

Old vs recent cross-border cooperation: Portugal–Spain and Norway–Sweden

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The two largest European Peninsulas (Iberian and Scandinavian) are both divided by a long and ancient frontier, which separates four old European nations: Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Norway. In the first case, the unusual stability of the border, which remains almost unchanged for more than 800 years, has contributed to strengthen a long 'back-to-back' existence, during most of this time. In the latter, however, successive changes in the border location, and historical alliances between the Nordic countries, created a more 'face-to-face' type of border and a more solid background for the cross-border cooperation (CBC). Therefore, while the INTERREG-A Community Initiative represented an important starting point for the CBC process in most parts of the Portuguese–Spanish border region (PSBR), it was just another important added value for the CBC in the Swedish–Norwegian border region (SNBR), since this process had already started in 1948, when Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Denmark established the joint Nordic Committee for Economic Cooperation, followed by the formation of the Nordic Council in 1951. With this in mind, this article analyses how such distinct CBC backgrounds contributed to the two different approaches and results obtained from the implementation of the INTERREG-A in both studied border regions.

Key words: cross-border cooperation, INTERREG-A, polycentrism, socioeconomic cohesion

Introduction

In 1990 the European Commission launched a specific initiative, known as INTERREG-A, to dismantle the barriers of the European Union (EU) border regions and to prepare them for the new challenges of increasing European integration. Since then, three generations (1990–1993, 1994–1999 and 2000–2006) of this programme have been completed and a fourth, included in the Territorial Cooperation Cohesion Policy objective (2007–2013), is already on its way.

The Portuguese–Spanish border region (PSBR), known as *Raia Ibérica*, started to receive funds in the first INTERREG-A generation and since then the cross-border cooperation (CBC) process and the barrier effect along the border have changed significantly from an almost non-cooperation standpoint to the recent set-up of three European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation in the northern part of this region. This remarkable change of events had in the INTERREG-A

the main cause, even though the maturity of this programme was only reached in the present INTERREG-A generation.

On the other hand, the Swedish–Norwegian border region (SNBR) INTERREG-A programme only started in 1994 (second generation), but since then it has revealed a high degree of maturity in the management of the CBC process, since special priority was given to the economic growth dimension (creating alternative employment opportunities), and not so much to the reinforcement of the cross-border accessibilities, as was the case with the PSBR.

To provide further comparisons of both analysed border regions, this article focus on the territorial impacts of the INTERREG-A and more precisely on:

- 1 the distribution of the INTERREG-A projects and investment in all its sub-regions
- 2 the INTERREG-A contribution to social-economic cohesion

- 3 the INTERREG-A contribution to territorial articulation of the border area
- 4 the present situation of the CBC process.

The key role of the CBC process to territorial development

The development path supported by EU regional policy has been, since the beginning, linked with the effort to assist Community border regions, under the Structural Funds, in order to overcome the obstacles posed by the presence of borders. Yet, the most important instrument to assist the EU border areas to overcome the problems arising from their relative isolation and to promote the development of networks of cooperation was the INTERREG Community Initiative, launched in 1990.

After almost 20 years and more than 8 billion euros spent to reduce the barrier effect of the border areas, in all its dimensions (institutional, social, cultural, economic, accessibilities, etc.), there are many success stories, especially in the 'old' Member-States, in promoting a genuine process of CBC, which according to a EU Working Paper, can be defined as

cooperation between neighboring administrative authorities adjacent to an internal or external frontier of the European Union. Those authorities are represented by the Association of European Border Regions. They are generally in a geographically unfavorable position, which leads to isolation from the economic and political life of the interior of the country and to administrative and legal handicaps on a daily basis in all spheres. (EC 1996, 5)

Another perspective is given by Markus Perkmann, which states that the CBC in general refers to 'a more or less institutionalized collaboration between contiguous sub-national authorities across national borders' (2003, 156).

