

Two Generations of Eurocities along the Northern Section of the Spanish-Portuguese Border

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The Spanish-Portuguese border currently hosts various ‘twin cities’, especially along its Northern section, embracing Galicia (Spain) and Northern Portugal (officially, Região Norte), commonly labelled ‘eurocities’. These cross-border inter-urban projects have become possible in the middle term because of EU integration processes, but importantly also due to the longstanding shared history, culture, environment, society, language, etc. between both involved regions.

The term ‘eurocity’ intentionally mimics cross-border projects at other levels, e.g. euro-regions and euro-districts, the ‘eu-’ prefix indicating that Europe (and/or the EU) is the relevant arena (Sohn, 2018). A possible precursor is ‘Eurode’, a cross-border urban project between the Dutch municipality of Kerkrade and the German municipality of Herzogenrath, coined in 1997. However, there, the prefix ‘eu-’ is followed by a place-specific toponym ‘-rode’ meaning ‘reclamation of land’ (Ehlers, 2007).

The term ‘eurocity’ first appeared in the 1997 agreement between the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa (Spain) and the inter-municipal community Bayonne-Anglet-Biarritz (France) to describe the so-called Basque Eurocity which spans about 60 km. This is a cooperation framework for 25 municipalities, constituting an urban continuum between San Sebastián and Bayonne along the Biscay Bay coast. Later the term migrated from the Spanish-French border to the Spanish-Portuguese border, where it gained momentum from 2007 (Figure 1). To our best knowledge, the Iberian Peninsula is the only place where the term ‘eurocity’ is employed².

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

As the term ‘region’ is applicable on both macro- and micro-scales, we assume a eurocity is a euroregion at the local scale where primary actors are towns, and ones not needing to be physically adjacent. What matters is the idea of building a joint project wherein local inhabitants are actively engaged (Trillo-Santamaría et al., 2015). In contrast to euroregions that often are transfrontier co-operation bodies with a legal personality, eurocities do not require a particular legal setting or any specific type of cross-border governance.

This chapter explores two eurocity waves in the Galicia and Região Norte area, which we see as two twin-city/eurocity generations. The first is based on classical bilateral agreements (Eurocity Chaves-Verín), while the second operates as a network of twin-cities under the umbrella of one governing structure: European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) Rio Minho — led by supra-municipal political bodies. Our study rests upon literature analysis and intensive fieldwork over recent years, especially the direct involvement of two of us advising and leading cross-border projects, meetings and research on the *raia húmida* (see later).

The chapter divides into six parts. First, we introduce the Galician-Northern Portuguese border. The second describes the general background of cross-border cooperation across the whole region. Thirdly, the Eurocity Chaves-Verín is analysed. Fourth, we examine eurocities in the *raia húmida* and EGTC Rio Minho developments. We conclude by comparing the two eurocity generations, with an epilogue framing the eurocities situation in the context of COVID-19.

1. A border with strong commonalities: an open path for cooperation

The Spanish-Portuguese border, commonly known as the *raya* (in Spanish) or *raia* (in Portuguese-Galician), dates from the 12th century, with Portugal's *de facto* independence following the battle of São Mamede (1128) and a self-proclaimed kingdom (1139). The Treaty of Alcañices in 1297 between Castile and Portugal is this border's first legal recognition, thereby underpinning the assumption that this is one of the world's oldest boundaries. However, as elsewhere in Europe, the boundary was not fully delimited and demarcated until the later 19th century, with the Treaty of Limits (1864), ratified in the General Act of Demarcation (1906) (Trillo-Santamaría & Paül, 2014).

Before the 12th century, the Iberian Peninsula's north-western region — broadly where Galicia and Região Norte are located today — was assumed to be a common land, first amalgamated under the Roman Gallaecia province and persisting into the early-Middle Ages. Portugal's emergence did not end human interactions across that broad region. Generally speaking, analogous natural environments have framed similar cultural interventions, relating to parallel landscapes all along the current border area. In fact, the landscape differences observable today come from contemporary dissimilar trajectories on each side of the border, as regards spatial planning and environmental management.

