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Cross Border City-Regions Beyond Nation-States:

Basque & Oresund Comparative Cases

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City-regions (Scott 2001, Tewdwr-Jones 2000, Ward 2007, Harding 2007 and Harrison 2013) are widely recognised as pivotal societal and political-economic formations, key to national and international competitiveness and rebalancing political restructuring processes into nation-states, even changing their dynamics beyond and between them (Ohmae 1995, Keating 2002 and Soja and Brenner 2014).

This paper examines two contrarily complementary EU cross border city-region case studies by applying the 5-System City-Region analytical framework discussed at the RSA 2013 Winter Conference (Calzada, 2013). On the one hand, the case of the Basque Country (OECD, 2013) nationalistic city-region (Calzada, 2011) in between Spain and France nation-states reflects surprisingly low cross border territorial development strategic synergies. On the other hand, in contrast, the case of the Oresund non-nationalistic city-region (OECD, 2013) shows a highly cooperative and fluent cross-border dynamic that started in 2000.

Despite the centrality of city-regions to modern day accounts of economic success (Scott, 2011: 289), critics, including the author this paper, argue that advocates of a new city-regionalism overlook how city-regions are constructed politically (Harrison, 2007: 311; Jonas and Ward, 2007: 2119) even beyond nation-state borders (Keating, 2001: 1). Furthermore, Keating argues that globalization and European integration have encouraged the re-emergence of nationalism within established states, a notion that connects directly with city-regions. This claim has sparked a flurry of research aimed at developing understanding of nationalistic or non-nationalistic city-regionalism to avoid the ecological fallacy to suppose that what is true to some city-regions is true of all city-regions (Morgan, 2013: 1). But what has been achieved of late has been done through an explicit focus on non-nationalistic state-centric led initiatives such as those that have occurred in the UK, Germany and the Netherlands, among others (Harrison, 2010: 17).

Having said that, shedding some light on the distinction between nationalistic and non-nationalistic city-regionalism processes and according to the initial findings of the author's current research, **Benchmarking Future City-Regions** (www.cityregions.org), it can be concluded that whereas some city-regions are highlighting politically driven nationalist devolution strategies (Scotland, Catalonia, the Basque Country and Iceland), others remain steady in implementing economically driven strategies (Oresund, Liverpool/Manchester, Dublin and Portland). Therefore, despite the existence of more than 300 city-regions (Scott, 2001: 1), the author argues that there is not a single model of the city-region as a whole. Moreover, this paper emphasizes that this urban regionalization process is being accelerated due to a wide range of causes: consequences of the global flows of migration and commuters (Oresund), nation-state devolution processes (Scotland, Catalonia, Basque, Liverpool and Manchester), internal democratic regeneration (Iceland), and socio-economic transformation (Dublin and Portland).

Amidst the findings of the aforementioned on-going **Benchmarking Future City-Regions** (www.cityregions.org) research project, the paper focuses only on the two EU cross-border city-regions: one nationalistic, the Basque Country city-region, and the other, non-nationalistic, Oresund city-region, by applying comparatively the 5-System analytical framework to stakeholders that deal with the cross border cooperation and social innovation processes beyond nation-state borders (Martinelli, Moulaert and Novy, 2012: 18).

Hence, some preliminary conclusions: while the **Basque Country city-region** is supposedly driven by a nationalistic city-regional strategy via its POLIS system, in reality the territory presents overlaps and the urban governance model is inefficiently coordinated among the administrative entities, which shows a lack of cross-border synergies. This city-region consists of three administrative entities with cultural, linguistic and social ties that could be converted in a potentially efficient cross border cooperation EU hub. However, due to nation-state centralist visions and a narrow and weak strategic vision of regional policy making, the territorial pattern remains stuck. Further cooperation should be encouraged for entrepreneurial city-regional activities. The CYBER system, which is the relational system, reflects many boundaries to enable a shared and common territorial strategic vision.

In contrast, since 2000, the **Oresund city-region** has developed highly dynamic cross border cooperation via its CYBER system, by setting up a Copenhagen-Malmö-centric spatial hub without being driven by any nationalistic view until now. Insofar as endeavours of cross border cooperation have been based on physical connectivity, Oresund has achieved a non-precedent status when referring to the EU bordering realm. Nevertheless, after the fieldwork research, the author has noticed a decreasing slowdown of the POLIS system cooperation between two nation-states, due to the administrative hindrances caused by low yield and new territorial inequalities (Haselsberger, Walsh, Herrschel, 2014: 4).

However, the paper leaves some pending questions for further research discussion:

Are non-nationalistic cross-border city-regions in a better position than nationalistic ones to reach more fluent cross border cooperation beyond their respective nation-states? Paradoxically, it is not clear yet how relevant it can be for a cross border cooperation to be fuelled by any nationalistic view. Or alternatively, are both cases, Oresund and the Basque Country, two sides of the same coin that are contrarily complementary?