

Chapter

Political Regionalism in the Age of Devolution in Europe:

Metropolitanisation and the Right to Decide

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To cite this publication (AOM - Author Original Manuscript):

Calzada, Igor (2018), 'Political Regionalism in the Age of Devolution in Europe: Metropolitanisation and the Right to Decide', in Anssi Paasi, John Harrison and Martin Jones (eds), *Handbook on the Geographies of Regions and Territories*. Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Wordcount: 6,180

Chapter abstract:

This chapter examines how a new political regionalism pattern characterised by devolution and self-determination claims expressed and embodied via geo-democratic practices such as the ‘right to decide’ is emerging in three small, stateless and city-regional nations in Europe: Scotland, Catalonia and the Basque Country. Three main arguments are presented as the source of such diverse and pervasive city-regional ‘metropolitanisation’ processes: geo-economics, geo-politics and geo-democratics. This chapter posits that from the political regionalism perspective, geo-economic arguments claiming devolving powers are important, but in the event of being allowed the ability to hold a referendum by nation-states, however likely or unlikely, geo-political and geo-democratic manifestations count even more. Ultimately, is the ‘right to decide’ a potential ‘democratic’ extension of the ‘right to the city’? Insofar as these three small stateless nations are advocating a ‘civic nationalism’ appealing to ‘European’ values, the chapter concludes by exploring how devolution claims could increasingly ‘Europeanize’ the political regional agenda, in an ongoing push and pull of having ‘more say’ in the EU, fuelled by an increasing metropolitan drive and a bottom-up democratic experimentation towards the ‘right to decide’.

Chapter keywords: political regionalism; devolution; Europe; metropolitanisation; right to decide; small stateless city-regional nations.

Introduction: Rescaling Nation-States in the Age of Devolution in Europe

Regions and city-regions are neither static territorial entities nor isolated geographical areas inside *plurinational*-states (Harrison 2017; Passi et al. 2017). Nation-states — which are responsible for regions and city-regions, whether actively or passively, voluntarily or involuntarily, sceptically or acceptingly, alone or with others — end up playing the game of interdependence and entering into agreements on common goods with them (Innerarity 2016). Therefore, in this era of politics beyond nation-state borders, despite intimate relations between nation-states and regions/city-regions (Calzada 2015), the hegemonic idea that regions/city-regions are predominantly just sub-national entities nestled within singular nation-states (e.g. Agnew 2015, p.120) has been superseded by growing claims for self-determination and independence in some small stateless city-regional nations such as Scotland, Catalonia (Colomb et al. 2014) and the Basque Country (Calzada et al. 2015) (See Table 1). Some argue that this change towards devolution in certain nation-states is caused by a new political equilibrium regarding regional identity confrontations in an evolutionary step of political re-scaling (Keating 2014; Khanna 2016).

Two main intertwined explanations can be presented. Firstly, a new political regionalism is emerging characterised by devolution (Goodwin et al. 2014; Khanna 2016) and self-determination claims (Guibernau 2013), which is expressed and embodied via geodemocratic practices such as the ‘right to decide’ (Barceló et al. 2015; Cagiao y Conde et al. 2016). Secondly, driving these changes could stem from ‘metropolitanisation’ (Sellers et al. 2013) insofar as these small stateless nations are advocating a new socially progressive political agenda around ‘civic nationalism’ appealing to universal values (notably freedom and equality), and in contrast to ‘ethnic nationalism’ which is seen to be zero-sum, aggressive and draws on race or history to

set the nation apart. Thus, this chapter suggests that an increasing metropolitan drive can be connected to the willingness for a bottom-up democratic experimentation towards the ‘right to decide’.

To set this in context it is important to, first, understand how the Westphalian interstate system made up of sovereign territorial nation-states is being re-scaled, in the aforementioned cases, by a ‘civic nationalism’. This is particularly relevant in a European context increasingly characterised by multilevel governance (e.g. Jones 2016, p. 3; Alcantara et al. 2016; Benson 2015) and a polymorphic political geographic recognition of city-regions becoming increasingly important ‘sub-national’, ‘third’ or ‘meso’-level political actors. More specifically, as we will observe later, this chapter reinforces the ‘Europe of regions’ thesis (see Keating 2014) by adding two new dimensions: first, metropolitanisation as the geoeconomic (Harrison 2012) and geopolitical (Guibernau 2013; Requejo 2015; Moisiu 2013) basis for emergent small stateless city-regional nations; and, second, the ‘right to decide’ as the geodemocratic basis for small stateless city-regional nations.