The border has never prevented social interactions. Even during the 20th-century Iberian dictatorships (Salazar in Portugal 1933-1974; Franco in Spain 1939-1975) smuggling remained very important, and anti-regime activists maintained intense contacts. Historically, Galicians and Portuguese have commonly crossed for social purposes, like mixed marriages, joint celebrations, fairs or pilgrimages. Despite representing barely 20% of the Spanish-Portuguese boundary, the area hosts 6 out of 16 main Spanish-Portuguese border-crossing points, accounting for almost 44% of total average daily traffic (ADT) in 2016. Mostly these flows cross the international bridge Tui (Galicia)-Valença (Portugal), with an ADT of 15,015 vehicles per day (2016), representing 43% and 19% of all Galician-Portuguese and Spanish-Portuguese flows, respectively (OTEP, 2018).

Social exchanges have been facilitated by common language; somewhat unusual in border areas. Although socio-linguistically considered different languages, Galician and Portuguese are philologically and linguistically conceived as only one: the *raia* is home to transition dialects between Galician and Portuguese.

Despite this area's commonalities, it is usually divided between the *raia húmida* ('wet border') and the *raia seca* ('dry border'). The former is marked by the Minho River's final stretch (about 70km), while the latter, much longer (about 225km), is a land border. The *raia húmida*, located in an urban corridor connecting the Western-most Portuguese and Galician cities, hosts higher density population and more intense economic activities (Paül et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the *raia seca*, like most Spanish-Portuguese border areas,

is a marginal rural area with declining population; there are only two urban exceptions: Verín (Galicia) and Chaves (Portugal).

2. Galicia-Região Norte cross-border background

Galicia and Região Norte have pioneered cross-border cooperation on the Spanish-Portuguese border, and constitute a benchmark for other experiences. Although no bilateral political agreements explicitly mention the term 'Euroregion', this cross-border area is commonly known as Galicia-North of Portugal Euroregion (Table 1).

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Galicia is an autonomous region, holding some devolved executive and legislative powers, while Região Norte is a deconcentrated administrative entity depending directly upon Lisbon central government. Despite strong disparities in competences, both regions have found ways to cooperate since the early-1980s, acceleratingly so after both countries joined the European Communities in 1986. In 1991, the first Spanish-Portuguese cross-border body was created: the Galicia-North of Portugal Working Community.

At the euroregional level, an EGTC emerged in 2010. This new Galicia-North of Portugal EGTC (EGTC-GNP) does not replace the Working Community; the latter is assumed to be the political forum for discussion, while the former has become the technical branch to implement agreements. In 2000, several Portuguese and Galician municipalities formed an association entitled the Eixo Atlântico (Atlantic Axis) that has become a Working Community member and generated multiple studies and publications, mainly on urban issues.

Local-level cooperation in Galicia-Região Norte also confronts other dissimilarities in the capacity of territorial authorities. Contrary to regional-level developments, Portuguese municipalities are stronger and much wider (in population and land area) than their Galician counterparts. The Portuguese Act 75/2013 allowed creation of four Inter-Municipal Communities in Portugal's northernmost region; all strongly willing to cooperate with their Galician counterparts. However, in Galicia (and Spain generally) such inter-municipal governance has been effectively forbidden since the Spanish Act 27/2013. In this sense, Galician provincial councils (two in Southern Galicia) have attained new roles in cross-border cooperation, somewhat contesting Galician Government leadership in this agenda.

Alongside institutionalised cooperation, other cross-border agreements (e.g. between business associations and trade unions) are worth mentioning. Common social, sport and cultural initiatives and events are regularly held, like the radio station *Ponte nas Ondas*. Meanwhile, since 2002 a public foundation exists between Galicia and Região Norte's six public universities: the Euroregional Studies Centre (CEER). This participates in the Iacobus programme, managed by EGTC-GNP, which aims to facilitate and fund euroregional academic mobility rather as the 'Erasmus' exchange programme does for EU university students.

Beyond the EGTC-GNP, two other EGTCs have emerged, both directly related to eurocities: EGTC Chaves-Verín (2013) and EGTC Rio Minho (2018).

