

# 10 Border cities in Portugal-Spain and territorial development trends

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Abstract:

Portugal and Spain share what is one of the oldest unchanged national borderlines in the World. It has remained practically unchanged for 800 years. As a result, the formal cross-border cooperation process between the two Iberian countries was only engaged, with significant formal partnerships, after the 1990s, following the implementation of the EU INTERREG-A Communitive Initiative. As time progressed, this Initiative, later on transformed into a EU Cohesion Policy goal (European Territorial Cooperation) contributed to an exponential growth of cross-border cooperation processes, translated into the creation of more than 100 cross-border entities across the Portuguese-Spanning border. These included not only Euroregions, and later on European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs), but also several Eurocities close to the border. Indeed, in a context in which the Portuguese-Spanish border region faces, in vast areas, a dramatic depopulation process, the role of border cities is particularly relevant to retain population and economic activities in the border area. As such, this chapter will analyse the border cities in the Portuguese-Spanish border region and their contribution to the territorial development of this border region. A more detailed analysis will be done to the case of the Eurocity Elvas (PT) - Badajoz (ES).

Keywords: Border cities, Portugal-Spain, Raia Ibérica, Eurocities, Cross-border Cooperation, Border regions

## 10.1. Introduction

We live in an era in which the world is delimited by sovereign nation-states. This territorialism paradigm presents several known territorial traps affecting, for instance, the implementation of cross-border and transnational planning processes (Faludi, 2018). As we stand, no clear path forwards appears on the horizon about the implementation of a global deterritorialism paradigm (Medeiros et al., 2020). The transgression of state boundaries, as well as the complex rescaling of the state, in certain policy domains has, however, been a reality, at least in certain parts of the world, and during

certain periods of our history (Sachs, 2020). This has been the case of the period associated with the political construction of the presently known European Union (EU). As Rodríguez-Pose (2002: 13) notes, “until recently, intra-UE boundaries not only delimited the borders between member-states, but also represent a series of barriers to trade and additional costs”. A more recent study “suggests that if only 20% of the existing legal and administrative obstacles were removed, border regions along borders in central EU and EFTA countries may have a lower GDP due to these obstacles” (EC, 2017: 127).

Despite the persistence of a wide number of cross-border obstacles (socioeconomic, cultural, accessibilities, institutional, legal-administrative, etc.) within the European space (Medeiros, 2018a), the support given by EU policies (EU Cohesion Policy) and programmes (Interreg), has been crucial to systematically reducing most of these cross-border barriers across the EU internal and external borders (Medeiros, 2018b; Reitel et al., 2018). These EU cross-border cooperation programmes’ positive impacts in reducing border effects was particularly evident in the Portuguese-Spanish border region, firstly in the accessibility’s domains, and afterwards in the remaining ones (Medeiros, 2010a; 2010b; 2011a; 2011b). One of these visible impacts was the creation of cross-border urban networks, from the establishment of the Eixo Atlântico (North PT 19 cities + Galicia ES 17 cities) (Ladeiras et al., 2019) and, more recently, the six cross-border Eurocities (Jurado-Almonte et al., 2020).

The advantages of cross-border urban collaboration processes between Portugal and Spain was already presented in several studies, which highlighted how the socioeconomic dynamics from the Spanish border medium-towns beneficiates the close-by Portuguese border cities, via an increment of trade flows, tourism flows, and technical, scientific and cultural cooperation. In the meantime, there are other crucial aspects which could boost cross-border urban synergies and complementarities, such as: (i) the productive economy; (ii) culture partnerships; (iii) environment and (iv) recreation (DGOTDU, 2003; MAOTDR, 2007). The establishment of these cross-border urban interdependencies, which characterise border twin cities (Eskelinen & Kotilainen, 2005) are only possible, in the studied Iberian case, between small or medium towns, as no large metropolitan area is present in the Portuguese-Spanish border region.