In the 1990s, many hyper-globalist scholars forecast the imminent demise of national state power because of the purportedly borderless, politically uncontrollable forces of global economic integration (Ohmae 1995). In contrast, a growing literature on state-rescaling provided a strong counterargument: namely, that national states are being qualitatively transformed – not eroded or dismantled – under contemporary capitalist conditions (Brenner 2004). In a longer historical perspective, Keating (2014) argues for the re-scaling of nation-states as the politicization of regional space, which in some cases coincides with strong historical identities and national diversity, such as in the cases selected for this chapter (Scotland, Catalonia and the Basque Country). Connecting these together, Goodwin et al. (2014, p. 64) examine the devolved structures

and strategies of economic development that have been put in place across the UK in an attempt to increase global economic competitiveness while tackling entrenched social inequalities, recognising cultural and identity politics, and enabling piecemeal democratic rights.

It seems remarkable that the current recentralisation vs. devolution debate (for an overview see Calzada 2016) in each nation-state implies a different starting point from the perspective of political regionalism. This perspective requires including the demands of some small stateless city-regional nations that claim to hold plebiscitarian referenda on full devolution – understood as secession – and to be included *automatically* as member states in the EU. In this regard, and contrary to general perception, according to Muro et al. (2016), the prospects of EU membership have had only a limited effect on support for the creation of a sovereign state. Moreover, their study concludes that the impact was strongly mediated by the participants' previous degree of nationalism and their attitudes with respect to the EU. This observation provokes reflection on the potential dysfunctionalities in the way *communication* and *negotiation* are implemented between small stateless city-regional nations and their respective nation-states (see the case of Catalonia as an example at Forcadell 2017).

In the year 2014, two pluri-national states, the United Kingdom and Spain, faced debates about re-scaling their nation-states and similar turning points in their relationships with some of their city-regional small nations: albeit in different ways. While the United Kingdom (UK) witnessed a Scottish Independence referendum in September 2014, agreed upon by the then Prime Minister of the UK, David Cameron, and the former Scottish First Minister, Alex Salmond, Spain's central government upheld the territorial unity of the Spanish nation-state and refused any expression of self-determination as demanded by a considerable population in Catalonia (Crameri

2015; Guibernau 2013). A further important difference is the political landscape in the Basque Country over the past 40 years has been dominated by attempts to overcome political violence. At present, a hopeful peace process is being fuelled by civic society and avoiding confrontational inertia between ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna or Basque Country and Freedom: the armed Basque nationalist and separatist organization) and the Spanish state. To this end, there is some progress being made, or at least an interest in leveraging self-government and implementing the ‘right to decide’ in the Basque country (Barceló et al. 2015; Calzada et al. 2015).

Nevertheless, the Scotland, Catalonia and the Basque Country cases could be depicted in different ways. This is the point of the departure for this chapter, which aims to address the rapidly changing balance between “small nations” (Kay 2009) and their referential pluri-national states. This chapter outlines the political history of each small nation and the status and achievements of political negotiation with their pluri-national states. This is important because it demarcates power relationships and establishes the preconditions for the future negotiations of the power devolution between the regional and state levels.

Pervasive City-Regional Metropolitanisation: Geoeconomics, Geopolitics and Geodemocratics

Brexit and the soon-to-be end of the UK’s continued membership of the EU has triggered a much wider debate about the organisation and legitimisation of nation-state power, both institutionally and territorially. After the plebiscites on Scottish independence (Calzada 2014), this debate includes the growing push for regional devolution within existing nation-states in Europe (Keating 2017).