3. Eurocity Chaves-Verín: the forerunner of local border cooperation

Chaves and Verín are not located on the boundary, they are 22 km apart: Chaves is 8 km from the borderline and Verín, 14 km. They started institutionalised cross-border cooperation in 2007 when Verín joined the Eixo Atlântico Association and, as a part of its bid, foresaw a specific agreement with Chaves. A year later, a Strategic Agenda was presented (Domínguez, 2008), with three main axes: simplified residents' access to services and facilities (called 'eurocitizenship'), sustainable development and economic development. In 2014 the Eurocity Chaves-Verín was legally created with ratification of the EGTC by both national governments. Its headquarters are located in the old border post. This re-purposed building is intended as a multi-purpose meeting place for border people, including rehearsals for musicians. Tourist information is also provided.

EU structural funds, namely INTERREG, have been obtained in 2007-2020 to sustain the Eurocity projects and activities with various project leaders. Two were led by Verín, one by the EGTC Chaves-Verín. Meanwhile, two more projects on hot springs had the Eurocity as a partner. During 2007-20, the Eurocity has organised multiple events, mostly around culture, sport, training, education and tourism, all intensively disseminated online (via websites, Facebook, Twitter). There has been a monthly common cultural agenda; alongside common tourist guides and tour packages, and participation in Fair Trades (e.g. FITUR in Madrid).

Among the projects since 2007, two are noteworthy: one on the eurocitizen card, aiming to forge a sense of belonging to the Eurocity, and the other on cross-border public transportation. The eurocitizen card is freely available for all Chaves-Verín residents, granting equal access to services (libraries, swimming pools, museums) on both sides of the border; it also entails discounts at some events and specific businesses. By 2018, almost 18% of the Eurocity population had the card, with around 190 people using it each day. To facilitate mobility, the Eurocity has taken the lead through a B-solutions³ pilot project to launch regular passenger transport between Chaves and Verín. The service is free, only running on special days of cultural events and weekly fairs. It started in mid-2019 but was suspended in March 2020 because COVID-19 led to border-closure. Before its launch, buses connected both cities to the boundary line, but without crossing it, and schedules were uncoordinated, due to the mismatch between EU, national, regional and local transport regulations.

A survey on Eurocity mobility undertaken by Eurocity technicians in 2019 shows the frequency of boundary-crossing: 1-3 times monthly, 65%; 1-2 times weekly, 10%; 3 or more times weekly, 25%. The survey also reveals that people cross for fuel, shopping and personal matters (25% each); alongside work and leisure/nightlife (12.5% each).

During these years, the Eurocity has forged strong international connections, for example, joining the Iberian Network of Transfrontier Entities, the Association of European Border Regions or participating in the Open-Days/European Week of Cities and Regions in Brussels. Importantly, its work has been recognised at EU level: in 2015 the Eurocity was awarded the RegioStar and some policies have been considered benchmarks by Zillmer et al. (2018, 2020).

Since inception, the Eurocity has attempted to enlarge its coverage area, implying that neighbouring municipalities are perceived as potential partners. This has been repeatedly

discussed but without clear outcome. Under an ongoing INTERREG project, there is currently a study connected to a Strategic Agenda for the 2030 Eurodistrict Tâmega — the Tâmega being the river straddling the area. This Eurodistrict's area might include, beyond the Eurocity, 5 additional Portuguese municipalities and 6 in Galicia (Figure 1). Arguably, an EGTC at this level might replace the current Eurocity (Ladeiras, 2018).

4. The three eurocities of the *raia húmida*

The Minho River marks the international boundary between Spain (Galicia) and Portugal in its lower stretch until it opens into the Atlantic. Thus, a fortress system along the riverbank was constructed across the centuries by nation-states to control their respective territories. However, a transcendental symbolical reconfiguration has occurred in recent years. The fortresses have been reconceived as a cultural landscape attracting visitors, and reinterpreted through the discourse of cross-border cooperation and European integration.