The analysis of the territorial development trends (see Medeiros, 2019c) over the past decades of the identified cross-border cities is largely affected by the aforementioned territorial context, and also by the fact that they are located, for the most part, in lagging regions, from a socioeconomic perspective (Trigal, 2002). Before that, the first two sections of this chapter will respectively illustrate the main geographical and historical contexts related with the Portuguese-Spanish border area, over the past decades, based on available literature and on updated statistical data (demographic and economic) for the border municipalities and NUTS 3. A more detailed analysis of a specific case

study (Elvas PT – Badajoz ES) is presented in a final section. This case study was selected because Badajoz is the largest city closed to the Portuguese-Spanish borderline (the second in the whole border area after Vigo - ES), and because it is not too far away from an historical Portuguese border city (Elvas). For this case study a series of interviews took place with relevant stakeholders from both Iberian border cities, to complement and update existing studies. A final section will conclude the analysis.

## 10.2. Portuguese-Spanish border region: a geographical analysis

As Haggett (2001) would put it, Geographers study a continuum of rather limited environments of varying sizes. In the case of this chapter, the focus of the geographical analysis is the Portuguese-Spanish border region, also known as Raia Ibérica (Trigal & Guichard, 2000). The precise delimitation of this border space is, as in many other cases, particularly difficult to do, as it depends of a myriad of factors (Medeiros 2019a). Notably, for some, the delimitation of the Raia Ibérica should follow the use of border municipalities (Cavaco, 1997), whilst for others, it implies a mix selection of border municipalities with border provinces (Perronnet-Menault, 2000). For this analysis, the authors decided to follow the criteria used in the first EU Interreg-A programme: the selection of border NUTS 3 (EC, 1990). This is, of course, a controversial criterion since, sometimes, vast parts of the delimited border area have little or none border character. This is very much the case of several territories included in the Portuguese-Spanish border NUTS 3, as is the case of the west of Algarve (PT) and large parts of eastern territories of several Spanish provinces (i.e. Badajoz, Cáceres, Salamanca, etc.) (Fig. 10.1). The advantage of using this criterion is, however, the possibility of accessing a large pool of comparable statistics from both sides of the border.

Insert here Figure 10.1. The delimitation of the Portuguese-Spanish border area (Raia Ibérica).  
Source: own elaboration.

As seen in Figure 10.1, from a geographical standpoint, the Raia Ibérica occupies a significant territorial portion of the Iberian Peninsula, which include several regional capitals, with relatively important population contingents at the national and especially at the regional levels. These are, however, for the most part, small sized localities with a few medium towns at the national level. Several of these municipalities are even facing depopulation trends (Table 10.1). Even in the Spanish side of the border, where the largest border cities are located, only the regional (provincial) capitals + Vigo and Badajoz, have population contingents over the 50,000 inhabitants. In all, it can be concluded that, demographically speaking, the Raia Ibérica is a territory without a very large

metropolitan area within an Iberian and European context. It is also possible to verify a demographic predominance of the regional capitals, many of which are facing depopulation trends (Viana do Castelo, Faro, Évora, Vila Real, Chaves, Guarda, Bragança, Beja, Salamanca, Huelva, Ourense and Zamora).

Table 10.1. The largest (population) 20 municipalities in the both the Portuguese and Spanish border regions

Portugal	2019	2009	1999	Spain	2019	2009	1999
Braga -c	182,679	180,414	166,127	Vigo	295,364	297,332	283,670
Barcelos	116,187	121,116	122,278	Badajoz	150,702	148,334	136,613
Viana do Castelo -c	84,417	89,210	88,878	Salamanca -c	144,228	155,619	158,720
Loulé	68,697	69,538	60,337	Huelva -c	143,663	148,806	140,583
Faro -c	61,015	64,032	58,721	Ourense -c	105,233	107,742	109,120
Portimão	55,483	54,602	45,890	Cáceres -c	96,126	93,131	78,614
Évora -c	52,428	56,779	56,637	Pontevedra -c	83,029	81,576	74,139
Castelo Branco -c	51,987	56,224	55,922	Zamora -c	61,406	66,293	64,906
Vila Real -c	49,962	51,826	50,279	Mérida -c	59,335	56,395	50,387
Vila Verde	46,911	48,053	46,861	Plasencia	39,913	41,148	36,465
Covilhã	46,787	52,260	54,320	Vilagarcía Arousa	37,456	37,576	33,909
Olhão	44,405	44,922	41,256	Don Benito	37,151	35,791	31,367
Albufeira	41,528	39,859	32,405	Almendralejo	33,474	33,588	27,554
Ponte de Lima	41,315	43,799	44,342	Redondela	29,218	30,001	28,943
Chaves -c	39,343	41,785	43,563	Lepe	27,431	25,886	18,995
Guarda -c	38,969	42,880	43,831	Cangas	26,542	25,748	23,413
Silves	36,226	36,824	34,185	Villanueva Serena	25,667	25,838	23,717
Esposende	34,177	34,340	33,533	Marín	24,319	25,969	25,421
Bragança -c	33,607	35,431	34,916	Almonte	24,191	21,782	17,202
Beja -c	33,579	35,974	35,805	Ponteareas	22,877	23,172	17,938