However, the established and simplistic state-centric vision for the research of city-regions, focused on geo-economic processes, no longer suffices (see Harrison et al. 2014, 2015; Jonas et al. 2016; Moisio et al. this volume). Instead, geo-political and geo-democratic dynamics must be included to articulate and enrich a systematic analysis of devolution that goes beyond a focus on re-territorialising an existing nation-state to match it to relationally defined diversifying (regional) ideas of nationality, identity, representation and devolutionary ambitions as new geopolitical global ‘connectographies’ (Khanna 2016).

While the world is continuously urbanising, it has also rapidly metropolitanised. At present, complex processes of city-regional metropolitanisation (Sellers et al. 2013; Clark et al. 2016) are altering the nature of the relationship between city-regional small nations, which are pushing ahead in pursuing greater devolution deals, and their respective nation-states, which are *obsessed* with maintaining territorial unity (Ruiz et al. 2003). Metropolitanisation stands out, as this distinction between a more visible, articulate and dominant ‘metropolitan class’ and those in the more peripheral, less articulated, non-metropolitan areas, has developed into a formidable struggle for influence on national politics and policies. This conflict is evident not only in the recent Brexit plebiscite in the UK (especially in Scotland and Northern Ireland), but also in Spain, where the Catalan regional election of 2015 was framed as a proxy for an independence referendum (Generalitat de Catalunya 2014) and resulted in the appointment of a new mayor in Barcelona, Ada Colau, who is not in favour of independence but advocates the ‘right to decide’. Thus, pro-referendum does not mean pro-independence; the ‘right to decide’ resonates as a democratic, rather than a merely nationalistic, practice.

As such, metropolitanisation may show that identities and related political agendas are no longer expressed in territorially homogeneous units circumscribed by clearly demarcated boundaries or borders. Instead, identities develop a more explicit metropolitan versus non-metropolitan dichotomy (Brenner 2003; Sellers et al. 2013), with clear implications for defining, articulating and claiming the ‘right to decide’ regardless of the possible outcomes of an independence referendum (Barceló et al. 2015). Another common metropolitan fact in Glasgow (Pattie et al. 2016), Barcelona (Martí et al. 2016) and Bilbao (Calzada 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017) refers to citizens’ political behaviour regarding devolution and their position in favour of the ‘right to decide’.

In the UK, although Scotland voted in the end to remain part of the UK, the independence referendum and the broad political discussions within and outside the Scottish Parliament have encouraged calls for further re-organisation of the UK state (Keating et al. 2014): through extension of powers to the ‘national territories’ - Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – and new regional representation for England to disentangle the English and joint parliamentary representations and politics. In the case of Spain, the way out of the territorial crisis that threatens the integrity of the nation-state itself is even less clear (Moreno 2015). Thus, the inability or unwillingness of the Spanish political class to accommodate these desires for greater self-determination has resulted in an increasingly confrontational and centrifugal dynamic that undermines the very state that is to be protected in its *status quo* (Martí et al. 2016; Requejo 2015; Serrano 2013).

As such, Moreno (2015) argues that interdependence in the old continent goes beyond internal boundary building and the establishment of self-centred compartments of governance, as occurred with the old Westphalian nation-states. Catalonians, like

Scots and Basques, have reiterated their support for further Europeanisation, a process that many aim to make congruent with territorial subsidiarity and home rule. That the three metropolitan-civic nationalisms rooted in the city-regional small nations embrace and try to preserve the European social model is opposite the position of the pro-Brexit ‘ethnic nationalism’ (Breuilly 2016). This demonstrates the connection between devolution claims, metropolitan inclusiveness as a social value and a politically and socially progressive agenda, as shown in the political programmes of the main parties (Gillespie 2016; Sage 2014).

Likewise, these three cases underpin the debate about multilevel governance, the changing nature of the nation-state in the EU, and the relative power of central state governments. This theme is often presented as a debate about whether the nation-state’s political authority and capacity to act are being eroded ‘from below’ by the demands of territorially based city-regional groups, and ‘from above’ by the logic of economic and political integration among European nation-states. However, we can also observe in the three cases how nation-states are eroding their ‘particular’ sovereignty by disempowering their endogenous capacity for democracy and implementation of multilevel governance as follows: a) In post-Brexit Scotland, diminishing the ‘right to decide’ to remain part of the EU or to be present in the negotiations; b) In Catalonia, prosecuting the president of the Catalan parliament for allowing debate on a potential referendum (Cramer 2015); c) In the Basque Country, the continual attacks of autonomy’s *concierto económico* economic agreement with Spain as the contemporary political and symbolic taxation devolution formulae used as the principal asset of the Basque self-government (Bourne 2008; Uriarte 2015).

