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Cross-Border Urban Sustainable Planning in USA and EU border cities

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Abstract:

This article presents a comparison between cross-border urban sustainable planning strategies in two border cities. One is located in the European Union, along the Portuguese-Spanish border area (the Eurocity Elvas/Campo Maior//Badajoz). Another is located in North America, along the USA-Mexico border area (Nogales/Nogales). Supported by a literature review and interviews, the research concluded that cross-border urban sustainable planning is still in its initial phases in both case studies given other cross-border urban planning priorities. In the European case, environmentally sustainable issues are not particularly relevant in the Eurocity cross-border planning strategy. In the North American case, sustainable planning is developed at the national level, in particular with the support of cross-border strategies in the domain of water and energy infrastructure, but not at the border-city level.

Keywords: Border Cities, Nogales, Eurocity Elvas/Campo Maior/Badajoz, Cross-Border Sustainable Planning, Cross-Border Cooperation.

1. Introduction

The United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda (UN, 2016) ambitious and transformational vision for the World embraces measures specifically focused on cities. Amongst these, are the recognition of the need for sustainable urban development and planning to minimise the impact of cities on the global climate system. More importantly, however, this Agenda defines one main goal dedicated to cities (11): ‘make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’. This goal encompasses several policy domains such as housing, transport, road safety, integrated and sustainable planning, cultural and natural heritage, risks, waste management, green spaces, social inclusion, etc. However, there are no specific mentions of ‘border cities’ and their potential role in implementing the UN Agenda 2030 goals. Likewise, the latest UN World Cities Report (UN, 2020) while revealing that urban areas are, by now, home to 55% of the world’s population (68% expected by 2050), does not dedicate any remark to border cities, despite mention the economic disruption resulted from closing borders as a measure adopted to combat the spread of the COVID-19.

In a continent like Europe, and more particularly in the European Union (EU), marked by a strong presence of national borders, border cities have the potential to play a vital role in the territorial development and integration process of border regions, which are commonly known to perform less well socioeconomically than other regions within a Member State (Reitel et al., 2018). Indeed, in broad numbers, the EU internal border regions cover approximately 40% of the EU territory, whilst accounting for roughly 30% of the EU population (150 million people). Ultimately, this vast border space produces 30% of the EU’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and hosts around 2 million cross-border commuters (EC, 2017). These include around 1,3 million cross-border workers, which were greatly affected by the recent covidfencing process (closing of the national borders due to COVID-19) (Medeiros et al., 2020).

Likewise, the United States of America’s (USA) border cities and their inhabitants are subject to policies of scrutiny, surveillance, and suspicion, on the one hand, while seemingly divergent policies animate cross-border trade, outsourcing, tourism, and integration (Lara-Valencia & Herzog, 2020). Crucially, in the space along the USA-Mexico border, the trend towards urbanization is quite intense, and a large part of the border dwellers reside in urban areas. In detail, in 2019, about 90.5% of the 76.7 million residents of Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas lived in an urban place. That makes USA border cities particularly relevant for public policy and spatial planning (Lara-Valencia & Herzog, 2020). Indeed, for Peña (2020) cross-border planning for the metropolitan areas is a great challenge for territorial development and cooperation at the USA-Mexico border, due to the speed of growth of the cities and urban population, particularly on the Mexican side of the border.

Similarly, on the USA-Canada border cross-border regions do not have the same level of integration along their shared and peaceful boundary line (3,987 miles long,). Even so, some cross-border cities are involved, for instance, in several common governance-related policies regarding the environment, tourism, and cross-border trade (Brunet-Jailly, 2020).

Despite the existence of some studies investigating a few European and USA border cities (see Medeiros, 2021), most have not been analysed through the lens of planning, specifically in the domain of urban sustainable development. At the same time, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis allowing the comparison of EU and USA border cities with a collection of a pool of policy best practices that can be applied elsewhere to improve territorial cross-border integration and cross-border planning processes towards urban sustainable development. Hence, the primary gap behind the proposed research is to capture existing knowledge on EU and USA border cities sustainable urban development planning processes via the comparison of two case studies: (i) the Eurocity Elvas/Campo Maior//Badajoz in the EU and (ii) the Nogales/Nogales border city in North America. The first case (EU) is justified by having an already implemented Eurocity strategy in a cross-border area deeply studied case by the author. The second case (USA) was selected due to recent research made by the same author on the Nogales-Nogales border city.

