



Reporting a Bottom-up Political Process: Local Perceptions of Cross-Border Cooperation in the southern Portugal-Spain region

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Abstract:	<p>Beyond the national political-territorial borders in Europe, the cross-regional dimension maintains an experimental democratic character. Entities developed to foster cross-border cooperation, such as working communities and Euroregions, are conceived as mechanisms of democratisation through the decentralisation of regional or/and local governmental bodies. However, scholarly debate suggests that the top-down policy-making process that is characteristic of cross-border programmes seems to cast doubt on the fulfilment of a European participatory democracy. In this respect, the cross-border cooperation process seems to contribute to an added value to the dilemma of the European democratic deficit.</p> <p>The objective of this paper is to present a regional contribution to this debate through a study of local experts' perspectives on the implementation and impact of cross-border cooperation policies in the southern Portugal-Spain border region and the possibilities for local and social participation. This paper utilises data from two related investigations in the southern cross-border area between Portugal and Spain, including qualitative interviews, focus groups, and content analysis of secondary data.</p> <p>The results reveal a positive attitude towards the recent regional top-down initiatives of European integration, although local experts question the potential for the inclusion of local perspectives in cross-border initiatives. Additionally, during this period of economic crisis, political contradictions may be observed, and political initiatives related to the Spanish-Portugal border may hamper the existing cross-border flows and dynamics of progressive integration. In this sense, local authorities play an important role as the nexus between transnational institutions of cross-border cooperation and the inhabitants of border regions.</p>

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3 **Reporting a bottom-up political process: Local perceptions of cross-border**
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5 **cooperation in the southern Portugal-Spain region.**
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22 **Abstract:**
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25 maintains an experimental democratic character. Entities developed to foster cross-
26 border cooperation, such as working communities and Euroregions, are conceived as
27 mechanisms of democratisation through the decentralisation of regional or/and local
28 governmental bodies. However, scholarly debate suggests that the top-down policy-
29 making process that is characteristic of cross-border programmes seems to cast doubt on
30 the fulfilment of a European participatory democracy. In this respect, the cross-border
31 cooperation process seems to contribute to an added value to the dilemma of the
32 European democratic deficit.
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45 study of local experts' perspectives on the implementation and impact of cross-border
46 cooperation policies in the southern Portugal-Spain border region and the possibilities
47 for local and social participation. This paper utilises data from two related investigations
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49 interviews, focus groups, and content analysis of secondary data.
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4 European integration, although local experts question the potential for the inclusion of
5 local perspectives in cross-border initiatives. Additionally, during this period of
6 economic crisis, political contradictions may be observed, and political initiatives
7 related to the Spanish-Portugal border may hamper the existing cross-border flows and
8 dynamics of progressive integration. In this sense, local authorities play an important
9 role as the nexus between transnational institutions of cross-border cooperation and the
10 inhabitants of border regions.
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23 Keywords: Cross-border cooperation, European integration, Euroregion, local/social
24 participation, regionalism, democratic deficit.
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A. Cross-border cooperation and Euroregions: agents of the bottom-up processes.

After WWII, the beginning of the European reconstruction commenced through explicit, top-down decisions by European nation-states and through a more spontaneous process of cross-border cooperation (CBC) between local and regional institutions. This CBC has emerged in recent decades as one of the major processes of European integration (Rojo and Varela, 2010). European CBC is a cumulative process that crosses different stages and border regions with the increase of the so-called Euroregions, or Working Communities (Morata, 2010; Terlouw, 2012; Gabbe and Ramirez, 2013). Three or four developmental stages are notable (Perkmann, 2003; Oliveras, Durà, Perkmann, 2010). The first historical milestone was a bottom-up CBC of local governments as the main boosters aiming to improve their socio-economic conditions (Rojo and Varela, 2010). A second stage was characterised by the emergence of the first legal instruments for cooperation at the European level, such as the Madrid Convention, which was celebrated in 1980 (Oliveras, Durà, Perkmann, 2010). The third period involved an injection of European structural funds to the well-known community programme Interregs. In the 1990s, this structure provided an inflection point and an expansion period for the cross-border regions and cross-border structures of cooperation, especially in Eastern Europe, by means of accession to the EU. The incipient fourth period involves revisionist and qualitative changes in the implementation of CBC and the creation of new figures, such as the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (Medeiros, 2011; Rojo and Varela, 2010).