In parallel, metropolitan governance has been found to re-scale nation-states (Sellers et al. 2013) by evolving from the initial territorial competitiveness agenda (geo-

economic argument; Harrison 2012), moving towards articulating quests of self-determination (geo-political argument; Moisio et al. 2013) and reaching the ‘right to decide’ on their own futures (geo-democratic argument; Harvey 2008; Crameri 2015). As a consequence, three inter-related dimensions of pervasive city-regional metropolitanisation affecting political regionalism may be identified:

- 1) The *geo-economic argument* refers to new forms of city-suburban cooperation, regional coordination, region-wide spatial planning and metropolitan institutional organisation promoted in western European city-regions (Brenner 2003; Harrison et al. 2015). Growing tensions between nation-states and ‘their’ city-regions have resulted in either political rescaling via pervasive devolution (e.g. Khanna 2016, p. 63) or resistance to such centrifugal pressures. The financial crisis of 2008 has called into question the suitability of the ‘one-size-fits-all’ orchestration of state territoriality (Harrison 2015) through hierarchical, top-down, asymmetric relationships between the centre and subordinated, peripheral spaces (Brenner 2003). Instead, Khanna (e.g. 2016, p. 75) argues that “the more peripheral areas witness – but don’t partake in – the success of the centre, the more they will push to seize control of their own affairs”. However, does this mean political dissolution of nation-states *per se* (Stanic 2016)? The increasing visibility and dominant economic position of the main cities vis-à-vis the state (Herrschel et al. 2016) have yielded headlines about ‘cities going independent’, such as the provocatively titled ‘Devo Met’ (The Economist 2014). To some, particularly in conventional ‘realist’ International Relations debates, this is heresy; states are fixed and whole geographic entities. The growing focus on the economic dimension of statehood (geo-economic

argument) and its territorial and institutional manifestation, however, questions the validity of such familiar assumptions as overly simplistic.

- 2) This leads to the second argument, the *geo-political argument*, which seeks to capture the continuing struggle within nation-states around new emerging centres of political identity and agency — whether they are metropolitan or, indeed, based on small nations. For city-regions, this has provoked both a more explicit and conscious sense of *belonging* and an update of the propagated ‘right to the city’ as ‘individual liberty to access urban resources’ (e.g. Harvey 2008, p. 23). This builds the third argument: geodemocratics.
- 3) As globalisation has added impetus to questions about the role and purpose of borders and territorialities of identities and competitiveness, presumed contiguous state territories have become increasingly brittle. State territorial cohesiveness and continuity are no longer a given. This opens the way to new *geodemocratics*. Democratic experiments such as direct democracy and plebiscites exercise the ‘right to decide’. Thus, just as urbanisation played a crucial role in the absorption of capital surpluses (Harvey 2008), currently, metropolitanisation favours further devolution towards governing self-responsibly at different scales and within different boundaries than the established ‘nation-states’, whether for cities themselves or for city-regions or regions with strong notions of identity or ‘self-ness’. New territorialities in democratic representations seem to be a matter of course.

These three inter-related dimensions of pervasive city-regional metropolitanisation affect political regionalism in terms of going beyond established notions of the region as a ‘natural’ subdivision of the state by pointing to claims by cities for self-rule, as they are deemed to no longer require their national capitals and

states to filter their (mainly economic) relations with the world (Herrschel et al. 2017; Khanna 2016; Barber 2013). Discussions about the metropolitanisation of the multi-level governance in Europe during the 1990s (Benson 2015) thus should extend to cities and city-regions as distinct entities in an ‘age of devolution’ (Calzada 2016), an age that establishes a new geopolitical relationship with the respective nation-state, which will entail new ways to agree and implement geodemocratic experiments connected to the original meaning of the right to the city.