This analytical approach sets out a completely new scientific direction to existing mainstream border, regional, and urban studies, which are mainly driven by the lens of socioeconomic and governance analysis. From both the EU and USA perspectives, this is exciting since it allows the collection of fresh data on potential USA border cities' best practices on how to mitigate cross-border obstacles and implement effective cross-border urban sustainable development strategies. The research intends to provide crucial information that could guide policymakers in taking appropriate decisions in implementing sound sustainable urban development processes. This comparative analysis is novel and has the potential to fill a void in existing literature on regional, urban, and border studies. In sum, the research intends to answer the following research questions:

1. In which manner are the selected case-studies have strategic cross-border plans fostering sustainable urban development?
2. Which best-practices (if any) are being implemented via cross-border planning strategies to respond to sustainable urban development needs in the selected case-studies?

2. Research Plan and Methods

Mostly based on a qualitative methodological analysis, the proposed project adds an innovative flavour to the existing border and regional/urban planning and development studies as it is particularly focused on analysing existing cross-border sustainable urban planning strategies in two case studies, representing the EU and North America's border cities. The selected EU case study is the Elvas-Campo Maior-Badajoz Eurocity (EUROBEC), which has been established in 2018 in one of the EU cross-border regions (border area between Portugal and Spain) which, by now (mid-2020s), register one of the most intense and mature cross-border institutional cooperation processes in the EU (Medeiros et al., 2023). Moreover, the author has studied this cross-border area for more than 20 years. The selected North American case study is the Nogales-Nogales border city which is one of the most studied USA-Mexico cross-border urban areas and was also subject to a recent analysis from the author.

Ultimately, the research contributes to verifying in what measure cross-border urban sustainable development strategies are or are not being effectively implemented and, if so, in which policy domains. To achieve the expected results, the research followed direct and indirect methods to collect the necessary information for the two selected case studies. These methods include a literature review, supported by the consultation of the border cities' strategies and related documents – the reading of these strategies will allow us to understand the main goals of the strategy and their potential contribution to sustainable urban development. In addition, the research will be supported by the reading of existing literature shedding light on the cross-border cooperation processes in both case studies.

3. Border cities in a nutshell

What is a border city?

In simple terms, a border city is a city located in a border area or border region. This viewpoint, however, leaves ample scope for disputing the correct identification of border cities, since the delimitation of border and/or cross-border areas is subject to an interplay of a multitude of factors (Medeiros, 2019). Borders areas commonly exhibit low levels of urbanization (Sohn & Lara-Valencia, 2013). Even so, there are exceptions in which large capital cities are located close to the national border (e.g., Vienna and Bratislava). A usual trend in Europe is also the elaboration of common development strategies between cities located on different sides of the border. These city cross-border collaboration processes have different denominations such as Eurocities (Jurado-Almonte et al. 2020). Albeit having several meanings, the notion of the more specific border twin

cities refers to a pair of border cities adjacent to each other across a national border (Kaisto, 2017). Instead, the rarer binational city belongs to two national states (Sohn & Lara-Valencia, 2013).

Types of border cities

For the most part, border cities are located in socioeconomically lagging regions (border areas) from a territorial development prism (EC, 2017; Medeiros, 2018a). As such, they are faced with noticeable challenges to compete in a national and global economy, when compared with leading regions. However, they can be crucial development pillars for surrounding lagging regions as they have, in many instances, the potential to attract productive, knowledge/creative, human, social-institutional, cultural, and infrastructural capital, as bases of regional competitive advantage (Beer & Clower, 2020). For Buursink (2001) a border city is more or less dependent on the border for its very existence since its development process was forged by the presence of a cross-border point, and/or a settlement on the other side of the boundary. According to this author, border cities located in the immediate proximity of borders can be considered duplicated cities or partitioned cities. As expected, the constant change in the delimitation of European national boundaries, for example, limits the application of these criteria (Eskelinen & Kotilainen, 2005).