Note: Data for Portugal in 1999 refers to 2001; c- regional capital. Source: Authors compilation based on national statistics.

By 2019, Raia Ibérica has an estimated population of approximately 5,465,330 inhabitants, which represents 9,5% of the total population of the two Iberian countries. These figures show a systematic depopulation trend in this border area in the past decade, with a total loss of around 267,000 inhabitants. As can be seen in Table 10.2, the Portuguese side of the border is far more relevant within the national level than the Spanish, from a demographic lens.

Table 10.2. The Portuguese-Spanish border area demographic trends within the Iberian context

Territory	2019	2009	1999
Portugal	10,295,909	10,573,479	10,394,669
Border NUTS 3	2,122,776	2,270,885	2,283,902
Border NUTS 3 (%)	20.6	21.5	22.0
Spain	47,026,208	46,745,807	40,202,160
Border NUTS 3	3,342,554	3,461,492	3,341,282
Border NUTS 3 (%)	7.11	7.40	8.31
Portugal and Spain	57,322,117	57,319,286	50,596,829
Border NUTS 3	5,465,330	5,732,377	5,625,184
Border NUTS 3 (%)	9,5	10,0	11,1

Note: Data for Portugal in 1999 refers to 2001

To complete the demographic picture of the Raia Ibérica, the use of population density data for all Iberian Peninsula parishes (PT) and municipalities (ES) unravels an overall panorama of a territory with low levels of population contingents. The exceptions are the axis connecting Porto (PT) and Braga (PT) with Vigo (ES) in the Northwest of the border region, and the south of Algarve (PT) - Huelva (ES) axis, in the south (Fig. 10.2). Then again, the population trends over the past two decades show a vast depopulation spot in the north eastern part of the Raia Ibérica. This confirms the conclusions from other studies which identify this region as one of the European territories facing higher losses of inhabitants and higher levels of demographic ageing (EC, 2017, 2020), which is not a recent phenomenon (Caramelo, 2007; Medeiros, 2011a; Perronnet-Menault, 2000; Trigal, 2002) (Fig. 10.3).

Insert here Figure 10.2. Demographic density in the Portuguese-Spanish border region (2011).  
Source: authors cartography based on data from national statistics.

Insert here Figure 10.3. Population change in the Portuguese-Spanish border region (1999-2019).  
Source: authors cartography based on data from national statistics.

For some, the mental aspects of borders can be more relevant than material ones (Guichard et al., 2000). Even so, it is undeniable that a geographical analysis of borders provides a useful tool to better understand the border region' main characteristics. As could be expected, the depopulation trends facing a large part of the Raia Ibérica territory mirror socioeconomic challenges. Indeed, generically, from a socioeconomic standpoint, the Portuguese–Spanish border area encompass mostly lagging and peripheral regions (Rivera & Vázquez, 2018). Crucially, with more than 1,200km, the the Raia IBérica borderline and its surrounding area is generically known to have: (i) low levels of demographic densities; (ii) an ageing population; (iii) an economy with a significant primary sector, low levels of innovation in the secondary sector, mostly based on small companies and a tertiary sector largely dependent from the public initiative; (iv) a weak urban network in the area close to the border, with a predominance of small urban settlements; (v) a distinct juridical/political framework; and (vi) low levels of cross-border public transportation (Castro, 2008).