This resulting ‘fused’ ‘civic nationalism’ with the city as its centre may suggest that strategic nationalist ambitions in small stateless city-regional nations could, in essence, be considered an updated and expanded version of a metropolitan-based ‘right to the city’, as Lefebvre coined the term (see Purcell 2003). Are the two ‘rights’ comparable and, based on their sub-national scale and from a conventional international relations perspective, possibly mutually subordinate to established nation-states? According to Harvey (e.g. 2008, p. 40), ‘Lefebvre was right to insist that the revolution has to be urban, in the broadest sense of that term’. Is the ‘right to decide’ a potential ‘democratic’ extension of the ‘right to the city’?

From the Right to the City to the Right to Decide: Political regional agenda in Scotland, Catalonia and the Basque Country

To capture how geodemocratics is taking place differently based on how each small stateless city-regional nation is setting its political regional agenda driven by devolution, this chapter compares three cases as follows in the table:

Small Stateless City-Regional Nations	Basque Country	Scotland	Catalonia
(Pluri)Nation(al)-States	SP & FR	UK	SP
Network of cities and their hinterlands/outlying ares	Bilbao San Sebastian Vitoria Pamplona Bayonne	Glasgow Edinburgh Inverness Aberdeen Dundee	Barcelona Tarragona Girona Lleida
Devolution dimensions	Fiscal, Policy and Political devolution	Policy and Political devolution	Political devolution
Devolution strategies	Fixed by institutions	Fuelled by the Government	Driven by civic society
Devolution deal	Economic Agreement (<i>Concierto Económico</i>)	After the Independence Referendum in 2014, Scotland Act 2016	In 2010, the Spanish Constitutional Court invalidated the democratically achieved 2006 Statute of Autonomy
Right to Decide implementation	Unilateral or Bilateral Consultation/ Referendum agreed by the Spanish Government and Basque autonomy potentially in 2017 or beyond.	After Brexit vote, potential 2 nd Referendum of Independence (presumably) between autumn 2018 and spring 2019.	Since 2015, several mechanisms used for the referendum seem to be constitutionally illegal: Consultation in 2014 and Plebiscitarian Elections in 2015. The independence referendum has been announced by the President of Catalonia to be held in 2017.
Political innovation processes	Post-violence politics	Rationalised Dialectic	Antagonistic Dialectic

Table 1: Political regional agenda in Scotland, Catalonia and the Basque Country

Instead of providing a comprehensive taxonomy of city-regions (Calzada 2015), in this chapter, the term ‘small, stateless city-regional nations,’ as shown in Table 1, refers to the Basque Country, Scotland, and Catalonia. They are defined as politically-entrepreneurial, socio-territorial entities nurtured by blending two dimensions. First, the urban dimension that is characterized through the interaction of their network of cities and their hinterlands in a particular regional context in pursuing ‘internationality’. And

secondly, the political dimension that is fuelled by community-driven, diverse, and plural metropolitan identity—clearly an opposition to an inward-looking, homogeneous, ethnopolitical view. This heterogeneous metropolitan identity articulates a strategic socially-progressive policy vision through devolution, agreed or not, in reference to its nation-state. Regardless the particular pathway, hindrances and, last political achievements; although by always emphasizing as the ultimate goal, democratic experimental and entrepreneurial activist practices based on inclusive social values.

Much of the question of self-determination, or the ‘right to secede’, seems closely linked to economic opportunity — actual and/or perceived (e.g. Khanna 2016, p. 68; Guibernau 2013). There is an evaluation of ‘costs’ and ‘benefits’ and a desire to self-manage and use such perceived opportunities to one’s own advantage (Sage 2014): ‘can we afford full independence economically’ and ‘which way are we better off — independently or as part of the UK or Spain?’ These questions produce very different responses from the political regionalism perspective, as shown in Table 1.