Either way, what counts the most is the fact that the INTERREG-A is increasingly recognised as a 'key tool for the application of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) which was adopted in 1999' (ESPON 2006, 56). Indeed, by supporting the material and immaterial territorial connections, this EU initiative is contributing to a more balanced, harmonious and sustainable development of the EU territory, and consequently to achieve economic, social and territorial cohesion in Europe. In sum,

the goal of cooperation in border and cross-border regions is to develop cooperative structures, procedures and instruments that facilitate the removal of obstacles and foster the elimination of divisive factors. The ultimate objective is to transcend borders and reduce their significance to that of mere administrative boundaries. (AEBR 2008, 15)

The CBC process in the PSBR and the SNBR

Historical background

In 1990, when the first INTERREG-A programme aiming to support the PSBR was launched, this area was the longest internal EU border (1234 km; 2.1 million people in the Portuguese territory and about 3.5 million on the Spanish side). At the same time, historical reasons gave rise to a strong degree of isolation, even though both sides of the border share, in general, similar peripheral status and lower levels of income, as a consequence of 'development dynamics in the last decades that did not touch significantly and positively these peripheral areas' (Cavaco 1995, 268).

Additionally, the area located along this long-existing and unchanged EU border, legitimated in 1297 by the Alcañices Treaty, is characterised, in general, by low population densities, 'weak presence of dynamic centers and cities' (Trigal 2005, 5), strong constraints imposed by the juxtaposition of different legal and administrative systems, poor cross-border communications and differences in culture and language.

On the other hand, the SNBR only gained access to INTERREG-A funds with the entry of Sweden into the EU (1995). Yet, by then, the 'Nordic INTERREG programmes have been in the making for decades', since the Nordic Council of Ministers (created in 1971) 'commenced funding Nordic cross-border cooperation initiatives, and during the late 1970s several new cross-border collaboration initiatives emerged' (Nordregio 2007, 89).

In the same vein, constant changes in the Swedish–Norwegian borderline, and the increased transboundary integration derived from the Swedish–Norwegian union (1814–1905) (Lundén 2004, 176), contributed to a high level of CBC intensity. Nevertheless, the SNBR still faces significant challenges in

- 1 improving the territorial articulation (lack of an urban system in many areas)
- 2 reducing the juridical and administrative differences, and
- 3 increasing the population growth in the most remote and rural areas.

Geography and cohesion

Integrated into the two largest European peninsulas, both studied border regions (Figure 1) show some convergences and divergences in several social-economic cohesion domains (Table 1). Indeed, in general terms, one can state that these two border areas represent a significant amount of land area in the European context, and about a quarter of the peninsular territory. Yet, they only account for 11 per cent of the peninsular population.¹ In addition, in broad terms, both border territories fall within the group of demographic handicapped European areas (low

