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# Governing the mountains: cross-border regionalization in Catalonia

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## **Introduction**

Since roughly the late 1980s, the political and economic regulation in Europe has moved progressively from state-centered government to *governance* based on multiple partnerships across the public-private divide, and bringing together both governmental and non-governmental organizations. This trend is reflected empirically in the proliferation of projects directed at local and regional development across various territorial scales (Jessop 2002: 43). Among such projects are the many processes of regionalization, in which new transterritorial and international mechanisms of governance are created through political and economic networking (e.g. Delli Zotti 1996, Éger and Langer 1996, Perkmann and Sum 2002). Probably the most challenging new forms of governance are related to *cross-border regionalization* where, ideally, different national political, legislative and administrative cultures should act together and enable the actors involved to assess trajectories of development, envision common goals, and determine means of achieving these (Perkmann 1999, Scott 2000).

It may be feasible to explain the shift from government to governance with reference to the major political-economic trends of the past three decades; globalization, supranational integration, the end of the 'cold war', and general rescaling related to the 'hollowing out' of the nation-state (e.g. Swyngedouw 1992, O'Dowd and Wilson 1996, Keating 1997). However, when assessing the rapid growth of the number of European cross-border regions since the early 1970s, it is important to realize their resonance with European Union policies, particularly the EU regional policy programmes. In most cases the 'Euroregions', or 'Euregios', that now count more than seventy, have remained rather technocratic entities through which local and regional goals are pursued (Perkmann 2002: 121). Often these co-operative networks have been set up mainly to exploit new opportunities for funding and political activity that the European institutions have promoted. With their focus on ordinary aspects of administrative activities in local authorities, the cross-border co-operation represents a less radical development in the European polity than first may seem to be the case.

Nevertheless, cross-border regionalization is part of the development of the European polity that will bring about a more polycentric Europe. The European

Union has launched policies which actively foster cross-border initiatives and regional co-operation both within the EU and across its external borders. Numerous economic, political, and cultural actors involved in cross-border co-operation have seized these opportunities in attempt to expand their capacity to govern on various scales (Häkli 1998a, Perkmann and Sum 2002).

This is also the case in Catalonia, where numerous forms of co-operation exist across the national boundary, giving rise to multiple, more or less institutionalized settings for governance based on complex transboundary networks. On both sides of the Franco-Spanish boundary politicians and economic actors are willing to seize opportunities to form new regional alliances, utilise the funding provided by the EU programmes, and to enhance their capacities through strategic networking.

However, while cross-border co-operation in Catalonia certainly is characterized by technocratic goals, its social and cultural context makes any 'bridge-building' across the Franco-Spanish boundary politically tension-laden. Catalonia is a region in Spain, but also a nation with a history of struggle for political autonomy. The consolidation of the Spanish and French kingdoms during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries left Catalonia without political and cultural sovereignty, and the Treaty of the Pyrenees 1646 divided the Catalan homeland *Els Països Catalans*<sup>1</sup> between France and Spain (Pi-Sunyer 1980, Brunn 1992).

Today, the Catalan culture and politics enjoy increasing leeway in France and particularly in Spain. This has paved way for a deepening co-operation and integration across the Pyrenees between actors in the Spanish Catalonia (*el Principat*) and French Catalonia (*Catalunya Nord*). Several institutional forms of co-operation have been established to initiate and govern projects of co-operation. This chapter examines the new forms of cross-border governance that have emerged in the Catalan borderlands. First, the development of the European polity is outlined to set up the discussion of the social and geographical context of transboundary co-operation. The paper then looks at the existing forms of cross-border regionalization in Catalonia and contrasts these with the awareness of and attitudes toward the co-operation among 'ordinary' Catalans. The chapter argues that there is yet little awareness among Catalans of institutional activities that are fostering cross-border regionalization in the region, and that this is an issue that will greatly influence the actual outcomes and political potential of cross-border governance in Catalonia.