In the case of the Basque Country, after suffering from the lack of peace caused by a spiral of political violence between the organisation ETA and the Spanish state, there is evidence that this era is being left behind. After the ceasefire announced by the organisation ETA in 2011, political parties have been pursuing a normalised context in which they can express projects (independence included) without the threat of political unrest and violence. There is an intensive and committed effort from institutions and civic society to cure wounds. In this context, devolution claims may not be radicalised insofar as the self-government policy driven by the Economic Agreement (*Concierto Económico*; Uriarte 2015) shows wide support from Basque society as a source of the social and economic well-being of the last 30 years. Self-government, understood as total tax policy devolution and some capacity to act with policy and political devolution,

is legitimised both in the Basque Autonomous Community and the Statutory Community of Navarra, which are the only two regions in Spain with such unique historic ‘privilege’ (for those Spanish nationalists/unionists against it) or ‘responsibility’ (mainly the entire Basque Society, according to surveys; Ruiz et al. 2003). A key role has been played by Bilbao’s transformation, in just a few decades since the late 1980s/early 1990s, from being the city of iron symbolised by large, polluting steel furnaces into an international place of culture and urbanity characterised by the iconic and world-renowned Guggenheim Museum opened in 1997.

Scotland is recognised as a constituent nation of the United Kingdom, unlike the Basque Country and Catalonia, which are named simply as ‘nationalities’ in the Spanish Constitution. This issue of ‘nation’ versus ‘nationality’ reinforces the ‘indivisibility unity of the Spanish nation’ and is the principal source of conflict in the case of Catalonia with Spain. Scottish autonomy is new and was conferred in a referendum in 1979. It was established by the Scotland Act passed by the New Labour government in 1998, which led to the election of the first Scottish Parliament in May 1999 and the formation of a new Scottish devolved government in charge of a wide-ranging set of policy fields, including healthcare, education and energy. Thus, Scotland has been gaining political and policy devolution fuelled solely by the new Scottish Government (2013). This is the same government that held the independence referendum in 2014 and obtained votes from 56 out of 59 MPs from Scotland in the 2015 UK General Elections. The Scottish public has greater levels of trust in Holyrood than in Westminster and, we could argue, in the SNP than in the Labour Party (at least clearly in Glasgow), whose sentiments go beyond the claim for further fiscal devolution. Glasgow has gained a metropolitan and an international visibility that goes along with a sharper political profile and a distinct democratic standing (Clark et al. 2016). In both referenda for

independence and EU membership, Glasgow set the main trend. To summarise, even though independentists were defeated by the small margin of 45% vs. 55%, the rational way in which the independence debate was run showed constructive pros and cons which were not seen in Catalonia. However, after the Brexit vote, in the age of devolution, there is a question of how to respect the people of Scotland's vote to remain part of the EU.

Finally, in Catalonia, the 27 September 2015 Catalan regional election was framed as a proxy for an independence referendum by the pro-independence parties (Martí et al. 2016). Since then, the new government has explicitly expressed the goal of holding a referendum in 2017. The controversial turning point occurred in 2006, when a new Statute of Autonomy was approved by the Catalan Parliament but was immediately banned by the Spanish Constitutional Court. This event led to massive demonstrations in Catalonia calling for the 'right to decide' their own future as a 'nation'. This phenomenon has been studied by scholars from diverse ideologies who advocate various solutions to the territorial tension, either from the federalist or secessionist side of the debate (Cagiao y Conde et al. 2016; Barceló et al. 2015; Requejo 2015; Moreno 2015; Guibernau 2013). The hegemonic Catalan feeling that used to be driven by pragmatism has turned secessionist because of lack of faith in a federal agreement given the re-centralist, defensive, uncommunicative strategy of the Spanish government (Serrano 2013). The 'right to decide' thus became the motto (Calzada 2014).

Since then, the goals in Catalonia have been to reinforce the majority of votes in parliament and to design an operative plan to 'disconnect' from Spain after the referendum in 2017, which has recently provoked the prosecution of the President of the Catalan parliament, Ms Forcadell (2017). In this set of tumultuous events, Barcelona plays a unique pivotal role insofar as the newly elected activist mayor, Ada Colau,

representing the new radical left party, 'Barcelona In Common', has revitalised her municipal powers by embracing global initiatives of cities exactly in the way Barber (2013), Corijn (2009) and Sassen (2002), among many authors, suggest. As such, Colau shows an ambivalent 'metropolitan'-based strategy regarding the tension between Catalonia as a small stateless nation and Spain as a nation-state with a re-centralist approach: although Colau does not favour secession as influenced by municipally based federal political principles, she does support a referendum and the application of the 'right to decide' not only as the representative of the internationalised capital city of the city-region, Barcelona, but also as a relevant part of Catalonia, the small stateless city-regional nation. In fact, in 1998, as a sign of its growing empowerment, Barcelona approved the Municipal Charter, which provided the framework for devolution of institutional powers in urban planning, infrastructure, education, social services and culture and offered greater financial resources to cover those responsibilities. Thus, as Serrano (2013, p. 541) argues, opposition by the Spanish central government to delivering greater fiscal powers to Catalonia as a region has effectively been bypassed. As in its metropolitan form, the scenario of independence has gained 'realness' and more political acceptability.