Cross-border cooperation (CBC) refers to the collaboration of sub-national authorities across national borders with a vertical and horizontal coordination of policies to achieve

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3 common objectives in specific areas. The collaboration must be more or less
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5 institutionalised and stable over time (Perkmann, 2003; Oliveras, Durà, Perkmann,
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7 2010). A set of criteria proposed by Perkmann (2003: 156) provides a more precise
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9 characterisation of CBC, indicating that CBC must involve the collaboration of public
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11 leaders from different countries at the local /regional level. However, these leaders do
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13 not have legal competency in international law. Accordingly, CBC is directly related to
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15 the everyday objectives of the collaborating sub-national public administrations.
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20 With the gradual increase of CBC, Euroregions have emerged as a relevant type of
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22 cross-border cooperation within the European Union (Association of European Border
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24 Regions, 2008). The coverage of these initiatives is so extensive that all local and
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26 regional entities in border areas participate in CBC in some way. By the beginning of
27
28 2000, more than 70 regions were labelled Euroregions, or Working Communities
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30 (Perkmann, 2002; Parlamento Europeo, 2005). A few years later, there are an estimated
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32 133 cross-cross border regions (Oliveras, Durà, Perkmann, 2010), and 136 in 2013,
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34 according to the list of cross-border region members of the Association of European
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36 Border Regions, AEBR (2013). Although in some border regions, these administrative
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38 bodies have been created only recently, their founding members (such as regional and
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40 local governments) bring experience in leading the implementation of CBC policies
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42 before the creation of the Euroregion. This phenomenon explains the recent academic
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44 interest in Euroregions as a concept (Medeiros, 2011) or as an institution (Perkmann,
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46 2002; Lepik, 2009; Wolf et al., 2006).
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54 The previous areas involved in more stable collaboration have officially been renamed
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56 Euroregions based on a loose set of criteria. Many of these Euroregions are small-scale
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3 cross-border regions that are entitled to conduct CBC projects depending on the interest
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5 of local and regional authorities. The goal is for these regions to become integral actors
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7 in cross-border activity and to provide a bottom-up structure for addressing cross-border
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9 issues under the auspices of the EU. Through this new administrative border machinery,
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11 both local and regional governments have gained reinvigorated roles in line with the
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13 trend towards regionalism and the goal of the decentralisation of European Integration
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15 (Downs, 2002; Perkmann, 2002).
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20 The majority of cross-border regions (67%) tend to be micro regions at the NUTS II that
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22 are integrated by local and regional actors (Oliveras, Durà, Perkmann, 2010). Thus, the
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24 implementation of Euroregions and CBC has been associated with a bottom-up
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26 approach under the European Integration and Cohesion Policy.
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31 The Association of European Border Regions (2000: 7; 2006: 34) states that cross-
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33 border cooperation is responsible for “the strengthening of democracy and the
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35 development of operational regional/local administrative structures”. Rooted in an
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37 institutional European “logic repertoire”, Euroregions are designated as informal,
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39 bottom-up structures or agencies that not only have a pseudo-institutional frame but also
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41 have sufficient authority to address local and regional issues that affect the border areas.
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43 Euroregions involve both local and regional governments in undertaking border issues
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45 due to the distance from central-state and European institutions. Thus, Euroregions are
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47 intended to enhance and reinforce democracy and citizenship participation as
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49 decentralised agencies with a first-hand understanding of border issues. In other words,
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51 Euroregions reflect the EU in miniature or at close range (Association of European
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53 Border Regions, 2008: 7).
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5 However, some researchers have showed the difficulties of achieving a real bottom-up
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7 process through the incorporation of Euroregions (Pikner, 2008; Lepik, 2009; Terlouw,
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9 2012). This article explores local experts' perspectives on the implementation and
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11 impact of cross-border cooperation policies in the southern Portugal-Spain border
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13 region and the potential for local and social participation.
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16 17 18 **A. The regional-political dimension vs. the local-social dimension.** 19