### **Governance and the 'Regional'**

It has become a broadly accepted view among political analysts that the 'Europe of Regions' is a 'rational myth' that mainly functions to legitimate a more autonomous role for local authorities in the implementation of supranational EU policies (Le Galès 1998, Perkmann 2002). In the context of European policy discourses reference to the regional scale is also in line with the adopted policy goals and programmes. However, in reality most European regions have not acquired a strong governmental and institutional status. This places much pressure

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<sup>1</sup> *Els Països Catalans*, the Catalan linguistic and cultural area, is a spatial concept that simultaneously points to the shared cultural history of Catalan speakers, and a definite geographical area, underlining the artificiality of the boundary between Spain and France.

on governmental and non-governmental actors who nevertheless are faced with the task of governance in their efforts to foster local and regional development.

Following Bob Jessop (1995) governance can be understood broadly as attempts to attain collective goals and purposes in and through specific configurations of governmental and non-governmental institutions, organizations and practices. Thus, instead of a coherent and ready-made regional system upon which European policy-making could be built, we should expect to find a more fluid, less systematic, and a highly diversified field of regional governance, where regions perform very differently depending on their ability to mobilise and co-ordinate both human and economic resources for collective goal-attainment (Le Galès 1998).

On a general level governance as a social practice is certainly influenced by the relative incoherence of the European regional system. However, there is an even more fundamental level on which 'the regional' is related to governance. Instead of being discrete entities of the external social, economic and political reality, regions are now commonly understood as constructs that are created and reproduced in social practices, such as those involved in governance (e.g. Paasi 1991, Häkli 1994, 1998b, 1998c, Jessop 2002). Hence, governance is not only a set of practices played out upon a particular regional setting, but it is also constitutive of 'the regional' as a field of action and knowledge.

This is most apparent in the case of transnational regions that are of relatively recent origin and have emerged as more or less loose concepts in the context of cross-border co-operation. Instead of being entities formed by social processes, these transnational regions are formations - networks of action - consisting of governmental, economic and cultural agents with overlapping interests that can be addressed by defining them in regional terms. These formations are not necessarily institutionally strong, but they may function well as loosely organized passageways for various practices of regional governance (Le Galès 1998, Smith 1998).

The fact that dozens of 'Euroregions' or 'Euregions' have been established in the European borderlands clearly illustrates that institutional stability is much desired as a support for cross-border governance. Euroregions are commonly seen as avenues for better access to the European Commission and EU funding (Perkmann 2002). For individual authorities participation offers for example the chance to be prepared in terms of an established partnership, as commonly required by the European Regional Development Fund initiatives and programmes. Furthermore, precisely because it opens direct connections between local and regional authorities and the European Union, Euroregions provide the former with more elbow room in negotiations with their own national governments in issues of regional development, decision making, and representation of interests. Not surprisingly, Euroregions seem to have obtained a permanent place in the contemporary 'multi-level governance' in Europe (Ward and Williams 1997, Ansell *et al.* 1997, Perkmann and Sum 2002).

Also in Catalonia several institutional forms of transboundary co-operation have been established to launch and govern development initiatives and projects. Before assessing how these fulfill their function in terms of governance, as well as in addressing issues relevant to 'ordinary' Catalans, it is necessary to look at the geographical context in which these efforts take place. This will show how

aspects of material environment can be intertwined with discourses and narratives that are employed in agenda setting for cross-border co-operation.

### **Catalans: A Mountain People**

Catalonia, in her present territorial shape, lies at the south-eastern Pyrenees, the monumental divider between Spain and France. Rather than being merely a physical matter of fact, the mountains represent various aspects that are essential to Catalan history and identity. On the most fundamental level the Pyrenees are connected to struggles against domination by foreign powers. According to tradition, the mountains provided shelter for nobles who took refuge there against the Moorish political power and social organization in the Early Middle Ages (Nogué 1998, Glick 2002).

Later, resistance toward Castilian centralization policies since the early eighteenth century centered at times on the monasteries of Ripoll and Montserrat, both sheltered by mountains. The extraordinary landscape of Montserrat in particular has become a quintessential symbol of Catalan national identity. Moreover, Catalan poets and writers have depicted the mountains as a virgin nature, pure, sacred and intact, reflecting the national character of the Catalan people (Nogué 1991).

In the early decades of the nineteenth century Catalan intelligentsia began to discover the mountain environment. The mountain exploration was motivated by nationalist as much as scientific and artistic curiosity. By the early twentieth century a hiking association, the *Centre Excursionista de Catalunya*, had become one of the most influential societies of civic and cultural character (García-Ramon and Nogué-Font 1994). Hiking at the Pyrenees was associated with discovering the Catalan national character and landscape.