Final Remarks: "Europeanizing" Political Regionalism in the Age of Devolution?

In this chapter, a comparative description of three small stateless city-regional nation cases has been presented to better understand how metropolitanisation and the 'right to decide' are setting up the devolution-driven political regional agenda in Europe. As such, in the context of eventful years for secessionist movements both in the UK and Spain since 2014, we can conclude that metropolitan areas and major cities such as Glasgow, Barcelona and Bilbao as urban centres are strongly fuelling the democratic

debate between the community-based city-regions and their respective nation-states. Furthermore, from the political regionalism perspective, geoeconomic arguments claiming devolving powers are important, but in the event of being allowed the ability to hold a referendum by nation-states, however likely or unlikely, geo-political and geo-democratic manifestations count even more.

Regarding the European political regional dimension, authors such as Bourne (2014), Muro et al. (2016) and Moreno (2015) have investigated the role of the future EU membership of these three cases' potential new states in debates about the advantages and disadvantages of devolution, secession or even independence. However, paradoxically, the EU's structure may stimulate support for an independent state while discouraging the act of secession. In fact, insofar as the EU could provide a complex web of opportunities and constraints for approximately 20 significant pro- and anti-independence or devolution movements, it is also likely to remain implicated in secession processes, according to Bourne (e.g. 2014, p. 95). These arguments can be considered arguments about "Europeanization" or the ways in which European integration affects politics, policies and institutions within European nation-states and small stateless city-regional nations.

In the following table, an analysis of the potential EU positions regarding various political regionalist devolution strategies is presented:

<i>“Europeanizing” Political Regionalism in the Age of Devolution?</i>		
Impact	How integration affects city-regional power	Source of city-regional power affected
Disempowerment	Bias of the EU’s decision-system against (city-)regions	Legal-constitutional
Empowerment	Supranational institutions are potential allies for regional governments	Relational
	Emergence of multilevel process of interest aggregation where others may depend on city-regions’ resources	Possession of valued resources
	Supranational institutions promote ideas that affect the legitimacy of city-regional actors	Legitimacy
No effect	Domestic processes of interest aggregation are more salient for city-regional influence, and nation-states’ governments can dominate state relations with the EU	Relational

Source: Adapted from Bourne (e.g. 2008, p. 11).

Table 2: “Europeanizing” Political Regionalism in the Age of Devolution?

In the current context, the EU’s regional policy and multi-level governance provide an important *instrumentarium* and a platform for the international outreach of sub-national actors in the pursuit of their own, increasingly more articulate, interests and priorities (Herrschell et al. 2017). This is the case for Scotland, Catalonia and the Basque Country, whose strategic positions within the regional political arena have been empowered by the EU through their active economic sectorial leadership, their influential ‘lobbying’ and networking and their construction of their ‘own’ metropolitan space with a clear European dimension. However, whereas the domestic argument of legitimacy often works to mobilise the support base, the international dimension seems crucial to those who want to join a ‘society of states’ in the EU. In this respect, the current context requires the adoption of an anticipative and active role of the EU.

However, as Connolly argues (e.g. 2013, p. 12), devolution and the ‘right to decide’, currently understood as the right to self-determination or secession in international law, provide little guidance for addressing separatist claims of stateless nations in Europe (Friend 2012) or other parts of the world. Thus, in Europe, devolution claims will increasingly be shaped by the institutions of the EU as part of the ongoing push and pull of having ‘more say’ in the EU, as its current member states and small stateless city-regional nations are fuelled by an increasing metropolitan drive and a bottom-up exercise towards the ‘right to decide’.

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