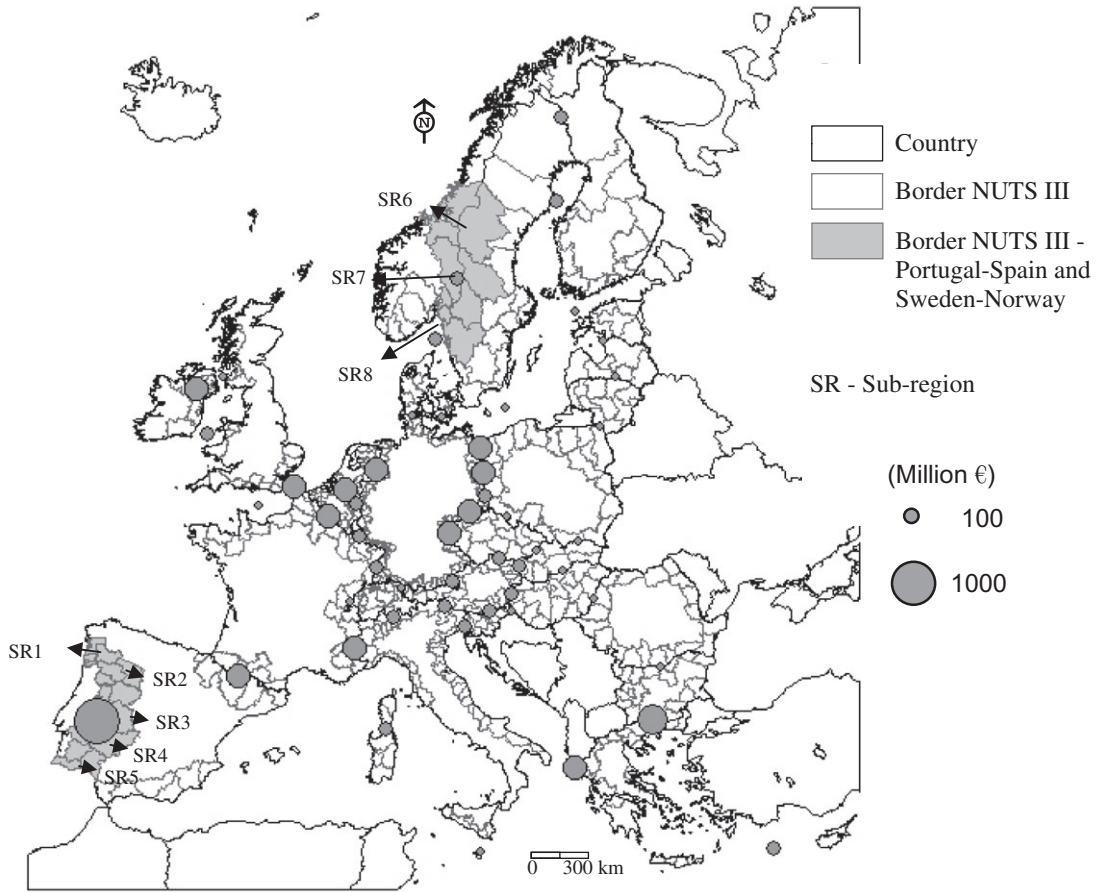


Figure 1 Portugal–Spain and Sweden–Norway border regions and INTERREG III-A programmes allocation resources
Source: Author

population densities and birth rates, and high mortality rates and ageing index).

However, if we compare the socio-economic indicators, the SNBR shows a better situation compared with the PSBR, which can be seen in the much higher income per capita values, in lower unemployment rates, in the lower added value product from the primary sector and in the much higher percentage of population with higher education in the former border region.

Given all these indicators, one can say that the PSBR shows higher signs of vulnerability in socio-economic terms, which in turn can impose greater challenges in order to create new opportunities for employment and growth and also for the sustainability of public services. At the same time, if we frame the SNBR in the Scandinavia Peninsula socio-economic indicators, it's easy to realise that it also faces important challenges to keep up with the economic competitiveness of the rest of the surrounding territory.

INTERREG-A territorial impacts

Projects and investment distribution

A recent study expresses the idea that the CBC 'is a powerful force affecting spatial socio-economic structures of neighbouring regions' (ESPON 2007). Accordingly, the new version of the European Charter for Cross-Border regions states that the CBC

helps to mitigate the disadvantages of these borders, overcome the peripheral status of the border regions in their country, and improve the living conditions of the population. It encompasses all cultural, social, economic and infrastructural spheres of life. (AEBR 2004, 3)

Seen from this standpoint, we think it's important to shed some light on the INTERREG-A investment distribution since 'the CBC-related activities of the EU are primarily financial' (Perkmann 2003, 155). In this regard, it should be noted that the PSBR has been receiving a much higher

Table 1 PSBR and SNBR geographical and cohesion data 2005–2006

Indicator	PSBR	SNBR
<i>Geography</i>		
Area (km ²)	137 015	192 656
Territory (%)	23	27
Counties with more than 50 000 inhabitants	10	22
Dynamic axes	2	1
<i>Demography</i>		
Population	5 460 990	3 558 648
Population (%)	11	26
Population density (people/km ²)	40	32
Population growth (91–05) (93–06)	64 818	150 761
Birth rate (‰)	8.49	10.92
Mortality rate (‰)	12.03	10.49
Ageing index (%)	143.9	98.99
<i>Cohesion</i>		
GNP pc (PPC) (euros/inhabitant)	12 261	31 893
GNP (%)	7.5	5.3
Activity rate (%)	51.45	73.45
Unemployment rate (%) ^a	8.5	5.7
VAP – Primary sector (%)	8.90	2.89
VAP – Secondary sector (%)	26.00	36.64
VAP – Tertiary sector (%)	65.10	58.47
Population with higher education (%)	9.9	18.7

^a Portugal 2001
Source: Data from Statistical Offices of the four countries – author calculations.

volume of financial resources than the SNBR (Figure 1 and Table 2).