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

Until the 1990s, there was only one river-bridge: the 1886 railway and pedestrian bridge connecting Tui and Valença. These two cities were the first to establish a eurocity on the *raia húmida* in 2012. As new EU-funded bridges emerged in the 1990s, new cooperative forces have apparently flourished with two other eurocities appearing: Cerveira-Tomiño and Monção-Salvaterra (Figure 2). A recent survey shows mobility is basically weekly or fortnightly, for shopping (39%) or leisure (36%); people not feeling this is an international experience, but simply moving nearby (Carballo, 2020). The main crossing points for border people are in order of importance: Cerveira-Tomiño, Monção-Salvaterra and Valença-Tui. 60% of respondents stated they had friends on the other side; 32% had relatives (Carballo, 2020). Another survey, specifically for Tui-Valença, showed around 60% of Tui inhabitants crossed at least weekly, alongside 80% of Valença inhabitants (Pousa, 2017).

The cooperation agreement creating the Eurocity Tui-Valença was signed in early-2012 by the two mayors. This perceives the border not as a barrier, but an opportunity for socioeconomic development. The objectives comprise the local economy, trade, institutions, technologies, tourism, society and education. By way of strong symbolism, the agreement's 8th anniversary (10th February 2020) was celebrated by both local government boards staging a common session in Valença, to be subsequently followed by similar annual sessions alternatively in Tui and Valença.

During these years, this Eurocity has focused on two areas: sports (28 activities in 2018; 25 in 2019) and tourism. Notable are a Eurocity travel guide (*Two Cities, Three Languages and Two People, United by a River, an Emotion and a Willingness*) and a tourist train linking both cities. Public institutions like Valença's swimming pool and Tui's theatre and Music School are shared. More interestingly, Portuguese voluntary firemen from Valença cross to fight fires in Tui when needed; Tui's local government offering modest payment in exchange (Pousa, 2017). This is justified because in Spain firemen are civil servants, while in Portugal they are often voluntary. Hence, local people are organised to combat fires. In Tui, Galician fire stations are more distant than the Portuguese ones, so calling up voluntary Portuguese firemen is faster.

The Eurocity is well-known to local inhabitants: around 91% knowing it exists and strongly approving cross-border cooperation (4.4 out of 5 of the Likert scale) (Pousa, 2017). This Eurocity has run for years with funding from both local governments. Since 2017, an INTERREG project has been awarded to build the Strategic Agenda 2019-2021 and a planning document, *Future Eurocity 2030*; a Eurocity website is planned. Tui and Valença also participate in another INTERREG project aiming to improve the river's tourism capacity. Moreover, the municipalities of the Eurocity Monção-Salvaterra de Miño take part.

As early as 1985 Tomiño and Cerveira signed a symbolic 'Friendship Agreement'. Until 2004, the only way across the river was by ferry, but then the 'Friendship Bridge' linking both towns was inaugurated — there is currently a project aiming to build a pedestrian bridge around the so-called Friendship Park. In 2014, the mayors revived the agreement, and launched the Strategic Agenda process. This was the final result of a participatory process taking account of stakeholder and civil-society opinions. There are four main cooperation areas: a) reinforcing the Minho river as a resource (mainly for sustainable development and tourism); b) enhancing cross-border mobility and territorial development; c) developing common management of public services; and d) economic development. An INTERREG project under the 2014-2020 framework has funded this Agenda's implementation in recent years. In 2018, Tomiño and Cerveira, following their counterparts, decided to become an 'officially' designated Eurocity Cerveira-Tomiño, the agreement being signed on the Friendship Bridge.

To facilitate the Agenda's development and promote cross-border public participation, cross-border ombudsmen (one from each municipality) were created: an initiative awarded a best practice award in citizen participation by the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy in 2019. Shared facilities include Vila Nova de Cerveira's swimming pool, and the Municipal Music School of Goián (Tomiño), equally available to people from both sides. The Eurocity also promoted free sport activities in 2018 and 2019 with over 400 participants (e.g. hiking and a Friendship Triathlon). However, there are problems when school-student groups want to cross to participate in events and/or use services: being minors leaving the country, parents must sign specific legal permission. The ombudsmen have directly tackled this problem, addressing specific recommendations to local, regional, national and European institutions⁴.

Another notable initiative is participatory budgeting. Since 2016, the Eurocity Tomiño-Cerveira can spend approximately €20,000 per year to fund cross-border projects proposed by partners from both sides of the border, and selected by local votes. A website gathers all the information for this initiative: <https://participacerveiratomino.eu>.