A recent study on the territorial cohesion trends of the Iberian regions, (Medeiros & Rauhut, 2020) demonstrated that the territory covered by the Raia Iberica has, for the most part, showed territorial exclusion trends in the past decade, within the Iberian context, vis-à-vis the intended territorial cohesion path. Several other studies present a similar picture (EC, 2020, Medeiros, 2010a)

in which the north-eastern Portuguese and Spanish border NUTS 3 are the ones facing less positive socioeconomic development trends along the past decades. A relative recent economic indicator (GDP) places the north-eastern Portuguese border NUTS 3 alongside the poorest regions in all Iberian Peninsula (Fig. 10.4).

Insert here Figure 10.4. GDP per capita (€) in the Portuguese-Spanish border region (2016). Source: authors cartography based on data from national statistics.

Finally, from a physical geography lens, it is important to stress out the only relevant physical barriers are posed by the presence of the most formidable Iberian rivers (Tagus, Douro, Guadiana) together with the smaller Minho river in the North. These delimit several kilometres of the borderline (Fig. 10.5). Despite being largely mitigated by many projects financed by EU funds (i.e. Interreg-A), especially between 1990 and 2006 (Medeiros, 2010a; 2011b), which greatly improved cross-border accessibility (construction and improvement of roads and bridges), there are still some border passages (i.e. Algarve-Andalucía) which depend on a single cross-border road passage (Guadiana Bridge - still the largest EU Interreg-A project from a financial prism). Apart from the rivers, the presence of mountains and other physical obstacles do not pose significant barriers to the cross-border flows in Raia IBérica. What is problematic, however, is the reduced presence of cross-border public transports (Medeiros, 2010a; 2019b) in almost all cross-border passages, even in the ones with highest cross-border flows: Porto (PT) -Vigo (ES); Faro (PT) - Huelva (ES) and Évora (PT) - Mérida (ES).

Insert here Figure 10.5. Main rivers in the Portuguese-Spanish border region. Source: authors cartography

### 10.3. The cross-border cooperation process between Portugal-Spain: an historical perspective

For most of its 800-year history, the political relations between Portugal and Spain was marked by a back-to-back process "due to the peculiar structure of mistrust existing between the two large Iberian States" (Rivera & Vázquez, 2018: 590). Often conceived of as one of the oldest and practically unchanged borders/boundaries in Europe, the borderline between Portugal and Spain was firstly defined in the Treaty of Alcañices in 1297 between Castille and Portugal (Trillo-Santamaría & Paül, 2014). Its legal demarcation is, however, relatively recent, as it was mainly established through the Treaty of Lisbon (1864) and the additional ruling of 1926 (Lois & Cairo, 2015). Moreover, unlike what happens in several European borders (see Lundén, 2006), the border between Portugal and Spain

is not characterised by systematic changes in the delimitation of the national boundaries, and consequently in cultural juxtapositions.

By 1977, the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Spain and Portugal initiated a new era for a more formal and fruitful process of Iberian cooperation (Jurado-Almonte et al., 2020). On a practical level, however, this formal cooperation only began to be forged with the adherence of both Iberian countries to the currently known EU, in 1986 (Rodrigues & Pérez, 2010), and especially with their participation in the first (1990-1993) EU Interreg-A Communitive Initiative (Medeiros, 2010a). In essence, a combined effect between EU funding and institutional will has led to the rise of the cross-border cooperation process between the two Iberian countries (Rivera & Vázquez, 2018). In a pragmatic manner, these effects can be seen in "increases in economic transactions and transport flows; cross-border social and cultural exchanges; or the build-up of cross-border cooperation bodies and projects" (Trillo-Santamaría & Paül, 2014: 177). Moreover, the EU Interreg-A programme was particularly important to improve cross-border physical connections across the Raia Ibérica boundary (Medeiros 2010a, 2011b), which have indeed facilitated cross-border flows on several cross-border crossings (Trillo-Santamaría, 2014). This novel scenario contrasted with the previous forms of informal cross-border collaboration marked in part by smuggling (Amante, 2010). Curiously, in rural border areas, cross-border flows tend to be significantly more active when the border is closed, since there are conditions to explore these characteristics economically (Amante, 2013), in particular when there are clear differences between prices of certain sought-after products (Lundén, 2004).