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22 Their value as democratic structures of European integration place Euroregions within
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24 the broader debate on the European undemocratic or democratic nature, or the so-called
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26 European democratic deficit. In this dilemma, the scale of analysis is crucial for
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28 understanding the role of Euroregions in terms of the decentralisation and
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30 democratisation of European integration. From a broader perspective, based on EU
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32 legislation, its application in member states, and the composition of EU institutions, the
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34 EU is not inherently undemocratic (Crombez, 2003). However, we can consider the EU
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36 an elite project that lacks the preconditions for full democratisation (Shafer, 2006). A
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38 parallel analysis could be conducted on Euroregions. As the institution that represents
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40 its members' border regions, the Association of European Border Regions highlights the
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42 potential of CBC structures to become catalysts for increasing involvement on the part
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44 of the citizens, authorities, and political and social groups on both sides of the border
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46 (2006: 14). According to the official documents and statements published by the
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48 Association of European Border Regions, the dominant discourse describes Euroregions
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50 as bottom-up structures that encourage a more democratic policy making through the
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52 renewed role of decentralised regional and local authorities (AEBR, 2000; 2006, 2008).
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3 However, the democratic nature of Euroregions and CBC is questionable when it is
4 assumed that local people perceive CBC structures such as Euroregions as top-down
5 structures.
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11 This interpretation of Euroregions may differ from other perspectives, particularly the
12 perspectives of the local people and key actors who live in border areas and who deal
13 with everyday issues in the fields of commerce, culture, and tourism, etc. Specifically, if
14 the role of Euroregions and other forms of CBC structures, as democratic decentralised
15 agencies, is considered from a more local or social perspective, another point of view
16 can be identified. In the last decade, emerging voices have called for a reconsideration
17 of the way in which cross-border cooperation should be handled (Gualda et al., 2011a;
18 Hospers, 2006; Houtum and Strüver, 2002; Prokkola, 2011; Scott, 2002). The vision of
19 the institutional apparatus and the political elite for CBC programmes may not
20 necessarily be shared by the target population, the people living in border regions. Calls
21 for reconsideration have increased as scholars from various regions have denounced the
22 gap between the projected goals of the European institutions that oversee the cross-
23 border regions and the reality experienced by the people and their cross-border social
24 networks. Such claims emphasise the lack of concern about local people and other key
25 actors in the border regions.
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47 As suggested by Houtum and Strüver (2002), perhaps local people are not aware that
48 they live in a cross-border region managed through a Euroregion, or perhaps people are
49 not even interested in the idea of CBC. It is assumed that there would be local interest in
50 closer social integration in the terms outlined by European CBC policies. However, are
51 these interests and terms necessarily shared by the local people? What are the interests
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3 of the locals, and are these interests integrated in CBC initiatives? Is there a need to
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5 examine the ways in which these frontier policies are conducted and integrated with the
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7 local people to appreciate the democratic development of such border entities? In line
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9 with the arguments proposed by Paasi (2001) and Houtum and Strüver (2002), this
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11 paper claims that political discourse and CBC initiatives seem to take a direction that
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13 differs and diverges from the everyday lives of the local people. One symptom of the
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15 discontinuity between political and local discourse in the implementation of cross-
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17 border projects is the negative feeling of being on the periphery that is inherent in the
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19 border territoriality expressed by local people (Gualda, Frago, and Lucio-Villegas,
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21 2011).
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27 **A. Objectives and methodology**

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32 To conduct cross-border initiatives in an integrative framework that involves both
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34 citizens and institutions, further research is needed to obtain a deeper understanding of
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36 the perspectives and opinions of the local people regarding CBC. The perspective of
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38 experts “living the border” seems to be an important matter in the theoretical and
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40 political debate on how CBC initiatives could be conducted and how they might lead to
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42 positive outcomes in the context of European Integration. We consider experts to be
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44 professionals living in the cross-border area with more intensive professional experience
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46 in formal/institutional and informal/private cross-border cooperation than the average
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48 citizen of the border region.
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55 The question in this paper is whether one should consider such opinions relevant when
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57 evaluating the integrative and democratic character of the European Cross-Border
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3 Projects. Experts' opinions imply a double perspective. First, experts have first-hand
4 knowledge and experience of the implementation of cross-border projects and other
5 relevant initiatives for the socio-economic development of the territory in which they
6 live. Second, they are also citizens of the cross-border area and are co-inhabitants with
7 the rest of citizenship that is the target of cross-border cooperation. Given the relevance
8 of these local and expert opinions when assessing the extent of the democratisation and
9 decentralisation of CBC initiatives, this paper focuses on local experts' perspectives.
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20 Thus, our main goal is to identify local experts' evaluations of the implementation of
21 CBC policies in the southern border area between Portugal and Spain and the potential
22 for the inclusion of grassroots initiatives or local participation. In the following section,
23 we present various arguments derived from the experiences and knowledge of the local
24 and informal experts interviewed that have emerged as a collective discourse on cross-
25 border cooperation. In doing so, we hope to contribute by reporting a local perspective
26 from the southern Portugal-Spain border region. Finally, we will discuss the extent to
27 which these cross-border initiatives are democratic and decentralised from the local
28 perspective, and we will examine the role of the local authorities in fostering
29 decentralised and democratic cross-border policies.
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45 The cross-border area formed by the NUTS II regions of Alentejo, Algarve, and
46 Andalusia (see map) is one of the five areas of cooperation of the POCTEP (CBC
47 Programme Spain-Portugal 2007-2013). We focus on the southern territories that are
48 closest to the border marked by the embouchure of the Guadiana River, in the
49 municipalities of Vila Real Do Santo Antonio (VRSA) in Algarve and Ayamonte in
50 Andalusia. These areas have traditionally been the most connected territories and the
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3 areas in which cross-border flows and relations have intensified since the international
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5 bridge was constructed in 1991.
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10 Map around here.

