers on either side of the river to participate in a large prize draw).

#### **5.4 Eurocidade Vilanova de Cerveira (P)-Tomiño (E)**

Both municipalities have had twinning relationships for years. However, in June 2014, coinciding with the commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the construction of the bridge that connects them, a document called "Carta da Amizade" (Charter of Friendship) was signed. It expressed the willingness to cooperate to share services and initiatives in areas such as sport, culture, tourism or social inclusion. In 2017, the Strategic Agenda for Cooperation Amizade Cerveira-Tomiño was published. It includes a set of cultural and sporting activities financed by the call Interreg V-A with almost 500,000 euros. From this document, the "Orçamento Participativo Transfronteirizo" (Cross-border Participatory Budget) was formulated, involving the neighbours of both municipalities (through associations) in the selection of activities to be implemented in the following year. One of them was a shared management program for local services. In particular, it was the so-called "Gotas de Água por Notas de Música" (Water Droplets by Music Notes) which provides, as a first experience, the offer of two public services and facilities: The municipal swimming pool of Vila Nova de Cerveira and the school of music of Tomiño.

**Table 4. Territory and population**

	Area (Km <sup>2</sup> )	Population	Population density (people per km <sup>2</sup> )
<b>Vilanova de Cerveira</b>	108,47	9 138 (2018)	83,3
<b>Tomiño</b>	106,6	13.464 (2018)	127,55
<b>Eurocidade</b>	215,07	22602	105,42

Data source: INE, Portugal; IGE Galicia. Prepared by author

In October 2018, the formal constitution of the *Eurocidade* Cerveira-Tomiño was made. Besides the cooperation and the shared management of public services, it also envisages the creation of an Europarque (cross-border Park) by the construction of a bridge (both for pedestrians and cyclists) to connect two spaces of leisure (Park of O Casteliño and the Fortress of Goián) that are separated by the river Miño.

## 6. Conclusions

Cross-border cooperation is a competitive advantage to frontier territories, while it has become a key tool for its socio-economic development. Competitive strategies have been partially displaced by an optical perspective of complementarity (Varela, Cancela, Cordal, 2015:91; Cancela, 2016). In general,

we can consider the Galician-Portuguese border as an active and dynamic area. As a result of the relatively broad historical trajectory of cross-border cooperation, in recent years we have witnessed the birth of new cross-border cooperation initiatives that exceed the initial objectives. The cooperation between Galicia and the North of Portugal began at regional level and has advanced towards the local (a bilateral approach of the issues predominates) originating case of micro-cooperation (Eurocities cases. Chaves-Verín, Tui-Valença, Monçao-Salvaterra, Cerveira-Tomiño).

The *eurocidades* are "true laboratories for the construction of shared citizenship, of living shared among equals" (Cancela, 2016). Their experiences and practices deserve the attention of politicians, bureaucrats and scholars. As Lois writes, "cross-border regionalization projects within the framework of the European Union are an experimental field, linked to a change in the significance of the border. Of peripheral zone for the states, they become receptor nodes and transmitters of investment patterns of historical and socially constructed meanings, in spatial terms. The Eurocity has been configured as a spatial socialization agent daily in the municipalities of Chaves and Verín, although with unequal incidence"(Lois, 2013, 317). It can also be pointed out that they approximate the administration to the citizen and give visibility to the cross-border cooperation (in particular those that present form of EGTC that are supramunicipal cross-border structures). These presuppose a political impulse and permanent and constant administrative coordination, as well as a certain standardization of criteria for working and managing jointly.

The *Eurocidades* are inspired by the logic of the proximity cooperation or "second generation" (provision of services, recognition of rights and strategic positioning of the respective territories). The improvement of the services of proximity (public health centres, firefighters, sports facilities...) that the entities lend to the citizens translates into the accumulation of legitimacy of outcomes ('output legitimacy'). As a matter of economic development and cohesion projects, some suspicions existing in this area of cooperation are avoided. At the same time, it also increases the involvement and presence of citizens in the initiatives, preventing stopping its progression.

In connection with the latter, the elaboration of an agenda or joint document in the *Eurocidades* evidences a proactive, creative and propositive attitude, which presupposes the will and the ability to think and represent the future jointly and strategically. It is also necessary to consider the relative capacity of the

*eurociudades* and to mark or condition other agendas (European, interstate, state or regional).

In short, this cooperation of proximity or "second generation" derives from the transformation of the prevailing cognitive framework (ideas and values) and which, to a large extent, is the EU's work on territorial cooperation (cooperation as an opportunity). Perhaps, therefore, they are the subject of emulation by other entities outside the *Eurociudades*. It responds to a learning by political and socioeconomic actors about the benefits of cooperation that reinforces its appeal. Finally, it should be emphasized that these experiences of micro-cooperation, integrated or emergent, will affect the significance of the border (Lois, 2013).

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