The symbolic value of Pyrenees for Catalan identity is considerable, but there is also a more practical side to the cultural history of the mountains. Before the ascent of the Spanish and French nation-states and the Treaty of the Pyrenees 1659, the Pyreneans were engaged in lively exchange, including transhumance of herds, pilgrimages, trade and commerce. It was commonplace to find people living and working in the Spanish side of the Pyrenees but speaking french instead of Catalan or Castilian (Laitin *et al.* 1994).

This mountain way of life was disrupted by the Treaty of the Pyrenees that ended the Thirty Year's War between Spain and France in 1659. The treaty resulted in the annexation of the northern part of Catalonia, *Catalunya nord*, to France (García-Ramon and Nogué-Font, 1994). Even though it took two centuries before the boundary actually materialized in the mountain landscape, many village communities in the Pyrenees had begun to insist on their separate national identities and territories well before the border was delimited in the Treaties of Bayonne (1856/1866) (Sahlins 1998). Hence, the sense of separate nationality was premised more on the emerging ideal of territorial sovereignty and its local experience than the national boundary itself.

The uniting and dividing functions of the Pyrenees represent two opposite realities that are simultaneously present in any effort to create transboundary networks and organize cross-border governance. The mountains are a *physical divider* hindering interaction between the Spanish and French sides of Catalonia

and channelling it to few border-crossing points. Unsurprisingly, the Franco-Spanish boundary is demarcated along the highest elevation of the Pyrenees, which in fact makes it a classic 'natural boundary'. However, instead of merely separating people the mountains also represent a *cultural link* between the Spanish and French Catalonias. Hence, as an activity that seeks to overcome the mountains as a barrier, but also utilize the sense of transboundary unity that the Pyrenees represent, cross-border governance in Catalonia means in a sense 'governing the mountains'.

This is the geographical and cultural context that sets the scene for the creation of new forms of governance in the Catalan borderlands. Both Spain and France have a Catalan speaking minority, even though the political and economic position of Spanish Catalonia, *el Principat*, far exceeds that of its northern counterpart (Mansvelt-Beck, 1993). In fact, the strength of the *Comunitat Autònoma de Catalunya* (Autonomous Community of Catalonia) among the Spanish regions does not really merit the label of minority for Catalans. In France, the state has pursued centralist policies much more successfully, and consequently the Catalan language and culture have had to make significant concessions to the standard French language, manners and systems of education (Mancebo, 1999).

Given the legacy of division of the Catalan homeland, the central role of the Pyrenees as a marker of Catalan identity, and the contemporary EU policies that greatly encourage regionalization, it is no wonder that there are numerous initiatives for cross-border co-operation in Catalonia. Together, albeit not necessarily in a co-ordinated manner, these processes, projects, organizations and initiatives set up the multi-level cross-border governance as an institutional field.

### **Cross-Border Co-Operation in Catalonia**

In Catalonia transboundary networks are many and involve numerous prominent actors. They also seem to effectively integrate the local, regional and national authorities and non-governmental actors, thus fostering the creation of extensive networks of governance (Genieys 1998). Along with several single issue, fixed scale co-operation projects, there are ones that are explicitly aiming at multi-level governance, such as the Euroregion initiative.

In October 1991 an agreement was signed by the leaders of Catalonia and the two French regions of Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrénées. Thus an institutional framework was established for co-operative initiatives that had emerged between the regions since the early 1980s (Euroregió bilan et perspectives 1994). While the *Euroregió Catalunya, Languedoc-Roussillon i Midi-Pyrénées* is not the first official agreement on cross-border co-operation involving regions on both sides of the Pyrenees, it is perhaps the most visible and significant one.

The two main goals of the Euroregion are first, to develop methods for increasing interaction between the economic, social and cultural actors in the region, and second, to strengthen the role of the Euroregion as a motor for the European economy, together with fostering the European integration and strengthening the position of Southern European regions (Euroregió bilan et perspectives 1994). Similar official rhetoric is typical to most Euroregions which

seek to stress their pro-European ideology (Kepka and Murphy 2002, Perkmann 2002).