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12 **Map 1 Alentejo, Algarve and Andalusia.**
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16 This paper reports the findings from a study conducted during 2010 and 2011 that was
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18 motivated by intriguing data from the area between these two municipalities. In this
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20 study, we used a total of eight focus groups (four focus groups in each country,
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22 designed in parallel). We also conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with “experts”
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24 (ten in VRSA and ten in Ayamonte) whose discourses are the main object of analysis.
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29 Because there is no directory of experts working in CBC, the experts were selected
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31 through a snowball technique (Goodman, 1961; Heckathorn, 1997; Abdul-Quader,
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33 Heckathorn, McKnight, et al. 2006; Drăgan and Isaic Maniau, 2012) that attempted to
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35 achieve theoretical representativeness of the sample, as is usual in qualitative
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37 approaches. Accordingly, this study does not aim to make inferences from the sample
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39 though the results of the qualitative interviews; rather, it provides meaningful
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41 information to continue this line of study in future research. Most of the experts worked
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43 in local public institutions that were beneficiary members of cross-border projects from
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45 Interreg A. A few of the experts worked in private institutions (the sailing and tourism
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47 sectors). Although they were not directly involved with Interreg projects, their work
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49 was based on cross-border relations with the neighbouring country.
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3 The anonymous direct quotations from the experts' interviews that are presented in this
4 article were considered representative for their critical contribution to the main
5 discussions.
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10 **A. Experts' evaluations of cross-border cooperation in the Southern Portugal-**
11 **Spain border region.**
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16 *B. Problems with the implementation of CBC policies.*
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20 Since Portugal and Spain joined the EU, there has been extensive cooperation in the
21 southern border region between these countries that culminated in the constitution of the
22 Euroregion AAA (Andalusia, Algarve, and Alentejo) in May 2010. As a symbol of this
23 fruitful and entrepreneurial cross-institutional cooperation, the first bridge over the river
24 Guadiana was built in 1991. More recently, two new bridges have been built to facilitate
25 transit across this southern border between Portugal and Spain. The inhabitants of the
26 border areas in which the bridges begin and end have witnessed a growing technocracy
27 towards an increasingly closer union among the people of Europe.
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40 The local discourse presents a generally positive attitude towards all types of cross-
41 border initiatives in all fields. This positive attitude is reasonable given the image of
42 CBC as a means of local and regional development and given the shared characteristics
43 and common problems on both sides of the border. In an investigation of the social
44 reality in the regions of Andalusia, Algarve, and Alentejo, the majority of the
45 interviewees (social actors and experts) perceived a medium-high degree of cooperation
46 (Gualda et al., 2008: 214). Citizens' perception of a very active cross-border region
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3 aligns with the general opinion that CBC is good and necessary for the future of villages
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5 and cities:
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10 “Whatever done jointly is good because the problems are shared. I know that the
11 initiatives will work out fine at the policy level. And at the citizen level, they will work
12 as well” (E7, Sailing instructor, VRSA, 2010). “Yes, I think it is positive, and in the
13 long term it is positive” (E4, Secretary of chamber of Commerce, Spain, 2010).
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20 These positive opinions towards CBC policies seem to partly contradict the alien nature
21 normally ascribed to official cross-border cooperation by those who take a more people-
22 oriented approach to this subject (Hospers, 2006; Houtum and Strüver, 2002; Scott,
23 2002; Gualda et al., 2011a). Nevertheless, amid the optimism regarding the growing
24 cooperation, an unclear and diffuse debate has arisen on how cross-border cooperation
25 should or could be developed. According to the local people, the social construction of
26 the Guadiana bridge constituted an alien experience that did not reflect the people’s own
27 initiative but that merely reflected the top-down, plausible goals of integration. Thus,
28 some people are ambivalent about the bridge (Gualda et al., 2010). Similarly, the
29 interviewed experts, who were closely related to CBC, noted several factors that
30 consistently hindered the decision-making process regarding cross-border initiatives and
31 policies. First, participants observed the lack of coordination and open information
32 flows among the institutions that are involved or interested in cross-border cooperation
33 programmes. Situations such as missing information or unexplained exclusion from a
34 cooperative network presented obstacles to stable cooperation in the long-term:
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3 “When I, as the representative of the city government of Ayamonte, go to Europe’s
4 door, they say, ‘Wait! Your regional government, that represents you, already has
5 applied it. OK!’ We will see when I am informed. Normally, it happens with the
6 regional government and the Province government... It is everything for the people but
7 without the people” (E6, Manager in Local Government, Spain, 2010).
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16 These comments reveal a negative attitude towards certain institutions at the higher
17 levels, such as the Regional or Central governments. It is important to note that, to a
18 certain extent, such negative sentiments may undermine the perceived legitimacy of
19 these institutions and may produce side effects of the European cross-border
20 institutional machinery. A factor related to the lack of coordination and information
21 flow in CBC is the perceived low efficiency manifested in the time needed to
22 implement CBC-related decisions. This sluggishness is highlighted as the main feature
23 of institutions that jeopardises the desirable effects of CBC:
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36 “The administration has noted problems with the dredging of the Guadiana river for 12
37 years, but there has not been any progress. The Commissioner may say that we will do
38 something now, but later, nothing is done. Advances? I don’t see them; that’s the truth.
39 At least from where I am, between the town halls, there has been cooperation, and with
40 their respective ministries—but advances? There is no efficiency, and the river will be
41 dredged when some disaster happens” (E3, Representative of Ownerships Association,
42 Spain, 2010) (2). “Yes, I think there should be more cooperative relationships... I see
43 the institutions so slow to make progress... To me, it is important that this interview we
44 are doing right now is already an advance to show it up”_(E10, University professor,
45 Spain, 2010).
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B. Feeling on the periphery of cross-border cooperation.