In 2018, the Eurocity ran a citizens' survey on border issues⁵. Several points emerged: a) almost 75% were aware of cross-border cooperation between Tomiño and Cerveira, with sports activities best known; b) cross-border cooperation is very popular, with 95% assessing it as positive or very positive; c) 95% see EU funds as an opportunity to improve life-quality for border people; d) 96.6% of respondents see the border as an opportunity; e) 93% are positive or very positive about shared services.

The final eurocity created on the Portuguese-Galician border is Monção-Salvaterra de Miño. Its inauguration in March 2015 celebrated the 20th anniversary of the bridge linking both towns. Like the others, a cooperation agreement was signed. Although the agreement

was supposedly about ‘town-twinning’, the term ‘eurocity’ has commonly been employed since the start in 2015, even in branding. Since early-May 2017, the Eurocity headquarters have been located in the former Portuguese border post.

So far, Eurocity activities have been modest, mainly around tourism, culture and sport. Shared-service usage is envisaged and, as with Tui-Valença, Salvaterra’s municipality will offer financial contributions to Monção’s voluntary firemen for any actions in its area. In any case, the lack of an INTERREG project supporting the management and funding of Eurocity initiatives is perceived as an issue needing attention: the partners are seeking European funding.

5. EGTC Rio Minho

In 2006, a cross-border association consisting of an Inter-Municipal Community on the Portuguese side (with 6 municipalities) and the Provincial Council of Pontevedra (representing 16 of the Province’s 61 municipalities) was created, and labelled Uniminho (Association of the Transboundary Minho River Valley). The three eurocity municipalities participated in this association, which was basically created to channel INTERREG projects. Uniminho was legally passed in the framework of the 2002 Spanish-Portuguese Treaty on Transboundary Cooperation.

Since the early-2010s, it was widely assumed that one or more EGTCs would be required for the *raia húmida* area to go beyond merely managing EU funds. Some eurocities internally discussed their institutionalisation as EGTCs, echoing Chaves-Verín’s experience. However, the 2015 elections produced a new Provincial Council majority that impelled reinforcing cross-border cooperation via an EGTC beyond bi-municipal agreements, replacing the previous Uniminho. In that period, the Inter-Municipal Community had doubled its geographical scope (with the creation of the new Alto Minho Inter-Municipal Community), thus the new EGTC includes municipalities not just within the Minho river basin but also within the Lima river basin. Accordingly, from the Galician side, the EGTC area covers several municipalities not strictly on the riverbanks but more functionally related to Vigo, clearly within its metropolitan area (Figure 2).

In 2017 an INTERREG project was granted to develop a Strategy for the future EGTC territory and in 2018 the EGTC was definitely created, and named Rio Minho. The Strategy was developed by the Euroregional Studies Centre CEER and its six founding universities between 2017 and 2019. Beyond developing different types of public participation and involving several academics in the process, we should mention the discussion held between the different scales within the EGTC to elaborate the Strategy.

Firstly, the inter-mayoral strategic meetings involved the three eurocities plus two other ‘twin-cities’, not declared eurocities but understood to be strong cross-border cooperating neighbouring municipalities: Arbo-Crecente-Melgaço and Caminha-A Guarda, latterly with O Rosal (Figure 2). Interestingly, these ‘twin-cities’ are tri-municipal rather than bi-municipal. Thus, a tension emerged between the scale of the individual ‘twin-cities’ (including the eurocities), and the scale of the EGTC as a whole. In any case, most cross-border shared services considered essential for the future of the *raia húmida* in the Strategy passed in 2019 are at this bi-/tri-municipal level, not for the whole EGTC area.

Secondly, in the Strategy's first draft available in early-2018, before most of the participation procedures, there was constant distinction between these municipalities of the Minho River valley, seen as experiencing close cross-border dynamics, and the other municipalities the EGTC covered. After considerable discussion, the definitive Strategy does not distinguish between these 'two cross-border speeds'. Although this is a political agreement, from an academic perspective its implications are uncertain given that the most intense cross-border dynamics occur in the strict Minho valley area. Thanks to intense participation procedures and political negotiations, priorities in the Strategy action plan changed significantly from document's initial draft to its final version. This is the case, for example, for sustainable tourism, which changes from fourth priority in early 2018 to second in mid-2019.