Then again, taking a deeper territorial approach into the sub-regions of the two studied border areas, it's also possible to conclude that the ones crossed by socio-economic dynamic axes received more funds from the INTERREG-A, which also reveals a positive correlation between the presence of articulated urban systems and CBC intensity. For instance, it's important to stress that the proximity of large urban agglomerations in the Norwegian part (Oslo and Trondheim) of the SNBR have a strong effect in many obtained results, since the other side of the border (Swedish) is, for the most part, a larger depopulated region.

It also comes as no surprise that the regional associations (representing the civil society layer), and the universities (or other kind of research institutes) show higher levels of participation in the INTERREG-A projects management in the SNBR. This is a clear indicator of a more decentralised type of governance, typical of the Nordic countries (Nordregio 2007, 40). On the other hand, the stronger presence of local (Portugal) and regional (Spain) government structures to manage the INTERREG-A

Table 2 INTERREG I-II-III-A data

Indicator	PSBR	SNBR
Total investment (ERDF) (euros)	2 671 054 531	203 455 974
Total projects	2179	532
Sub-regions		
SR1 (% projects)/ (% investment)	23/23	
SR2 (% projects)/ (% investment)	16/15	
SR3 (% projects)/ (% investment)	17/16	
SR4 (% projects)/ (% investment)	25/26	
SR5 (% projects)/ (% investment)	20/20	
SR6 (% projects)/ (% investment)		36/32
SR7 (% projects)/ (% investment)		29/27
SR8 (% projects)/ (% investment)		35/41
Managing authorities		
LOC (% projects)/ (% investment)	23/21	29/25
PUB (% projects)/ (% investment)	52/67	15/19
REG (% projects)/ (% investment)	20/09	43/42
UNI (% projects)/ (% investment)	05/03	13/14
Barrier effect dimensions		
ACESSI (% projects)/ (% investment)	13/42	05/10
CULSOC (% projects)/ (% investment)	12/07	36/30
ENVHER (% projects)/ (% investment)	36/25	10/12
INSURB (% projects)/ (% investment)	08/05	08/06
ECOTEC (% projects)/ (% investment)	28/21	36/37
STUDY (% projects)/ (% investment)	03/01	05/05

LOC: local authorities; PUB: public institutes; REG: regional associations; UNI: universities; ACESSI: accessibilities; CULSOC: cultural–social; ENVHER: environment–heritage; INSURB: institutional–urban; ECOTEC: economy–technology
Source: author

projects is closely tied to a more state-dependent type of governance, typical of south European countries.

It is equally instructive to examine how a centralised state such as Portugal, without an effective regional level of government, has to rely on the local level (municipal councils) to cooperate with the Spanish autonomous