In practice, the Euroregion co-operation aims at concerted action by the constituent regions within the European Union bodies, as well as securing the support and acceptance of the Spanish and French governments to its large scale projects. The Euroregion has a relatively broad multi-level organization, but little permanent staff. With one full time secretary it is headquartered in the French Catalan area of Roussillon, in the town of Perpignan. However, as a form of co-operation the *Euroregió Catalunya, Languedoc-Roussillon i Midi-Pyreneés* represents an institutionalized, official, and high governmental level network involving directly only members of the governmental, cultural, and scientific elite. There is no directly elected body politically in charge of the Euroregion's activity, but the officials involved are to some degree accountable to their respective regional governments.

Like most contemporary projects for enhanced regional governance (see Le Galès 1998, MacLeod and Goodwin 1999), the Euroregion co-operation becomes visible to the broader public mainly through the media, and to some degree through the realization of concrete projects of general interest (for example the improvement of roads crossing the border region). Nevertheless, the Euroregion activities are very much characterized by their technocratic overtone, addressing mainly the political, economic and governmental elites that are involved in its functions (see also Perkmann 2002). This is reflected in the official Euroregion documents where the Pyrenees is represented as a space traversed by modern technologies of communication. Instead of showing the mountains as a physical barrier, it is typically flattened out from the mappings of the functional borderland (e.g. Euroregió document estadístic 1993, Euroregió bilan et perspectives 1994).

Along with the Euroregion there exists another broad network for cross-border co-operation in Catalonia, one that explicitly represents the Pyrenees as a cultural link. The Working Community of the Pyrenees (*Comunitat de Treball dels Pirineus*) was founded in November 1983 as an organization for co-operation between the Spanish autonomous communities of Aragon, Catalonia, Navarra, and the Basque country, the French regions of Aquitania, Languedoc-Roussillon, and Midi-Pyrenées, and the principality of Andorra (XV Consejo Plenario 1997).

The CTP has the strategic goal of showing ways in which the Pyrenees can function as a uniting rather than separating element between the mountain communities (Carta d'Acció 1994). In practice, the CTP co-ordinates projects and often provides them with know-how and partners from the other side of the border, both essential requirements for funding from various EU sources, such as the Interreg, the Leader, and the Feder programmes (Vallvé 1997). In this regard it is a form of cross-border governance that focuses on helping local and regional actors to seize new opportunities that the European Union policy making has to offer (Perkmann 2002). Like the Euroregion, the CTP is a well-institutionalized, high-level governmental form of activity involving members of the regional elites, but without a directly elected democratic decision-making mechanism.

Together the Euroregion and the CTP frameworks support, initiate and co-ordinate dozens of cross-border co-operation projects ranging from small scale initiatives, such as the production of basic information about the area for improved communication (for example Atles de l'Euroregió 1995), all the way to

lobbying for large scale infrastructural projects, such as the high speed train connection (TGV) from Barcelona to Montpellier (Serratosa 1997). Thus, instead of acting as an organization with clearly defined functions and areal domain, these institutional frameworks are in fact constitutive of the processes of multi-level governance directed at improving the political and economic relations that condition local and regional development. Alleviating the problems of communication caused by the Pyrenees figures strongly in official discourses. The mountains are represented either as an abstract functional space, a barrier to be bridged, or as a historical link between mountain communities. While the former mappings seldom show the mountains at all, the latter tend to fully appropriate the mountain landscape in representing shared cultural heritage.

In addition to the Euroregion and the CTP, there are numerous other inter-regional networks, projects, and initiatives actively fostering cultural co-operation across the Franco-Spanish border. Among the most important are the network of Catalan universities based in Perpignan (*Xarxa d'Universitats Institut Joan Lluís Vives*), several projects for professional training funded from the Interreg programmes, cross-border co-operation on annual motor vehicle inspection, and waste water treatment (Banque d'experiences 1996). Additional initiatives for co-operation can be found on the local government level (Häkli 2002). For instance, the Pyrenean mountain municipalities have formed an association for co-operation, the town of Perpignan has established co-operative relations with Figueres, Lleida, and Girona, and there are numerous 'sister city' relations between the towns of Catalonia and Catalunya Nord (Roig 1997).