6. Conclusions

Galician-Portuguese eurocities have developed and managed specific common projects and initiatives, mostly by means of EU funding, to bring people from both sides of the *raia* closer. As different surveys show, border inhabitants are both knowledgeable and empathic towards eurocities and local cross-border activities, and also towards cross-border neighbours. This contrasts with lower enthusiasm at euroregional level (Trillo-Santamaría, 2014). As usual in Europe, social, sport and cultural events are easier to manage and fund, leaving specific border problems, like cross-border spatial planning and common health services, still to be tackled. In any case, the way found in Chaves-Verín of offering a public cross-border transport service opens up future innovative solutions. This accords with the on-going process of drafting new EU legislation to resolve legal and administrative obstacles in cross-border contexts.

In a context of well-established cross-border cooperation at the euroregional level for over three decades, Chaves-Verín represents a first generation of eurocities. Although originally supported by the Eixo Atlântico — Chaves-Verín has recently abandoned the Association — this Eurocity responds to the two municipalities' need to develop projects. At the very beginning, it lacked higher-level government support. In contrast, the three *raia húmida* eurocities represent specific local bilateral initiatives conforming to a wider territorial project embracing the whole Minho River valley, the EGTC Rio Minho. In this case, the EGTC has been strongly supported by supra-municipal governance structures on both sides, mainly the Pontevedra Provincial Council and the Alto Minho Inter-Municipal Community. In fact, the area's eurocities had originally sought to establish their own EGTCs, but this idea was finally abandoned once the EGTC Rio Minho was created. This specific layer of cross-border NUTS-3⁶ scale governance offers a broader scope of projects and, importantly, funding for developing common projects. This is why we identify a second generation of eurocities.

In this regard, the EGTC Eurocity Chaves-Verín has apparently accomplished its main objectives and anticipates expanding not only its territorial scope but also its partners. The bid for an EGTC Eurodistrict Tâmega might imply enlarging the area covered by the EGTC. We interpret this project as mirroring the EGTC Rio Minho, also because the new EGTC might imply superseding the previous EGTC Eurocity. Hence, we would have a second example of this second generation of eurocities or, more accurately, of an eurodistrict. Importantly, this might imply including wide rural areas: highly depopulated and aged, and with particularly stagnant economies, causing a necessary reconfiguration of a currently urban-based agenda.

Looking at the two generations of eurocities through the lens of twin-city characteristics (Garrard and Mikhailova, 2019), we admit that all Spanish-Portuguese eurocities, particularly the Minho river eurocities are interdependent. All of them have strong territorial identities and in the foreseeable future will persist in their separate existences, as they belong to different nation-states. At the same time, their cross-border territorial branding initiatives have been highly successful and admired. This is thanks to the common language, culture and traditions of Galician and Portuguese people further strengthened with mixed marriages and cross-border friendships, cross-border work and regular cross-border visits for leisure or shopping. Finally, we find ongoing formal and informal negotiations to be the most conspicuous common feature of twin-cities and eurocities. In this cross-border region, informal negotiations precede the formal ones, based on historical social practices all along the border. The formal negotiations have several co-existing layers — from the Galicia-North of Portugal Euroregion to single eurocities — complementing each other.

Epilogue

Any kind of eurocity evolution on both *raias*, at least at the short-mid-term, would eventually depend on post-COVID-19 crisis management. In fact, the crisis has been highly problematic in the border area, producing intense local-national tensions, because central-government decisions are usually at odds with border-people's lives. In fact, Spain's declaration of the State of Alarm (14th March 2020) and the Portuguese State of Emergency (18th March 2020) accompanied the closure of the Spanish-Portuguese frontier (16th March 2020): the freedom of movement assured by the Schengen Agreement was suspended until 1st July 2020. Only nine border controls were maintained in the whole Spanish-Portuguese border; two in the Galician-Northern Portugal Euroregion: Chaves-Verín and Tui-Valença.