There are, however, several cases of border cities created from scratch, either to act as border defensive strongholds or as a result of economic or administrative considerations (Sohn & Lara-Valencia, 2013). Several border cities lie at the fringes of the state and stand at the frontiers of globalisation (Shirk, 2014). In certain cases, border cities appropriate spaces of foreign policy (Gasparini, 2014). This is being materialised in Europe via the EU cross-border cooperation programmes (Guillermo-Ramirez, 2018; Medeiros 2018b). Likewise, other forms of cross-border urban cooperation such as Eurodistricts, Eurometropolis and Eurocities have begun to take shape in Europe since the 1990s (Lange & Pires, 2018). Across Europe, the adoption of border Eurocities (Jurado-Almonte et al., 2020), twin cities (Brakman et al., 2016) and binational cities (Ganster & Collins, 2017), can be viewed as an institutional tool to use the presence of the border as a resource (Sohn, 2014). This cross-border institutionalisation process is forged via cooperative agreements and memorandums of understanding thus implying that adequate resources are devoted to cross-border twinning activities.

In certain instances, a border city is a vast metropolis. Sometimes even the national capital. This is the case for Vienna (Austria), which is not only located relatively close to the national borderline but also to another European capital (Bratislava - Slovakia). This has led to the creation of the Twin City Vienna-Bratislava, to “develop a functionally coherent transnational region based on

specific advantages of the respective capital cities or other medium-sized cities” (Giffinger & Hamedinger, 2013: 213). This is just an example of cross-border intra-metropolitan spatial integration, entailing new opportunities to reinforce the transfrontier metropolises’ positions at the heart of global economic networks (Sohn, 2014b). However, legal-administrative barriers posed by differences in national systems tend to blur a full spatial integration process between both sides of the border (Decoville et al., 2013). In this regard, Sohn (2010) proposes three distinct models of cross-border metropolitan integration: (i) integration by specialization: cross-border commuting takes place primarily from the periphery towards the metropolitan centre, but not fully; (ii) integration by polarisation: cross-border flows primarily converge on the dominant urban centre; and (iii) integration by osmosis: cross-border flows are bi-directional. At the ultimate stage, this cross-border integration process contributes to cross-border regionalisation (Sergunin & Joenniemi, 2017).

Moreover, there is a case to view cross-border cities as territories in a condition of disparity and permanent competition for resources (urban metabolism), and where the border plays a relevant role as a symbolic element, as is the case of the Norwegian border city of Trondheim and the Swedish border city of Sälén, which compete for winter tourists via advertising (Sæther, 2022). In this regard, Brown (2017), addresses a similar reality in an era of intensifying transnational powers unleashed by globalization, in which the new national border walls emerge from the desire emerging from the waning of sovereignty.

4. The added value of border cities for territorial development

In all, current literature on border cities acknowledges their crucial role in materialising political, institutional, socioeconomic, and sociocultural added-value to the development of border regions, often associated with the implementation of cross-border cooperation processes (AEBR, 2008). Under this current state of the art for issues associated with border cities, there is a myriad of analyses address the role of border cities in promoting socioeconomic and institutional added-value, but also their crucial role in promoting European territorial integration, by contributing to systematically reducing the barrier effect posed by the presence of national boundaries, in all its main dimensions (accessibility, economic, social, cultural, environmental and institutional) (Medeiros, 2018b).

There is some recognition that border twin cities have been contributing to various forms of institutionalisation - via the promotion of legal instruments and access to financial instruments (Sohn, 2014b) - and spatial integration (Sergunin & Joenniemi, 2017). An interesting manifestation of these types of cities is the policy branding of places: “as pairings declare they are playing a role of integration laboratories, they reveal this claim in the towns’ naming, promotional slogans and visual

marketing symbols” (Jańczak, 2018: 408). However, in our view, the ultimate cross-border urban integration process is established via the implementation of cross-border planning processes (Braunerhielm et al., 2019; Durand & Decoville, 2018; Medeiros, 2014). In the case of the U.S.-Mexico border, Peña (2007: 1) claims that “existing cross-border planning institutions are the result of an adjustment process, to a great extent due to challenges to the status quo by border actors and organizations”. For Peña (2007), urban conurbations located on both sides of the border face similar urban challenges related to urban planning which can be more efficiently tackled via cross-border urban plans: water supply, transportation, air quality, capital facilities, economic development, etc. Nevertheless, in border-facing security issues, like this one, cross-border infrastructure planning has become so much more complicated, to the extent that “the USA and Mexico agreed, for the first time, to craft a US–Mexico Border Master Plan, which presumably would help integrate infrastructure planning with security concerns” (Herzog & Sohn, 2019: 196).