One of the most visible impacts from the implementation of EU cross-border programmes in the Raia Ibérica was the systematic expansion of the institutionalization of cross-border entities across the border, which is particularly strong in the North of Portugal - Galicia part (Oliveira, 2015; Pérez-Nieto, 2016). Conceived as mechanisms of democratisation via the decentralisation of local or/and regional governmental bodies (González-Gómez, & Gualda, 2016), these entities have been implemented along the border between Portugal and Spain since 1990, having surpassed 100 entities in a space of a decade (Medeiros, 2010a). What is remarkable, is the amount of territorial driven cross-border entities established in this old European border region since 2008, which include Euroregions, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), and Eurocities, covering the full scope of the Raia Iberica and even vast adjacent territories (Fig. 10.6).

For Rivera & Vázquez (2018), the development of cross-border institutionalisation can be divided into four different phases. The first was developed in the early 1990s with the establishment of several working communities across the border, such as the North of Portugal - Galicia and the North of Portugal - Castilla & León (Medeiros, 2014). This phase created the platform for a more sustainable and perennial process of formal cooperation between the Iberian nations. A third phase is

initiated in the mid-2000s, with the establishment of the first Iberian Euroregions (Medeiros, 2013) and soon after followed with the establishment of the first Iberian EGTC (North of Portugal-Galicia), in 2008. The fourth phase follows the creation in 2010 of the Iberian cross-border network (2009–2015), which was intended to be the first European macro region in Iberian territory: Regions of Southwest Europe - RESOE.

Border areas, being spaces of confluence of traditions, laws and different territorial arrangements, presents specific challenges to establish common development strategies (Vaz & Soto, 2020). One potential advantage from the implementation of Eurocities, for instance, is the reduction of border barriers to labour mobility. This is expected to contribute to increasing territorial integration in cross-border regions via a more efficient allocation of labour (Pires & Nunes 2018), and to reduce transaction costs (Lange, 2018). Furthermore, beyond the mainstream hard cooperation related aspects (financial and technical support), the establishment of cross-border entities bring about positive elements of soft cooperation such as: trust-building, population acceptance, and planning (Lange & Pires, 2018). Developed within the framework of EU territorial cooperation policies, the Iberian Eurocities emerged at the local level, grouping "localities that come together to attend to public services at a lower cost" (Jurado-Almonte et al., 2020: 6) (Table 10.3). In the Portuguese Spanish border region Eurocities are seen as new cross-border governance structures and a novel and exciting example of a local commitment to cross-border cooperation. "These new institutions are established based on different common objectives, such as economic dynamism, tourism, mobility, sustainability and access to funding" (Jurado-Almonte et al., 2020: 1).

Insert here Figure 10.6. Main cross-border entities in the Portuguese-Spanish border region in early 2020. Source: authors cartography

Table 10.3. Eurocities established along the Spanish-Portuguese border area

Name	Date	Inhabitants
EGTC Eurocity Chaves–Verín	18.12.2007 / 17.07.2013 in EGTC	55,500
Eurocity Tui–Valença do Minho	10.02.2012	31,000
Eurocity of the Guadiana (Ayamonte–Vila Real de Santo António–Castro Marim)	09.05.2013 / 07.02.2018 in EGTC	46,000
Eurocity Monção–Salvaterra de Miño	28.03.2015	29,000
Eurocity EUROBEC (Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior)	03.05.2018	190,000
Eurocity Cerveira–Tomiño	04.10.2018	23,000

Source: based on (Jurado-Almonte et al., 2020)

#### 10.4. Territorial development trends in Portuguese-Spanish border cities



Urban growth varies greatly among the cities, whereas both suburbanization and densification are familiar patterns in most of the urban areas (ESPON SPIMA, 2018). In a world when more than 50% of the population inhabit urban areas, crucial territorial development challenges have a strong urban dimension. Taking the European example, recent data has showed that "a comparison of European cities' economic performance indicates that the major cities are doing better than the rest, and capitals and larger metropolitan regions have performed better during the economic crisis than smaller metropolitan and nonmetropolitan regions. Small and medium-sized cities, however, form the backbone of Europe's territory and have an important role to play for territorial development and cohesion" (EC, 2014: 4).