Low institutional efficiency is associated with the lack of clarity about the way in which higher-level decisions are made, especially on the part of respondents who live in villages closest to the border and who do not participate in the important project decisions that will affect them. There is a general sense of being on the periphery, both territorially and politically.

“Logically, there is a macro dimension that encompasses the three regions. However, there must also be an eligible area that is the border area. The local governments and the villages close to the border must have a positive discrimination policy compared with the rest of the border regions that form part of the Euroregion” (E5, Manager in local government, Portugal, 2011).

To some extent, this perspective produces a feeling of being on the “periphery” more than at the border. This self-identification reported by some experts likely provokes a suspicious attitude among local governments towards higher public institutions when they are involved in border initiatives together: In their study of the social reality in the region, Gualda and colleagues noted some comments made by several town mayors that indicate this peripheral self-identification. Some CBC programmes have been conducted not only in the border area but also in larger cities or villages that are not close or related to the border because they have the higher economic and management capacities necessary to access the financial resources of CBC (Gualda et al., 2008: 215).

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3 “Look! There is a project approved by the Regional government. In Spain, the
4 municipality that is most suitable for this project is Ayamonte, but it is not in the
5 project. However, Marbella is (3). I don’t know how the Regional government has done
6 this because it has included Isla Cristina – a neighbouring village of Ayamonte - and
7 this is a project of the Regional government at the political level, and that’s all. They do
8 not take it into account” (E6, Manager in Local Government, Spain, 2010).
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16 “We would like if all the regions of Alentejo and Andalusia were involved. The issue is
17 that for reasons of proximity it is easier to carry out institutional initiatives. It is easier
18 to collaborate with Huelva, which is at the border, than with Almeria, but the closest
19 border territory should not be the exclusive one” (E8, Manager in Regional
20 Government, Portugal, 2011).
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29 Although the villages in the border region are more entitled to resources, they have
30 fewer opportunities to implement the projects necessary for development. There is a
31 simple explanation for this situation due to the technocracy of the European CBC.
32 Specifically, to participate in European projects, it is necessary to co-finance 25% of the
33 budget, which is added to the 75% covered by European funds. This requirement is a
34 significant outlay for the small and peripheral municipalities at the border that have
35 aged populations and limited economic resources.
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47 Finally, this feeling of being on the periphery is reinforced when CBC policies do not
48 sufficiently promote local initiatives. There was a shared sense among the interviewees
49 of dissonance regarding what is necessary for border development, which translates into
50 a lack of economic support for previous local and entrepreneurial activities at each side
51 of the border to promote cooperation and cross-border local dynamics: “All these types
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3 of things must come from public administration, but what happens is that everything is
4 about politics. They do give out some funds, but in the end, the money that they give
5 turns out to be so little!” (E6, Manager in Local Government, Spain, 2010). The
6 following experience reflects the significant economic efforts of small entrepreneurs to
7 promote border development and the low economic support that they perceive from
8 CBC institutions: “We have bought a ship without any support. The cross-border
9 policies affect us negatively because, although they make the attempt, you do not see
10 positive results. The transport is considered tourism, and we are working in the tourism
11 industry! You get tired of the many papers [applications for funding], and a new ship
12 cost 300,000 Euros, so we are shocked. If you bring me a project of 2,000 Euros...
13 However, this is what the gasoline costs” (E9, Ship owner of tourist transport Spain-
14 Portugal, 2010).
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32 *B. Know-how for cross-border cooperation: Towards a political opportunity structure*
33 *in CBC.*
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38 According to the general discourse in our area of study, two significant factors hinder
39 the development of a more democratic character of cross-border cooperation policies.
40 First, there is a lack of information flow among different governance structures,
41 especially from the regional levels to the local municipalities. Second, there is an
42 exclusive political performance from the higher or regional levels towards the local
43 levels through both formal structures and informal actions. Based on these observations,
44 we believe that in the development of CBC projects, it is necessary to establish “know
45 how” in the working culture in cross-border policies, particularly at the upper levels of
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3 administrations. These upper levels may be distanced from local demands and may
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5 therefore be limited in their capacity to manage local initiatives.
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10 This issue has been present in regional policy since the early 1990s. The length of time
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12 that has transpired is long enough to assume that there have been opportunities to gain
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14 expertise in developing more satisfactory cross-border cooperation. However, only in
15
16 recent years have many of the interviewed experts felt that the regions are beginning to
17
18 cooperate closely. The lagging process of learning to cooperate in this southern border
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20 region is more reasonably explained by general patterns of political performance
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22 characterised by hierarchical and non-inclusive policy procedures and top-down
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24 political processes. Here, we borrow Tarrow's concept of the political opportunity
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26 structure (1994: 85-86), "*consistent but not necessarily formal or permanent dimensions*
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28 *of the political environment that provides incentives for people to undertake collective*
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30 *action by affecting their expectations of success or failure*", to refer broadly to those
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32 formal or informal modes of political performance that characterise a given political
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34 structure as open, reachable, and available. Nonetheless, a comparative study of
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36 different border regions would help to clarify whether these complaints are the outcome
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38 of specific and culturally shaped modes of governance in each border area or whether
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40 they are typical of other border regions across the European Union.
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47 Local governments have input into this discussion. In our area of study, local
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49 governments highlight the factors that hinder the implementation of cross-border
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51 projects. On the one hand, local municipalities have assumed the role of the citizen in
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53 their experience of being distanced from higher-level politics. On the other hand, local