Border cities have a particularly important role in developing the surrounding cross-border areas, which are usually lagging from a territorial development standpoint, in a national context. This role comes from the fact that cities act as magnets for territorial development (Nijkamp & Kourtit, 2013) and as concrete vehicles for achieving territorial cohesion processes (Medeiros & Rauhut, 2020). More specifically, border cities have the potential to attract innovation and knowledge via academic institutions and innovative companies, thus stimulating economic competitiveness and innovation processes. Moreover, social cohesion can benefit from the sharing of cross-border public services, which are normally located in border cities, and increase the efficiency and quality of the provision of such social services (ESPON, 2019). As regards environmental sustainability, the implementation of cross-border transport, for example, stimulates the reduction of vehicles that cross the border and consequently the reduction of atmospheric pollution (Medeiros, 2019; Medeiros et al., 2021a). Likewise, cross-border planning can allow for the implementation of cross-border energy-efficient infrastructure. At the territorial governance and planning domains, border cities can stimulate institutional collaboration via the establishment of institutional agreements, by supporting cross-border networking (i.e., Eurocities, Euroregions, EGTCs, etc.) and by implementing cross-border planning.

But more importantly, border cities have the potential to make the most of resources located on both sides of the border for their development, as they concentrate all vital aspects of the territorial capital of the surrounding cross-border region (Camagni & Capello, 2013; Medeiros, 2020a). Some examples can be highlighted based on experiences verified by some scholars, like the twin cities at the Brazil-Uruguay border, with long-lasting experiences on cross-border healthcare and education, or Encarnación (Paraguay)-Posadas (Argentina) across the Paraná River. Furthermore, many small

cities at the Argentina-Brazil border host positive cross-border collaboration cases. Moreover, there is the well-known case of the Portuguese-Spanish Eurocities with so many services shared (e.g., the case of Badajoz-ES and Elvas-PT, in which the Elvas population use the Badajoz hospital), including interesting approaches to the cross-border labour market (Medeiros et al., 2021).

Based on collected demographic data, the contribution of border cities to the territorial development of cross-border areas largely depends on their size and socioeconomic vitality. It is one thing to have a large and vibrant border metropolis like Vienna, with almost two million inhabitants, or Luxembourg City, which attracts thousands of cross-border commuters, daily, from surrounding countries, thus attracting knowledge, skills, and innovation, favoring its territorial development process. This has nothing to do with two relatively small cities located on each side of the border with similar functions, socioeconomic status, and number of inhabitants. In the latter case, the influence of such twin cities on the territorial development process is expected to be far more limited (Medeiros & Guillermo-Ramírez, 2021).

5. Cross-border urban sustainable planning and integration via the reduction of border obstacles

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 (CBC) programmes' positive impacts in reducing border effects were particularly evident in, for instance, the Portuguese-Spanish border region, firstly in the accessibility domain, and afterward in the remaining obstacles (Medeiros, 2010; 2011). One of the visible impacts of CBC was the creation of cross-border urban networks, starting with the establishment of the Eixo Atlântico (North PT - 19 cities + Galicia ES - 17 cities) (Pires & Nunes, 2018; Ladeiras et al., 2019) and, more recently, the six cross-border Eurocities (Jurado-Almonte et al., 2020). Similar Eurocities experiences, however, have been implemented in many other parts of Europe (Sohn & Licheron, 2018).

In essence, European territorial integration, considered as the spatial component of European integration, requires sound and effective territorial cooperation processes to reduce all sorts of border barriers. In this regard, the institutional collaboration between border cities is key to forging European territorial integration through the implementation of cross-border and transnational programmes, strategies, and entities, which provide territorially flexible forms of political and economic interaction (Durand & Decoville, 2019a; 2019b). Indeed, current examples of the importance of several European

cross-border entities in solving concrete problems for cross-border commuters, arising from the closing of borders due to the COVID-19 pandemic, can be found in the Committee of the Regions platform: #EuropeansAgainstCovid19. Besides these institutional gains leading to improving cross-border flows and widening strategic planning, “the main achievements of Interreg programmes include: increased trust, higher connectivity, improved environment, better health, and economic growth. From people-to-people projects, through to infrastructure investments and support to institutional cooperation initiatives, Interreg has made a genuine difference to border regions and has contributed to their transformation” (EC, 2017: 2).