Numerous assessments already pointed towards the mounting importance of urban agglomerations role in socio-economic, cultural, technological and political developments at the local level, in a world increasingly affected by global dynamics and a great diversity at the local level. In this context, cities will serve as attraction for innovation and socioeconomic developments (Nijkamp, & Kourtit, 2013), as well as for the production of sustainable sources of energy (Hatti, 2019; Medeiros, 2020). In the EU alone, cities account for about 80 % of energy use and generate up to 85 % of Europe's GDP, making them engines of the European economy and catalysts for creativity and innovation throughout the EU (EC, 2021).

Based on a comparable classification of European cities produced under the scope of the European Territorial Observatory Network (ESPON), which identified a number of Metropolitan Urban Growth Areas (MEGAs) and Functional Urban Areas (FUAs), for the European space, it is possible to verify a relatively fragility of the Raia Ibérica urban system within the Iberian context. Firstly, there is not a single MEGA dominating the border landscape. Secondly, there are vast areas without a single FUA. These are concentrated in three cross-border urban axis: (i) North of Portugal - Galicia: Braga (PT) + Vigo and Ourense (ES); (ii) Alentejo - Extremadura: Évora (PT) + Badajoz and Cáceres (ES); and (iii) Algarve - Andalucía: Faro (PT) + Huelva (ES). The two remaining FUAs are the regional capitals of Salamanca and Zamora (ES), with no similar counterpart on the other side of the border (Fig. 10.7).

Insert here Figure 10.7. Urban system in the Portuguese-Spanish border region. Source: authors cartography.

Demographic data applied to the Raia Ibérica cities highlights these three main cross-border urban axis. This explains the depopulation trends in the border areas outside their influence, and hence

the importance of urban settlements to retain demographic contingents. These have, however, to have a presence of medium-sized cities to be able to attract economic and public services' related activities (Medeiros & Rauhut, 2020). This explains why the Portuguese north eastern part of the border shows systematic depopulation trends despite having a relatively large number of cities. They are, however, for the most part, small towns located in a lagging region (Fig. 10.8 and Fig. 10.9), all of them systematically losing inhabitants in the past decades.

Insert here Figure 10.8. Demographics of the Urban system in the Portuguese-Spanish border region. Source: authors cartography.

Insert here Figure 10.9. Population change in the Portuguese-Spanish border region urban system. Source: authors cartography.

An overall analysis of the demographic trends in all Raia Ibérica cities renders a worrisome scenario in which a significant number have been losing inhabitants, which is a tell tell sign of their lagging territorial development trends. The exceptions are, once again, some regional capitals located in the three-mentioned cross-border urban axis. But even some of those, like the large border city of Badajoz (ES) has not revealed a very positive demographic dynamics, vis-à-vis the cities located near the Atlantic (northwest and south of the border).

#### 10.5. The case of Elvas-Badajoz-Campo Maior Eurocity.

The Elvas-Badajoz-Campo Maior Eurocity (EUROBEC) is located in the south-west of the Iberian Peninsula on the border between Portugal and Spain, in the regions of Alentejo (Portugal) and Extremadura (Spain) (See Fig. 10.8). It is a cross-border cooperation project, formalized through a protocol signed on 3 May 2018<sup>1</sup>. This protocol aims to create a cross-border cooperation body, devoid of legal personality, in the form of a working group to monitor, promote, coordinate, support and / or carry out cross-border cooperation activities<sup>2</sup>.