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55 governments are perceived and perceive themselves as better managers in the field
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3 because the local government is the administrative body that is most proximally situated
4 in relation to citizens and to the needs of the border. Moreover, local governments are
5 capable of more flexible border relations and can facilitate the flow of information from
6 the bottom to the top levels.
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14 **A. Bottom-up policy making in cross-border cooperation.**
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18 *B. The mismatch between people's daily life and cross-border cooperation.*
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23 Another issue involves the way in which information about CBC is delivered, whether
24 access to information is satisfactory, and other comments by the respondents. Gualda et
25 al. showed that in the general population, there was complete ignorance regarding
26 institutional cross-border cooperation (2010: 214). Similarly, Houtum and Struve (2002)
27 reported that people living at the border did not even know that they lived in a cross-
28 border region, and they were not interested in anything but the pragmatic issues of their
29 daily life. This idea also appears in the discourse of the people in this southern border
30 area:
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43 “There are many projects, but we are not interested in them. Because I have my son, my
44 family... depends on me a lot. If I would not be here, I would not be interested in
45 Interreg, and it would not be something very big for me”_(E4, Secretary of Chamber of
46 Commerce, Spain, 2010).
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54 According to this discourse in the focus groups, local people seemed to have little
55 insight into the concept of cross-border cooperation. CBC political goals were not
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3 perceived as part of people's everyday lives. Even people who were conscious of how
4 important CBC was for their lives did not make an effort to understand the ways in
5 which CBC might affect them. People tend to be concerned with their daily problems or
6 pragmatic issues that relate to their fields of interest. In line with the idea of social
7 reality proposed by Berger and Luckman (1993), CBC policies do not connect with
8 people's everyday lives and experiences. If experiences and social interactions "here"
9 and "now" constitute people's ultimate reality, why should a person be interested in
10 something that seems far away?: "The citizens want to live, and they don't know that
11 the 'necessary projects' are necessary, as we are talking about high levels" (E4,
12 Secretary of Chamber of Commerce, Spain, 2010).
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27 Although the above factors may cause CBC to slip out of the consciousness of citizens,
28 these factors do not necessarily result in a negative opinion about the cross-border
29 policies conducted in their territories. As we have noted above, a positive attitude exists
30 towards cross-border initiatives in these local municipalities. Moreover, the perception
31 of cross-border cooperation as distant and abstract is unquestionable if its socio-
32 economic benefits for the border development are considered. In this case, perhaps
33 people do not need to be aware of and to testify continuously to the results of these
34 transnational policies. The inhabitants of the border region likely do not need to be part
35 of a constant flow of information to guarantee their participation in cross-border policies
36 that affect their lives and important concerns. The disconnection between people's daily
37 life and cross-border policies and Euroregions may not be dichotomised; rather, it may
38 suffer from a lack of interaction between political structures and citizenship. In
39 particular, simply announcing projects or initiatives in the border area through bulletins
40 or official means of communication is not sufficient. Official procedures for
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3 disseminating information about CBC policies to the local border population have not
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5 received the expected and automatic backing of the targeted people. Thus, local support,
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7 the legitimacy of cross-border projects, and their sustainability cannot be guaranteed. “I
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9 do not have much information on what the Euroregion is doing. I know that it has been
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11 constituted, but nothing about what is doing internally” (E4, Manager of Development
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13 Agency, Portugal, 2011).
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18 *B. Interactive opportunities for the decision and implementation process of cross-*
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20 *border cooperation.*
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25 The above discussion indicates the need to explain to the population more directly and
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27 explicitly the ways in which cross-border projects may affect people’s daily lives and
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29 the future of their villages. To do so, an intermediate and more interactive phase of CBC
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31 is necessary between the decision and implementation processes. First, in addition to
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33 traditional general information provided through bulletins, it is possible to highlight the
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35 relevance of cross-border projects by describing the projects in relation to people’s
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37 concerns about finding employment, securing opportunities for their children’s
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39 education, providing healthcare for their families, and maintaining their quality of life:
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45 “There is little access to the information, as we do not worry about it, and the
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47 administration also needs to think about ways to make the information more accessible
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49 to the citizenship because it is worthless to rely on just the bulletins” (E5, City
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51 Councilor of Local Government, Spain, 2010).
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3 Second, political practices and processes should take a more inclusive approach to
4 foster the development of local entrepreneurship. It is necessary to ask how the local
5 people, social actors, and grassroots ideas can be included in CBC procedures and,
6 consequently, in the process of European integration. In the academic discourse, CBC
7 and Euroregions are often considered representations of the technocratic nature of the
8 EU. On this issue, the experts appeared to be more unanimous and critical in their
9 opinions of CBC projects that are developed in a top-down manner and do not consider
10 the real needs of the border regions: “The European Union and the State all have their
11 own politics, organisations, or companies that may provide ideas, but those are not ideas
12 from the streets” (E2, Manager of Commerce, Spain, 2010). Regarding the policy
13 making related to CBC, as with the policy making in other fields, participants in focus
14 groups and interviews tend to feel that the EU and other high-level administrations
15 operate in different dimensions of reasoning and programming with needs and goals
16 that differ from their own: “The farmers’ needs are all the same. It turns out that the EU
17 does not consider these needs but addresses only the needs of the EU. The case of CBC
18 is exactly the same, with the perspectives of people at the higher level, nothing to do
19 with the perspectives from here” (E2, Manager on Commerce, Spain, 2010). “I think
20 that institutions have to consider what is important for people, and they must respond to
21 their needs, as they can have a theoretical idea that does not correspond to the needs of
22 the population. There must be some exchange” (E10, University professor, Spain,
23 2010).