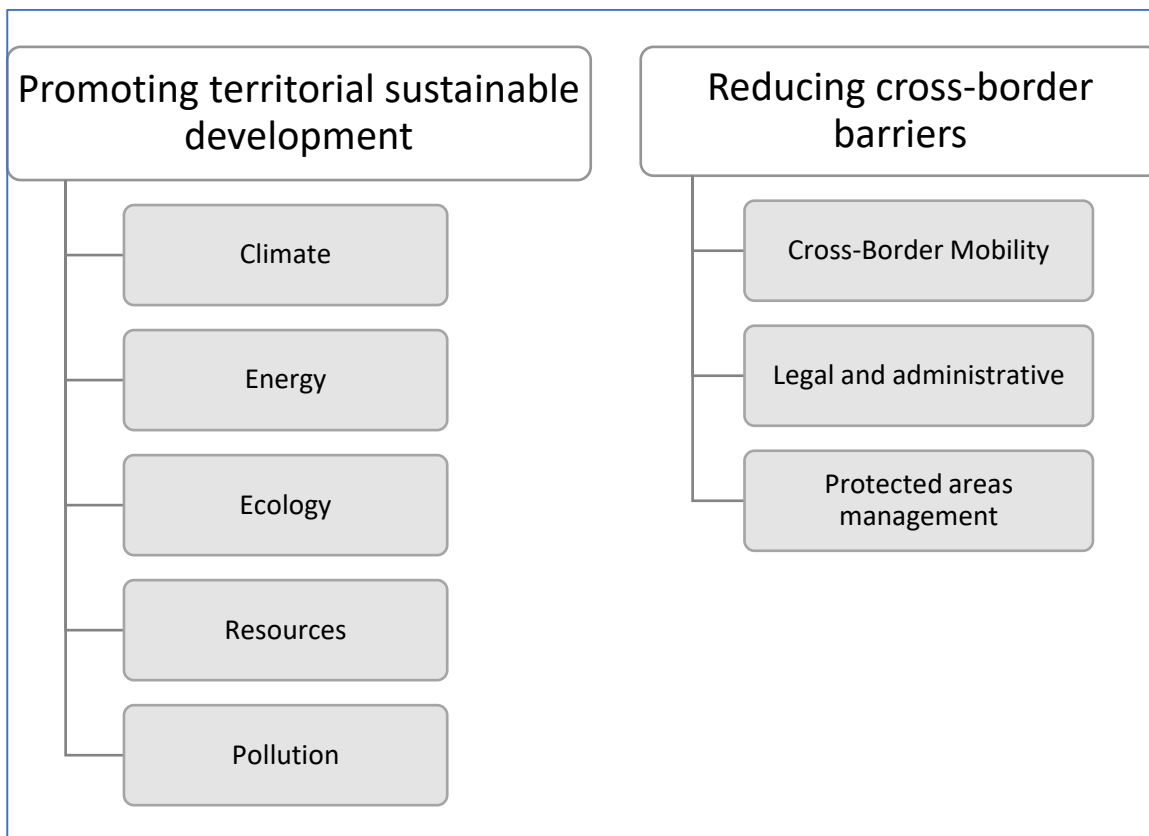
Cross-Border Urban Sustainable Planning

It has become common place to argue that increasing global environmental concerns have placed growing concerns in most national, regional, and local administrative entities’ strategic agendas on the need to foster sustainable development and planning processes (Fioretti et al., 2020). Expectedly, environmental sustainability embraces different analytical domains. Here, AlQahtany et al., for instance, link sustainable urban planning with policy areas such as: (i) climate and energy; (ii) land use; (iii) performance of buildings; (iv) transportation; (v) ecology; (vi) sustainable use of resources; and (vii) green business. Indeed, as Næss, (2021) acknowledges, sustainable urban planning should positively contribute to improving social life in sustainability-relevant ways and influence human actions towards a more sustainable urban place. Crucially, sustainable programming and town planning processes in the future require a coordinated and multi-level approach (Raco & Henderson, 2006; Sepe, 2006), aimed at bringing “together different societal aspects of urban development into a consensual political strategy” (Mössner, 2016: 972) via an integrated policy approach (Yigitcanlar & Teriman, 2015).