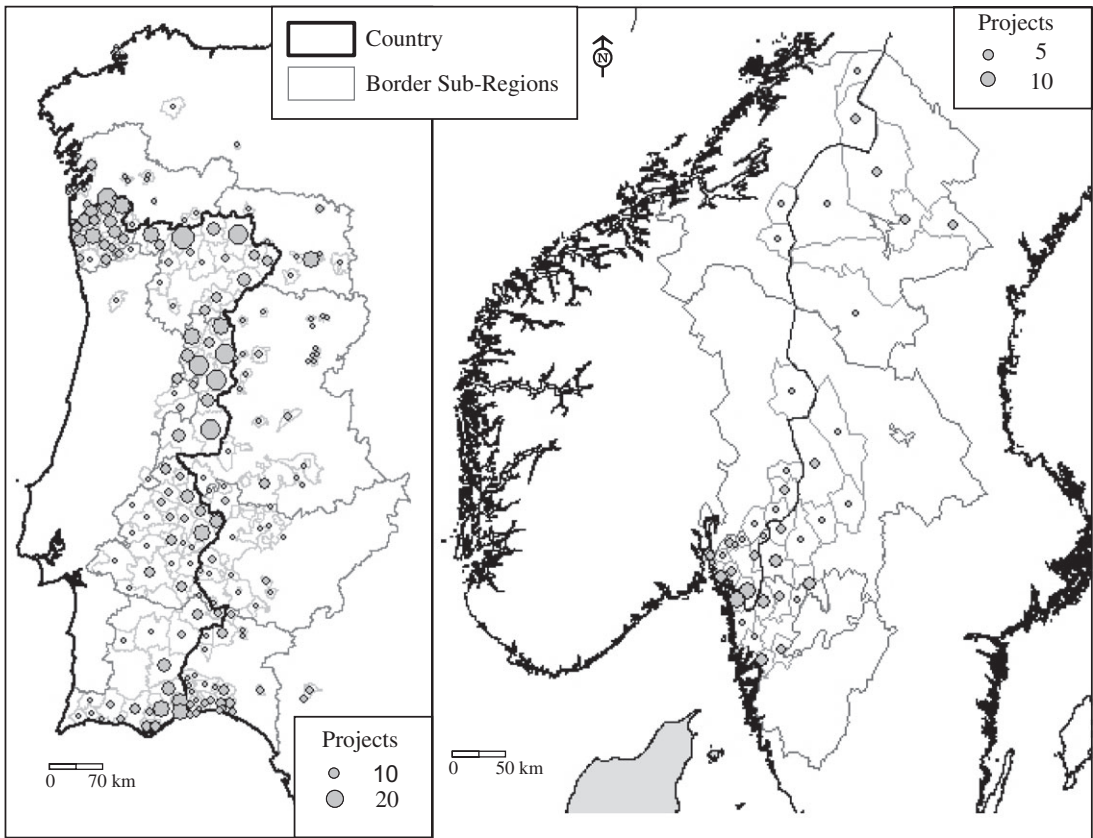


Figure 2 Local authorities participation in INTERREG-A projects in PSBR–SNBR
Source: Author

regional structures, on the other side of the border, which considerably hampers the CBC process in the PSBR. On the other hand, the SNBR reveals a much more balanced CBC between local authorities, which is mainly concentrated in the south part of the border (Figure 2).

Moreover, we also chose to take a closer look at the INTERREG-A contribution to the reduction of the barrier effect

that has been created by historic developments in the last three centuries and has been reinforced by military, administrative and socio-economic policies. This situation caused serious disadvantages for the people and the regional/local and social partners in border regions. (EC 2000, 2)

As such, we used criteria that divide the barrier effect concept into five different dimensions (Medeiros 2009a 2009b) in order to give a concise overview of the main differences observed in the two studied INTERREG-A programmes. In this regard, it is clear, once again, that the CBC process in the SNBR shows higher maturity than in the PSBR, since it focuses its strategy on improving the

economic potential of the border region with the aim of maintaining and creating new jobs (EC 2003), while the PSBR used more than 40 per cent of the INTERREG-A allocation resources for the cross-border road connections and similar infrastructure. The good news is that that picture was completely inverted in the present (INTERREG-A IV) programme. Even so, the first two generations of this programme were very important for creating a good CBC environment and dynamics that consolidated the joint management of the projects in recent years (DGDR 2001).

Another important aspect regarding the maturity of the INTERREG-A programmes is the continuity of its approved projects, in order to maintain their added value to the territory development in the long term. Thus, and after a thorough analysis of the INTERREG-A projects in both programmes, it became clear that project continuity is far stronger in the SNBR, which goes along with the higher maturity of that programme, since only 3.5 per cent of the approved INTERREG-A projects had more than one stage in the PSBR, compared with 11.7 per cent in the SNBR.

Table 3 INTERREG-A projects with higher financial allocation in PSBR and SNBR

INTERREG-A	Project	ERDF (€)
INT I – P	IP1 Algarve: Road	84.828.892
INT I – S	Motorway Badajoz–Portuguese Border	70.556.740
INT II – S	Roads and bridges	60.000.000
INT I – S	Motorway Porriño–Tuy N-550	47.422.220
INT III – PS	Advanced networks: Information and telecommunications	47.418.848
INT III – SN	NABO Train Trondheim–Östersund	7.219.824
INT III – SN	NABO Train Trondheim–Östersund	5.488.982
INT II – SN	Rock carvings	5.427.754
INT III – SN	New job markets	4.595.208
INT II – SN	GIT Bohuslän/Dalsland–Østfold	3.620.619

INT: INTERREG-A; P: Portugal; S: Spain; PS: Portugal–Spain; SN: Sweden–Norway

Source: Author

This maturity is also revealed when we look at the list of projects that received more funding from both INTERREG-A programmes (Table 3). As a matter of fact, this list confirms the priority given by Portuguese–Spanish authorities to improving the cross-border road permeability, while Swedish–Norwegian authorities have a more balanced strategy, as they focus their ‘impact projects’ in several development areas and dimensions: cultural (rock carvings); transport accessibilities (NABO train); institutional (GIT Bohuslän/Dalsland–Østfold); economy and technology.