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52 A remaining idea from the interviewees is related to the fact that informal cross-border
53 initiatives emerging from the people have received little support from institutional
54 levels. Specifically, cross-border contacts and relations among people of the border tend
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3 to be more fluent and direct than those at the institutional level. Consequently,
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5 spontaneous and short-to-medium-term initiatives tend to collide with rationalised
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7 processes of political structures, ending up caught in slow and inelastic official
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9 procedures: “It does not matter if we, the association of ownerships from here and there,
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11 work together because at the end, there are inspections often, and the responsibility of
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13 this must come from upper levels”_(E3, Representative of Ownerships Association,
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15 Spain, 2010).
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20 Finally, the possibility of participating in policy making for CBC activities depends on
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22 the specific areas: “Whether people participate depends importantly on what we are
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24 doing” (E6, Manager in local government, Spain, 2010). “I understand that every
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26 agreement has to be promoted, but right now, I don’t remember anything but the Milla
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28 del Guadiana, a sailing competition across the river, where people’s participation is
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30 fomented, but with bigger and important things... they do not participate” (E3,
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32 Representative of Ownerships Association, Spain, 2010). Grassroots participation seems
33
34 to be perceived not in absolute terms of participation across all aspects related to the
35
36 development of the cross-border region but only for fields in which participation is
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38 desirable and possible. Among these fields, experts consider cultural and recreational
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40 activities to be the best and most likely platforms for local participation. Therefore,
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42 cross-border events, such as monographic fairs, joint spectacles, and nautical
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44 competitions, are the best scenarios for promoting the participation and integration of
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46 people who live in the border regions. However, the immediate question arises
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48 regarding whether such opportunities are sufficient to bolster the democratic nature of
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50 cross-border projects. Are these activities simply a glimmer of democratic participation
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3 in CBC policies at the local level, especially for municipalities at the southern border of
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5 Spain and Portugal?
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8 9 **A. Conclusion.**