Amid globalisation intensification, spatial planning processes operate at multiple scales (Walsh, 2014) and also require a bottom-up implementation approach (Braunerhielm, et al., 2019). For Medeiros (2014: 368) cross-border planning can be defined as a “systematic preparation and implementation of a spatial-oriented policy or plan, in a border region, with a view to anticipating spatial changes, and in order to have direct or indirect positive effects on spatial activities, with the ultimate goal of reducing the barrier effect and enhancing territorial capital”. Durand & Decoville (2018) also highlight the need for an existing cross-border regulatory system managing land use across the border to be able to speak about a cross-border spatial plan. Moreover “cross-border spatial planning is also confronted with very concrete challenges stemming from the necessity to organize solutions that involve different administrative and institutional systems, different regulatory

frameworks, and different sets of actors and institutions” (Decoville et al., 2021: 40). In this context, the following figure (1) proposes a model to better assessing cross-border sustainable planning processes, which focus on several components of environmental planning which ultimately are dependent on the reducing of legal and administrative cross-border barriers in implementing cross-border urban sustainable strategies, as well as on the improvement of cross-border green mobility and protected areas management.

Figure 1. Cross-border urban sustainable planning model



6. The Elvas-Campo Maior-Badajoz 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). It is a cross-border cooperation project, formalized through a protocol signed on 3 May 2018. 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. The EUROBEC is located within the area of intervention of the EUROACE Euroregion, a cross-border entity joining three regions: Alentejo (Portugal), Centro

(Portugal), and Extremadura (Spain). The EUROACE 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' 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 was largely promoted through the “Building Eurocity Badajoz-Elvas-Campo Maior” project, co-financed by the EU with the support of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through the Interreg VA España-Portugal Programme (POCTEP 2014-2020). In the immediate future, there is no provision for a broader level of institutional formalization of this Eurocity, for example, by using the legal figure of European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). 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, to improve the quality of life in the region and to establish commitments to advance this cross-border cooperation, promoting the creation of economies of scale” (Medeiros & Neto, 2021: 203). 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” (Medeiros & Neto, 2021: 203).

In sum, 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. EUROACE is the first Euroregion with a tripartite nature on the Spanish-Portuguese border. The organization is not legally constituted and, therefore, 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.

The purpose of EUROACE is to encourage cross-border and interregional cooperation among the three involved border cities, to promote the comprehensive development of its surrounding territories, and improve the living conditions of its citizens, by achieving the following main objectives : (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. These are the following objectives to be achieved by EUROBEC:

- 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

7. The Nogales-Nogales border city

Unlike EU cross-border experiments, which are largely supported by local cross-border institutional agreements (Medeiros, 2018), the US-Mexico cross-border institutional collaboration takes place, for the most part, at the national level of administration. To some extent, however, as Scott (2002) notes, the US-Mexico regional cross-border cooperation environment is also affected by regional business associations, academic communities, NGOs, and local governments. The Nogales/Nogales micropolitan cross-border urban area, which was separated by a national boundary in 1853, is a relatively sparsely populated border city (46,000 inhabitants in the US and 260,000 in Mexico), with an important role in cross-border trade. According to Lara-Valencia & Herzog (2021: 82) “the city was planned jointly with its Mexican companion city as places to support and regulate the commerce that would come with better communication between large urban centers in Mexico and the United States but grew apart but interdependent over time”. Critically, “the local economy depends heavily

on jobs linked to border enforcement, retail, and transportation. Nogales is the largest port of entry for Mexican winter vegetables into the United States, and it is a transportation hub for export-oriented industries (maquiladora and mining) operating in northwest Mexico. Although Nogales is a center for international commerce, 28% of the population is below the poverty level” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) (Lara-Valencia & Herzog (2021: 83).