Socio-economic impacts

We are aware that there are many factors that influence the socio-economic cohesion of the studied border regions. Nevertheless, we built up an aggregated index (with the same methodology of the United Nations Human Development Index), which incorporates data related with the social (proportion of population with university degree; doctors per capita; libraries per capita) and economic (GNP per capita; activity rate; enterprises per capita) dimensions of the concept of socioeconomic cohesion, in order to see if these border regions are catching up rapidly with the surrounding (Peninsulas) territory, in socio-economic terms (Figure 3).

As expected, since the INTERREG-A funds are a drop in the ocean of needs in the mobilisation of the border regions territorial capital, both in PSBR and in SNBR a general socio-economic lagging behind continues its dramatic and persistent path, even though some border NUTS III (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) showed an above average socio-economic performance. However, we think that this performance isn’t necessarily related with the INTERREG-A investments, since there isn’t any positive correlation between the index values obtained for each border NUT III and the respective INTERREG-A investment percentage.

Even so, these results don’t deny or erase the positive effects that the INTERREG-A projects have had in the socio-economic development of the European border areas, based on the Fourth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion conclusions:

despite its limited scale of support on average (EUR 74 million per programme), the programmes tended to have a significant leverage effect (EUR 165 for every EUR 100 invested, EUR 5 of which came from private funds). This covered investment which would most certainly not have materialised without INTERREG. (EC 2007a, 118)

Nevertheless, as Van Houtum (2001) states, the rhetoric of a borderless Europe is still severely misleading. In other words, borders matter in spite of all the INTERREG-A efforts in successfully reducing the barrier effect and enhancing cross-border relations. In fact, the money involved in INTERREG-A would have to increase significantly to change the present picture, since it represents only 1.8 per cent of the 2007–2013 regional policy allocation funds (EC 2007b).

Territorial articulation impacts

Another important pillar of the EU cohesion policy is the territorial dimension, and since one of the main objectives of the European Spatial Development Perspective (EC 1999) is the development of a balanced and polycentric urban system in the European territory, we decided to see how the INTERREG-A has been contributing to a more articulated border territory, in both studied areas, by analysing the two dimensions of the polycentrism concept: the morphologic (number of cities, hierarchy, connectivity, distribution) and the relational (fluxes, networks, cooperation, complementarity).

Not unexpectedly, in the first dimension (morphologic), we could only detect three cross-border axes with higher morphologic polycentric potential (Medeiros 2009a