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14 The results suggest several future directions. First, findings based on the experiences of
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16 people living in the southern border between Portugal and Spain reveal a positive
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18 evaluation of cross-border projects and some concern regarding people's awareness of
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20 these initiatives. Nevertheless, experts with experience or knowledge in CBC offered a
21
22 more detailed description of how CBC is conducted in relation to the border region
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24 where they lived. In their view, cross-border policy making suffers from a lack of
25
26 information flow and an elite-centred process that results in an exclusive political
27
28 process. Thus, local governments from this border region often see themselves as mere
29
30 witnesses of the "big projects" and as located on the political periphery of cross-border
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32 cooperation, even though they are geographically closest to the border. In other words,
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34 local actors feel as if they were living on the periphery rather than in the border region.
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41 Therefore, it is necessary to seek better ways and procedures for conducting CBC
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43 initiatives. Specifically, institutions at the European, national, and regional levels must
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45 establish more opportunities for citizens to become involved in the process of policy
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47 making and local participation to generate a continuous flux of communication between
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49 local and institutional actors. This process requires the development of clearer and more
50
51 explicit procedures in the reasoning and decision-making processes for cross-border
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53 policies. Although this is not a new idea, it requires a new political will from a higher
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55 political level in the southern border region between Portugal and Spain. In addition, in
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3 the era of globalisation and ICTs, as the development of Web 2.0 allows new, rapid, and
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5 interactive means of communication (through tools such as Facebook and Twitter), new
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7 and creative ways to promote communication between actors and institutions should be
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9 attempted and evaluated to foster citizen's engagement and to improve legitimacy.
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14 The local governments have encountered a crossroads. They tend to be seen as having
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16 better structures than other institutional bodies for developing closer connections to
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18 local demands and as better representatives of what the border needs, and they are
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20 capable of delivering more flexible and fluent mechanisms for cross-border interaction.
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22 However, they are aware of the serious limitations of the local authorities, not only
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24 because of the different competences at the local level between Portugal and Spain
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26 (Fernández, 2008) but also because of the internal limited competences of local
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28 authorities. These limitations make it difficult for the local level to gain support from
29
30 the upper administrative levels regarding the development of cross-border policies that
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32 often imply trans-national competencies.
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39 Given that the findings of our analysis focus on the distant nature of CBC projects with
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41 respect to local needs and demands, to what extent can the new entities, "Euroregions",
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43 promote European integration? Is participation in these "residual areas", such as cultural
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45 and recreational activities, sufficient to ensure local involvement in policy making for
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47 greater European integration? Wallace and Smith (1995: 151) remarked on the absence
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49 of a democratic Europe in terms of representation and accountability by arguing that,
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51 over the years, European integration has become increasingly distanced from the
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53 people. Can CBC and the development of Euroregions enhance the integration process
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55 through their more decentralised nature? If the analysis in this paper can illuminate the
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3 issue, it is by suggesting that the success of these new bodies depends on more inclusive
4 political structures, not only between people and institutional offices but also between
5 different political levels. In particular, the role and weight of the local municipalities
6 located “in” the southern border region between Portugal and Spain must be
7 reinvigorated. Recently, the Association of European Border Regions has shown the
8 same concern in several discussion papers (Association of European Border Regions,
9 2010: a, b). These papers posit that for the future Interreg A programmes, it is necessary
10 to move towards more decentralised procedures in the implementation of CBC projects.
11 There are different ways of achieving decentralisation, including paying more attention
12 to project implementations at the border, initiating small-scale people-to people
13 projects, and consolidating the “Interreg agreement” among all the participants.
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29 However, these goals encounter difficulties in the Spanish-Portuguese border due to
30 volatility in the political priorities of institutions—in this case, national governments—
31 regarding the use of CBC to achieve greater integration. The recent initiative by the
32 Portugal Government to change highways into toll roads will affect daily
33 communication and transit between Spain and Portugal. The measure has provoked an
34 intense debate among local actors and the general population of the border areas,
35 especially in the southern border region. People, and even local governments, have
36 become concerned about their cross-border activities because the links and dynamics of
37 population, economic, and social flows could be dramatically changed overnight
38 (Jiménez, , 2011; López, , 2011). Once again, this situation illustrates the uncertain
39 future and sustainability of CBC in this area. On one hand, this border region is
40 included in the Interreg initiative that promotes CBC and the recent Euroregion and
41 aims to create a dynamic of integration. On the other hand, despite being on the road
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3 towards greater cooperation, certain political decisions illustrate the disconnection of
4 these CBC policies and the claims of local governments from the border regions,
5 indicating the likely negative consequences for cross-border relations of decisions made
6 at higher levels.
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14 Finally, although the difficulties in achieving optimal cross-border cooperation have
15 been suggested in previous investigations, one of the main contributions of our research,
16 which adopts a sociological approach, is that something has begun to change in the
17 relationships between these neighbours (the AAA regions). Some experts perceive that
18 the basis of real and concrete cooperation is now beginning. In their opinion, the
19 dynamics of relationships and participation in European projects are now less artificial
20 than one or two decades earlier, when institutional connections were developing.
21 Experts now adopt a positive view about the utility of CBC for regional development.
22 Nevertheless, it is also a critical view that detects poor practices that can be improved,
23 particularly regarding the distancing of the citizenship in designing and implementing
24 policies. Although the potential exists for CBC in the future, new limitations produced
25 by this crisis time (such as the case of a new toll road in south western Europe) are
26 possible for Spain and Portugal as well as the three peripheral regions of Alentejo,
27 Algarve, and Andalusia, posing new concerns about the sustainability of CBC for the
28 future. New investigations in the area must evaluate the effects of the economic crisis
29 on this issue.
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52 **Endnotes:**

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54 (1) The count is based on information on the Association of European Border Regions
55 website and includes all border regions that involve two or more nations.
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3 (2) Water management is administered by the state in both in Portugal and Spain.
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5 (3) Marbella is a municipality of Malaga province and is located approximately 300 km
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7 east of the municipality of Ayamonte, which includes the southern border of Spain and
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9 Portugal.
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Map 1 Alentejo, Algarve and Andalusia

view

Map 1 – Alentejo, Algarve and Andalusia in Europe



review

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