In all, the many initiatives and projects for cross-border co-operation reflect the policy of the Catalan government (*Generalitat de Catalunya*) that stresses the connection of Catalonia to the north, rather than to the rest of Spain (Guibernau 1997: 106). The spatial metaphors of Pyrenees as bridge or link serve to further underline this direction. These imaginary geographies accord well with the ideology that projects Catalonia and Catalanism as a model for Europe, a new concept of nation which perhaps can resolve political tensions caused by the European integration process and the erosion of the sovereign nation-state (Castells 1997). Essential for the realization of this ideology are the networks of cross-border governance that challenge the traditional models of state-based government (Jessop 2002).

### **Governance for Whom, by Whom?**

The idea of 'government for the people by the people' is one of the cornerstones of the modern western democracy. The idea implies that there exists a territorial congruence between a constituency (political community as the co-presence of citizens), a system of political representation (politicians as representatives of people living in a particular territory), and the areal extent of a political jurisdiction (the authority of states, regions, municipalities etc.). Along with territorial congruence, the ideal political order is based on the idea of citizens identifying with the territory as a place, and acknowledging the issues on the agenda in the 'public sphere'. While these principle conditions are rarely met to the full, they have strongly guided the modern political imagination that Low (1997) has aptly characterized 'the politics of place'.



In political analysis the idea of cross-border governance is typically associated with citizen-friendly, 'bottom up', non-bureaucratic administration that is decentring the state government (Leresche and Saez 2002: 88). However, this view is questionable in the light of research that has explored the patterns of identification that characterize transnational regions. The following results of a survey made in Catalonia are compatible with observations made in other European borderlands concerning the slow emergence of cross-border regional identities among the borderlanders (e.g. Paasi 1996, Wilson and Donnan 1998, Kaplan 2000, Eger and Sandtner 2002, Raento 2002).

In 1999 altogether 360 borderlanders were interviewed in Catalonia, 77 on the French and 283 on the Spanish side of the border. The interview charted people's border crossing frequency and motives, and their opinions on cross-border co-operation and the relaxation of the border control in Catalonia. It also elicited the respondents' future expectations regarding the disappearance of the border, as well as their understanding of the borderlands as a cultural and geographical unity.

The questionnaire interview was carried out in counties (*comarques*) adjacent to the border, and in all major cities. According to the survey border crossing is a relatively frequent activity for many people. Roughly one third of the respondents said that they cross the state border at least once a month, and some 40 per cent at least once a year. Hence, it is not surprising that the Catalan borderlanders generally view the relaxed border control in positive terms (see Table 1). Roughly two out of three respondents on both sides of the border said that the increasing permeability of the state boundary is a favourable development.

**1. How do you feel about the more relaxed border control?**

	Posit.	No dif- ference	Negat.	Total (%)
Catalonia	68,5	18,8	12,7	100,0
Catalunya Nord	55,8	27,3	16,9	100,0

**2. How do you feel about cross-border co-operation?**

	Posit.	No dif- ference	Negat.	Total (%)
Catalonia	80,6	11,3	8,1	100,0
Catalunya Nord	75,3	15,6	9,1	100,0

**3. Do you know some form of cross-border co-operation?**

	Yes	No	Total (%)
Catalonia	53,7	46,3	100,0
Catalunya Nord	59,7	40,3	100,0

Catalonia (n = 283), Catalunya Nord (n = 77)

**4. Do you know how cross-border co-operation is practically carried out?**

	Yes	Partly	No	Total (%)
Catalonia	3,7	29,5	66,8	100,0
Catalunya Nord	5,0	25,8	69,1	100,0

**5. Do you know how to participate in decision making concerning cross-border co-operation?**

	Yes	No	Total (%)
Catalonia	25,1	74,9	100,0
Catalunya Nord	20,8	79,2	100,0

**6. What place name you use of the other side of the boundary?**

	Integra- tive	Segrega- tive	Total (%)
Catalonia	19,8	80,2	100,0
Catalunya Nord	22,1	77,9	100,0

**Table 1.** Results of the survey at the Catalan borderlands.

The respondents also think very positively about co-operation across the border and know about one or another form of co-operation. Judging from the answers to these two questions it seems that the borderlanders generally support the practices of cross-border governance, i.e. the efforts to attain collective goals and purposes

through the networks of governmental and non-governmental institutions and organizations stretching across the Franco-Spanish boundary.