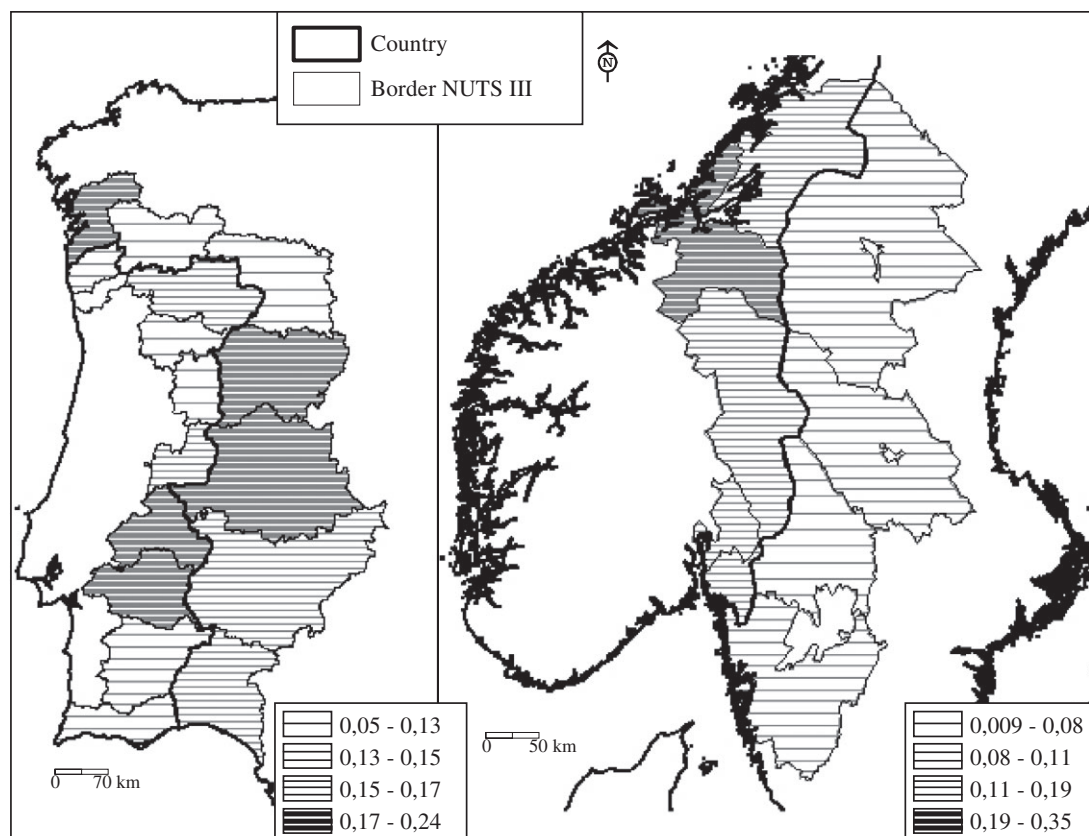


Figure 3 Socioeconomic development index in PSBR (1991–2005) and SNBR (1993–2006)

Source: Author

2009b) in the PSBR and one in the SNBR (Figure 4). This proves that the territorial articulation in both border areas is not very strong in general. Yet, in the former 42 per cent of the total investment coming from the first three INTERREG-A generations was spent in improving this physical dimension of polycentrism (roads, bridges, etc.). On the other hand, in the latter, only 10 per cent of the investment was intended to improve cross-border physical connections. In fact, one can say that the contribution of the INTERREG-A to a more polycentric and articulated territory resulted in the creation and reinforcement of the relational networks along the border areas, and this is a key component towards the achievement of a stronger territorial articulation, in both border areas.

CBC present situation

Long before 1990, the CBC in the two Scandinavian countries was already in progress, and the

guiding principle for Nordic cooperation remains the concept of Nordic value added: co-operation is under-

taken when common actions attain a more positive effect than separate national ones. (Nordregio 2007, 89)

Even so, it is estimated that 71 per cent of projects would not have happened without INTERREG (EC 2007b), and this fact reveals the positive impacts that this Community Initiative has brought to the SNBR. It's also clear that the INTERREG-A started a new beginning in the PSBR CBC panorama, in a growing spiral of cross-border contacts, which are stronger in its most dynamic cross-border axes (Minho–Galicia, Évora–Mérida and Faro–Huelva).

Yet, the time dimension is only one of the parameters that support our proposed CBC model (Medeiros 2009a), in order to make border areas comparable. Indeed, if we take the two studied borders as a whole (without looking at each one of its sub-regions; Figure 5) it's possible to confirm a higher 'degree' of CBC intensity in the SNBR at the present moment. However, it should be noted that recent developments in the PSBR CBC show an increasing willingness to remove the most important barriers that still hamper this process in all its sub-regions (Table 4).