EUROBEC is located within the area of intervention of the EUROACE Euroregion, a group formed of three regions: Alentejo (Portugal), Centro (Portugal) and Extremadura (Spain). It was founded on 21 September 2009 in Vila Velha de Ródão, with the signing of an agreement which, in effect, established the EUROACE working community. This event confirmed the three regions'

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<sup>1</sup>See Diário da República n.º 106/2018, Série II, 2018-06-04, Aviso n.º 7467/2018.

<sup>2</sup>See <https://www.cm-elvas.pt/viver/eurocidade-elvas-badajoz-campo-maior/>

desire to reinforce and boost their cooperation. This new agreement is the legal basis for the creation of a greater Euroregion among these three regions. The idea is to begin a new period of collaboration in which they can work together on projects that are closer and more useful to citizens, businesses and society in general.

The EUROBEC Eurocity is being promoted through the “Building Eurocity Badajoz-Elvas-Campo Maior” project, co-financed by the European Union with the support of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through the Interreg VA España-Portugal Program (POCTEP) 2014-2020<sup>3</sup>. In the immediate future, there is no provision for a broader level of institutional formalization of this Eurocity, for example, using the legal figure of European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)<sup>4</sup>.

Through EUROBEC, the municipalities of Elvas, Campo Maior and Badajoz aim to reinforce an institutional relationship that leads them to cooperate through “the exchange of information and the organization of projects and joint actions, with the objective of improving the quality of life in the region and to establish commitments to advance this cross-border cooperation, promoting the creation of economies of scale”<sup>5</sup>. The creation of the Elvas-Badajoz-Campo Maior Eurocity “will allow its citizens to acquire a new dimension in the structure of the three municipalities, the cross-border space between Portugal and Spain, their countries and the European Union as a whole. It also makes it possible to share services, equipment and infrastructure, allowing the citizens of each of the municipalities to take advantage of the opportunities and the best that each has to offer”<sup>6</sup>.

The Eurocity activity comprises the following: (a) Rural and urban equipment; (b) Energy; (c) Transport and communications; (d) Education, teaching and vocational training; (e) Heritage, culture and science; (f) Leisure and sport; (g) Health; (h) Social action; (i) Housing; (j) Civil protection; (k) Environment and basic sanitation; (l) Consumer protection; (m) Promotion of development; (n) Spatial planning and urbanism; (o) Municipal police, and (p) External cooperation. Table 10.4 presents the main objectives of EUROBEC Eurocity. EUROACE “is the first Euroregion with a tripartite nature on the Spanish-Portuguese border. The organization is not legally constituted and, therefore,

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<sup>3</sup>See <https://www.poctep.eu/en/inicio-2014-2020>

<sup>4</sup> The EGTC is a European legal instrument designed to facilitate and promote cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation. Unlike the structures which governed this kind of cooperation before 2007, the EGTC is a legal entity and as such, will enable regional and local authorities and other public bodies from different member states, to set up cooperation groupings with a legal personality. See Regulation (EU) No. 1302/2013 of the European Parliament and Council of 17 December 2013 amending Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) as regards the clarification, simplification and improvement of the establishment and functioning of such groupings.

<sup>5</sup>See Diário da República n.º 106/2018, Série II, 2018-06-04, Aviso n.º 7467/2018, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> See application document for the project “Building Eurocity Badajoz-Elvas-Campo Maior” for Interreg VA España-Portugal Program (POCTEP) 2014 -2020.

possesses an open and dynamic structure, leaving the door open to all entities and organisations within the three regions, both public and private, that wish to participate”<sup>7</sup>.

The purpose of EUROACE is to encourage cross-border and interregional cooperation among the three regions, promote the comprehensive development of its territories and improve the living conditions of its citizens, through achieving the following main objectives<sup>8</sup>: (i) Conceive cross-border strategies of territorial development, coordinate and guarantee their follow-up; (ii) Ensure the consistency of the different cooperation dynamics on the border between the three regions; (iii) Promote and approve initiatives that bring together the three regions’ agents, whose ultimate goal is to create and reinforce networks of cross-border cooperation; (iv) Encourage second generation cooperation, oriented towards the elimination of border-related expenses and improve the living conditions of citizens in the three regions, mainly through optimising resources and shared use of infrastructure, equipment and services.