However, some results of the interview clearly reveal that people do not actually know much about institutional cross-border co-operation. Few Catalan borderlanders could specify an example of existing forms of cross-border co-operation. Also when asked if they knew about the practical functions of cross-border co-operation, and how to participate, the overwhelming majority answered negatively. Thus, there seems to be little in the official co-operation that 'ordinary' Catalans can identify with.

Moreover, on the basis of the survey it seems that the dividing function of the state border between Spain and France is still very much a reality for many Catalans.<sup>2</sup> For example, when asked what place names best describe the borderlands seen from where the interviewee lives, an integrative term was used by only some 20 per cent of the interviewees on the Spanish side, and 22 per cent on the French side. The remaining respondents used a name that continues to recognise the border as a divider. Hence, while border crossing is for many people a part of their everyday activity, this can be done without questioning the relevance of the border or the state-based identities connected to it.

In all, the survey shows that despite the role of the Pyrenees as an element of cultural integration, and the strong historical relations between *El Principat* and *Catalunya Nord*, there is not yet a strong cross-border identity in existence in the Catalan borderlands. Combined with the relative lack of knowledge about cross-border co-operation, the absence of transboundary identity is indicative of a weakly developed sense of political community among the borderlanders. In theory governance may be a bottom-up practice challenging the traditional state-centered government, but as yet the new forms of cross-border co-operation in Catalonia have remained elitist and technocratic, and thus failed to address the broader population. The exact consequences of this are difficult to envision, but it can be argued that without transboundary polity eventually emerging at the Catalan borderlands, the politics of cross-border governance will continue to suffer from democracy deficit. In such case we can hardly find simple answers to the question of 'governance for whom and by whom' (see also Kramsch 2001).

## Conclusion

This chapter has shown that social and cultural inertia embedded in people's connection with territory, the sense of place, may be a more powerful intervening force in the development of European polity than the practitioners of cross-border governance may have expected. The era of strong nation-states has left a legacy of statist loyalties at international frontiers and this should not be underestimated in the analysis of European integration (Donnan and Wilson 1999, Häkli 2001, Häkli and Kaplan 2002, Sidaway 2001, 2002).

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<sup>2</sup> To avoid predetermining the respondents' answers the interview did not involve direct questions about people's spatial identity. Instead, by asking people to name the borderland regions the interview sought to chart the ways in which people imagine aspects of geographical and cultural unity across the national boundary. People's ability to name a region is highly indicative of the degree to which it is institutionalized in local social consciousness (Paasi 1991).

However, while the borderlanders may indeed be caught by traditional state-centered loyalties, this is not the case with those actors who are involved in transboundary networks. In the elite discourses the Pyrenees figure as a cultural link, or a barrier to be bridged by various means of communication. There clearly is a 'politics of bridge' at work in the Catalan borderlands, one that seeks to appropriate the unifying rather than the separating aspect of the mountains. This politics, that in Henre Lefebvre's (1991) terms operates in the world of spatial representation, enables the negotiation of goals and aspirations related to cross-border governance. Yet, those who know little about official transboundary initiatives keep negotiating their spatial identities as embedded in everyday spatial practice (Lefebvre 1991). Consequently, a rather traditional understanding of territorial political space remains as the most significant context in which people form their political views and frame issues.

The processes of cross-border co-operation have fostered the development of governance disconnected from politics rooted in national territories. This is clearly the case in Catalonia where the networks of governance bring together actors who basically are in charge of developing the cross-border region as a whole, but still are mainly representing their own municipalities and regions. It is not at all clear how consistent this form of governance is with the citizens' desire for democratic participation (Low 1997). A vast majority of the population of these border regions remain connected to their local political communities and everyday concerns instead of viewing the development of the cross-border region as a whole.

Another interesting question is the role of shared language and culture in cross-border regionalization. It remains to be seen whether the elite-driven 'politics of bridge' can evolve into a platform for shared political and cultural identity across the Franco-Spanish border. Despite the favorable conditions of linguistic affinity across the border it may well be that territorial congruence between political, cultural, and economic processes can not easily be achieved. In such case we can anticipate that in securing economic and social projects the role of governance is at best complementary to state-based governmental practice. As yet, it seems that cross-border governance in Catalonia is more about the political and economic elites governing the mountains, rather than the Pyreneans governing themselves.

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