According to the Vision 2020: City of Nogales General Plan (City of Nogales, 2020), the following development areas are regarded as policy priorities: (i) Growth Areas Element; (ii) Land Use Element; (iii) Economic Development Element; (iv) Transportation and Circulation Element; (v) Cultural Heritage and Historic Element; (vi) Housing Element; (vii) Parks, Recreation, Trails and Open Space Element; (viii) Environmental Planning Element; (ix) Water Resources Element; (x) Public Facilities and Services Element (xi) Cost of Development Element; (xii) Energy Element; (xiii) Administration and Implementation Element. The same report notes that “Nogales, Arizona, is a major international gateway along the United States/Mexico border. Due to its location at the international border, Nogales is the economic capital of the region and serves as one of the major gateways into the United States” (City of Nogales, 2020: 1), and also that “Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora form a single, functional and complex urban fabric with a constant flow between Ambos Nogales, creating a sense of fluidity that impacts all aspects of life, including culture, language, heritage, character, identity, context, environment and economy. In the same manner, both cities are located in the Ambos Nogales Watershed, sharing similar environmental opportunities and constraints such as water quality, runoff patterns and high-risk erosion areas, making it difficult to produce quality assessments without understanding the myriad ways in which these two communities are integrally connected and interdependent. Planning efforts along the border require decision-making at the international, federal, state, and local levels. The Nogales Wash and Union Pacific Railroad run through the middle of Nogales, presenting unique connectivity challenges but also offering opportunities” (City of Nogales, 2020: 2).

For Schwartz et al. (2023: 1), green infrastructure (GI) in the Nogales border city “has been proposed as a decentralized solution to complex urban water management issues”. This intended strategic policy action supporting sustainable urban development in the domain of water management, however, is hindered by persisting cross-border barriers such as: (i) different water quality standards and monitoring regulations; (ii) institutional gap in stormwater management upstream; (iii) stormwater management is often reactive rather than proactive; (iv) existing regulations are underenforced; and (v) multi-scalar authority and nested jurisdictions. Ultimately, the authors of the mentioned article suggest “the need to develop a binational urban planning approach that promotes a GI network at the watershed scale, preserving natural drainage systems from development, which has

been documented in earlier studies of sister cities in the US–Mexico border” (Schwartz et al. 2023: 17).

Curiously, policy strategic measures supporting cross-border planning between the USA and Mexico in the environmental domain are taken at the national rather than the urban level. For instance, the Border 2025: United States - Mexico Environmental Programme, demonstrates that both the USA and Mexico acknowledge that “the environment plays an important role in the economic, social, and cultural well-being of indigenous people and local communities and acknowledge the importance of engaging with these groups in the long-term conservation of the environment” (EPA, 2020). Border 2025 includes four strategic goals to address environmental and public health challenges in the border region. Within the goals are specific objectives that identify actions that will be taken in support of the programme mission. The goals and objectives were determined binationally between the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) and the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of Mexico (SEMARNAT) to address ongoing environmental challenges, which considered input from state and tribal partners. Essentially, the Border 2025 strategic goals are: (1) Reduce Air Pollution; (ii) Improve Water Quality; (iii) Promote Sustainable Materials and Waste Management, and Clean Sites; (iv) Improve Joint Preparedness for and Response to Hazardous Environmental Emergencies. More precisely, the Arizona-Sonora 2021-2023 Border 2025 Action Plan (USEPA 2021), proposes a set of cross-border environmental urban development goals:

- Establish reliable and sustainably operated air monitoring networks and provide real-time access to air quality data.
- Increase the quality and exchange of data from emissions inventories across the border and among federal, state, local, Tribal governments and Mexican Indigenous communities and Afro-Mexican people.
- Reduce vehicle emissions in the border region, including by establishing or strengthening programs that reduce the number of vehicles that do not comply with vehicle emissions standards.
- Employ strategies and technologies to reduce pollutant emissions and improve public health outcomes
- By 2025, support update and/or completion of climate action plans in each of the six northern Mexican Border States (as appropriate) and build the necessary capacity to guarantee sustained implementation
- Address Border Water Management in the Tijuana River Watershed.
- Improve Drinking Water and Wastewater Treatment Infrastructure.

- Improve O&M of Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure
- Promote beneficial reuse of treated wastewater and conservation of water and energy
- Improve access to transboundary water quality data
- By 2025, share information and experiences on sustainable materials management and resource efficiency practices with local and state-level institutions, tribal governments, and indigenous and Afro-Mexican communities
- Identify priority waste streams and develop sustainable materials management and resource efficiency practices that strengthen their respective market value.
- Prevent and Reduce Pollution in the Marine Environment.
- Update the Joint Mexico-United States Contingency Plan (JCP) and evaluate the emergency notification system along the border of Mexico and the United States.