Table 10.4. Main objectives to be achieved by EUROBEC

<p>Eurocity digital platform for cooperation  Map of cooperation actors  Guiding document of the administrative structure  Creation of the common Eurocity sporting events agenda  Creation of the common agenda of cultural events Eurociudad  Labour mobility table  Labour mobility report  Rental services, transport programmes, tourist cooperation.  Creation of Eurobec tourist routes  Eurocity card promotion  Exchange programme between training centres  Common cultural action in library network  Social interaction laboratory  Laboratory to promote social interaction  Eurocity observatory meetings  Joint promotion of main strategic sectors  Joint promotion plan design  Organization of internal promotion events</p>
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Source: Author’s own elaboration based on EUROBEC application document for the project “Building Eurocity Badajoz-Elvas-Campo Maior” for Interreg VA España-Portugal Program (POCTEP) 2014 -2020.

## 10.6. Conclusion

Whilst it is well known that several European cities outperform their countries in terms of socioeconomic performance, and that cities help their national economy to become more competitive on a global scale (EC, 2016), border cities tend to be both located in lagging regions and of small to

<sup>7</sup>See <https://www.euro-ace.eu/en/what-is-euroace/Introduction>

<sup>8</sup>See <https://www.euro-ace.eu/en/what-is-euroace/objectives>

medium sized in a national urban network context. This is exactly the case of the Portuguese-Spanish border region, which is dominated by vast depopulated and socioeconomic lagging regions, and by a poorly articulated cross-border urban network. The exceptions are the two-littoral cross-border urban axes (North PT – Galicia ES + Algarve PT – Andalucía ES) and the Évora – Badajoz – Mérida axis.

In all, the largest Raia Ibérica border cities are the regional capitals from both sides of the border, with few exceptions, like Vigo and Badajoz (ES). Many of them, present exceptional examples of Raia Ibérica' border cities which have not lost population in the past two decades. This means that these low or medium-income border cities need to better mobilise their territorial capital and institutional capacity to invert current lagging development trends, by attracting higher-value added activities. Facing this long-term demographic decline, many of the Raia Ibérica border cities can stop this negative vicious circle by establishing institutional forms of cross-border urban networking. This has been the case of the Eixo Atlântico initiative, which has linked 36 border cities in the North (PT) and Galicia (ES) border area since the mid -1990s.

More recently (since 2007), however, six Eurocities were established to foster cross-border urban cooperation processes across the Portuguese-Spanish borderline. Four are located in the north (Eurocity Monção–Salvaterra de Miño + Eurocity Tui–Valença do Minho + Eurocity Cerveira–Tomiño + EGTC Eurocity Chaves–Verín), and two in the south (Eurocity of the Guadiana (Ayamonte–Vila Real de Santo António–Castro Marim + Eurocity EUROBEC Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior). Another is in the pipeline in the centre part of the border. In a European context, only the city of Badajoz is considered a FUA (Functional Urban Area), meaning that the remaining are mostly small sized cities, in the national, Iberian and European contexts. As such, these cross-border initiatives are even more challenging, especially in the pandemic times we are now living (2020), which have greatly affected the previously established cross-border flows.

Despite being a relatively recent cross-border cooperation initiative (implemented in 2018) the EUROBEC Eurocity goals were presented in the last section of the article to provide the reader with fresh information on one of the ongoing Iberian Eurocities' projects. In essence, the EUROBEC Eurocity aims to facilitate cross-border cooperation processes in the Alentejo-Extremadura cross-border area which can facilitate the lives of border dwellers and cross-border commuters. For this, it aims, amongst other goals, to improve the sharing of cross-border services, equipment and infrastructure by citizens from each of the three involved municipalities (Elvas – Campo Maior – PT and Badajoz – ES), and to reinforce already established cross-border networks in the border area. In sum, despite many tangible positive achievements from the implementation of cross-border cities collaboration along the PT-ES border area, it is clear there are still many challenges ahead, in particular, in supporting cross-border planning processes leading to a more integrated border territory.

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