The daily contacts of eurocity dwellers were suddenly suspended. Although cross-border workers could legally cross the boundary, a specific problem arose in eurocities whose bridge had been locked. This was the case with Cerveira-Tomiño and Salvaterra-Monção. Normal travel times of 5/10 minutes could become 1 hour; 2 km driving could become 100 km. This naturally impacted mobility costs. In response, the EGTC Rio Minho mounted a specific study of COVID-19's socioeconomic impact in the *raia húmida*⁷. It proposed measures to palliate the crisis like opening more border crossings (eventually happening on June 15th 2020), at least for cross-border workers, and to coordinate the progressive end of lockdowns by an equivalent system of gradual re-openings: cross-border economic activities are strongly interdependent. In a more general perspective, the EGTC Chaves-Verín organised a virtual meeting of all Spanish-Portuguese eurocities to discuss pandemic-related problems and solutions on May 5th 2020. In a final document, they requested special status for these cross-border areas, including free movement and EU/INTERREG-specific funds to help recovery. Indeed, and partly due to lobbying from these cross-border entities during these months, Spain and Portugal signed a common trans-frontier agreement to deal with COVID-19 recovery measures in late August. And on October 10th 2020, at the 21th Spanish-Portuguese Summit, Spain and Portugal's governments approved a Common Strategy for Cross-border Development. This Strategy aims to cooperate in five strategic areas — mobility; infrastructure and digital connectivity; education, health and social services; economic development and

innovation; and sustainability and biodiversity conservation. For these purposes, they seek to obtain and manage European recovery funds. During these months, national and regional newspapers have publicised the effects of the crisis on borderlanders' labour and personal life, thereby following eurocities' and EGTCs claims.

In the middle of the pandemic's third wave, with increasing infections and fatalities, Portugal decided to close the boundary again on January 30th 2021. Closed bridges, strict controls for border-crossing, and severe social and economic impacts, especially for cross-border workers have re-appeared. Re-closing the international boundary, ironically without any EU-coordinated decision or a Madrid-Lisbon common strategy in March 2020 and again in February 2021, shows how fragile the eurocities are. Until the 'territorial trap' (Agnew, 1994) is overcome, it seems impossible to de-centre decision-making from state capitals to their periphery. Analysing eurocities' resilience in face of central government decisions is an exercise of hope: at the edges of the nation-states, eurocities result from bottom-up politics and policies, gathering opinions, wills and energies from border stakeholders — both public and private actors — seeking to develop their own future for their own border regions.

Acknowledgements

Public servants from the EGTCs Chaves-Verín and Rio Minho are acknowledged.

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¹ R.Vila-Lage holds a predoctoral research grant by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities with reference FPU18/04624; he has also been granted with a research stay in Northern Portugal funded by the IACOBUS programme.

² In the Iberian Peninsula the term 'eurocity' appears in four different languages: *eurohiriaren* (Basque), *eurocité* (French), *eurocidade* (Portuguese-Galician) and *eurociudad* (Spanish).

³ B-solutions is 'a 4-year initiative to tackle legal and administrative border obstacles/difficulties along EU internal borders' (b-solutionsproject.com). It is promoted by EU's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy and managed by the Association of European Border Regions.

⁴ See the document in English: https://eurocidadecerveiratominio.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/20190207_ombudsman_report_recommendations_for_the_removal_of_the_barrriers_to_child_and_juvenile_border_mobility_en.pdf [Accessed 28.05.2020]

⁵ The survey is available at <https://eurocidadecerveiratominio.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/enquisa-servizos.pdf> [Accessed 28.05.2020].

⁶ NUTS is the French acronym for Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics. As defined by Eurostat, this 'is a hierarchical system for dividing up the economy territory of the EU'. Regional policy is based on this classification. For more information, see <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/background> [Accessed 28.05.2020]

⁷ Unpublished document kindly sent to the authors by the EGTC Rio Minho. Previously (on April 28th 2020) the EGTC presented a declaration in this regard, sent to regional, national and European institutions. Available at: http://smartminho.eu/declaracion_conjunta_aect/ [Accessed 28.05.2020]. Currently, the Galician Government is drafting a plan to promote local cross-border cooperation after COVID-19 impacts.