8. A short comparison between the case studies

The level of cross-border cooperation institutional maturity, understood as the cross-border institutional collaboration intensity in terms of trust (Medeiros et al., 2024) and existing cross-border entities, differs greatly in European borders (Durand & Decoville, 2019b). The same goes when comparing EU border regions and USA-Mexico cross-border regions. Indeed, the ongoing EU support to European territorial cooperation projects, via the Interreg programmes since 1989, has contributed to triggering increasing cross-border territorial integration via the systematic reduction of border barriers and increasing institutional cross border entities which serve as backbones of cross-border institutional trust (Medeiros et al., 2024). Moreover, strategic urban development planning is well-developed in the EU (Saldert, 2021). Furthermore, EU strategic documents like the European Urban Agenda undercut the rationale that urban planning should go beyond administrative borders and foster functional urban areas, which include several European cross-border areas (EC, 2019). In this light, it is expected that European cross-border cities have, for long, incorporated cross-border institutional and planning experiences, which is not necessarily the case of the USA-Mexico cross-border cities. Even so, as seen, the EUROPEC does not directly entail the goal of promoting sustainable urban development at the core of its strategic guidelines. Instead, the EUROPEC presents more generic strategic cross-border cooperation development goals and is particularly focused on concrete actions fostering cross-border (non-green) mobility and cultural collaboration. Moreover, there are no concrete measures to implement legal-administrative procedures towards mitigating

cross-border barriers related to climate, energy, ecology, pollution, and management of natural resources.

Compared with the EU, the process of cross-border cooperation looks to lack the EU's cross-border institutional collaboration capacity to effectively implement cross-border strategic planning (Brunet-Jailly, 2022). As such, this relationship is subject to the will of political actors, who generally have short periods of participation compared to long-term urban plans, for example, the departure and return of the United States to the Paris Agreement. Even so, according to Lara-Valencia et al. (2023: 300), the Nogales-Nogales “provides an interesting case study because of its long history of collaboration and initiatives promoting environmental protection, community health and reducing health disparities across the border. Over time, cross-border cooperation in Ambos Nogales has materialized in a stable yet informal system of governance, allowing the exchange of information and resources and promoting non-hierarchical forms of coordination across the border”. Even though, at the border city Nogales-Nogales level, there is no ongoing formal cross-border urban sustainable planning process, at the national level several cross-border environmental legal agreements are being implemented to promote territorial sustainable development, in particular in the domain of water resources and environmental pollution. However, there are no clear formal goals to foster the reduction of border barriers of all sorts related to cross-border urban sustainable planning.

9. Conclusion

This article compared the implementation of cross-border urban sustainable planning strategies in one EU border city (Eurocity Elvas/Campo Maior/Badajoz) and one USA-Mexico border city (Nogales/Nogales). The article proposes a methodological approach to assess the implementation of cross-border urban sustainable planning processes, based on two analytical dimensions and respective components: (i) promoting territorial sustainable development, climate, and energy, ecology, resources, and pollution; and (ii) reducing cross-border barriers – cross-border mobility, legal and administrative, and protected areas management.

Mostly supported by the literature review, the research concluded that the Eurocity Elvas/Campo Maior/Badajoz has had an ongoing cross-border planning strategy since 2018. However, this strategy is mostly focused on fostering sociocultural cross-border collaboration and facilitating cross-border mobility. Hence, the policy domain of urban sustainable development is largely absent from this Iberian Eurocity, in both the promoting of territorial sustainable development processes and the reduction of cross-border barriers related to sustainable development. Likewise, the Nogales/Nogales border city does not have a formal urban cross-border spatial plan or strategy

particularly focused on fostering cross-border urban sustainable planning processes. Indeed, in this part of the world, cross-border agreements are mostly driven by national agencies. In this regard, there are quite a few cross-border legal agreements between USA and Mexico to engage in sustainable urban development processes, in several policy areas such as border water management and air pollution. Even so, in the Nogales/Nogales border city in particular, several ongoing projects are supporting green infrastructure (to improve and normalise water quality standards, and stormwater management). To be more effective, however, these cross-border planning actions require the development of a binational urban planning approach in the urban area, which is still largely absent.

Crucially, the presented research needs to be further complemented with several other case studies, both the EU and the USA, to identify the intended best practices in implementing cross-border urban sustainable planning strategies to respond to sustainable urban development needs. One is aware that the rising of environmental concerns which are increasingly gaining importance in development strategies across all territorial administrative levels, will inevitably contribute to increasing implementation of border urban sustainable planning strategies across the world. This paper intends to provide an initial contribution to this discussion which will need further and more detailed analyses in the next few years.

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