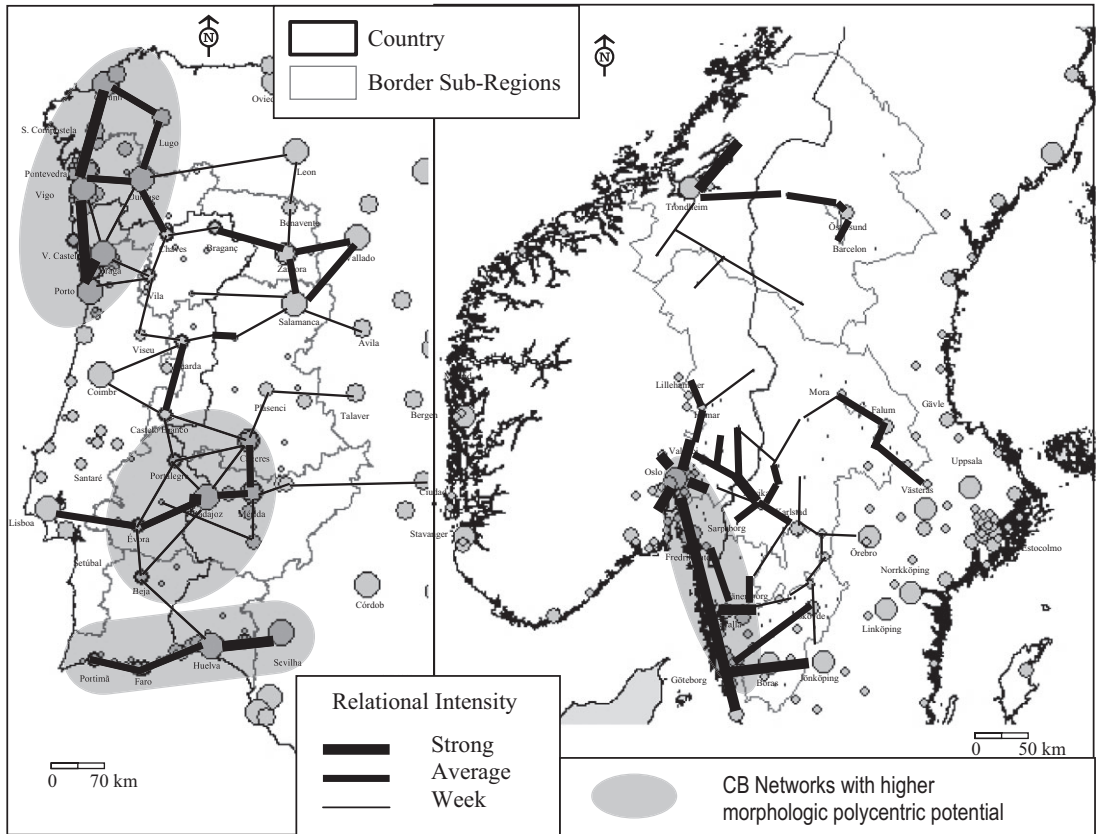


Figure 4 Territorial articulation in PSBR and SNBR (2006)

Source: Author

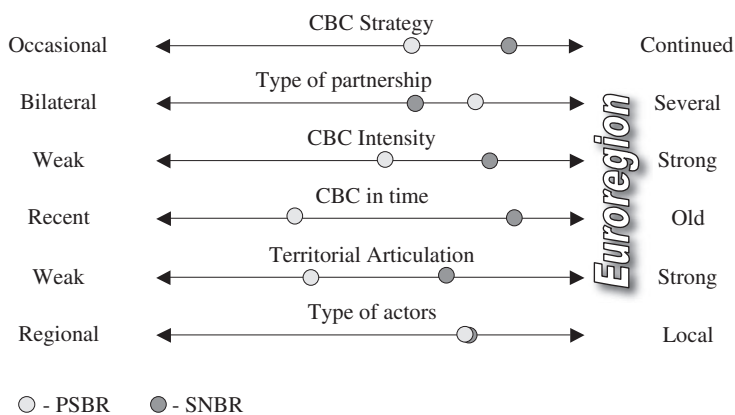


Figure 5 CBC model parameters in PSBR and SNBR (2006)

Sources: Adapted from Medeiros (2009a 2009b)

Table 4 Persisting barriers to the CBC in PSBR and SNBR

Sub-regions	Barriers
SR1	Legal and administrative issues at the level of institution competences. Difficult to find local and regional promoters. Cultural differences. Portuguese administration is very slow.
SR2	Distances between Bragança and Zamora. Lack of economy commerce capacity. Legal and administrative bureaucracies.
SR3	The language. Cultural differences. Weaknesses of regional and economic potential. Absence of joint services. Lack of transport. Lack of opportunities. The accessibilities. Administrative differences.
SR4	The language. Cultural suspicions. Administrative differences. Lack of mutual knowledge. The mentality and attitude towards CBC.
SR5	The language. Administrative asymmetries. Accessibility. Sharing of social infra-structures. Absence of regional entities and money in Portugal. Bureaucratic and administrative procedures. Lack of business cooperation. Institutional problems – different way to see the problems. Fear of losing autonomy.
SR6	Taxes, regulations and customs. Difficulties in installing business in the neighbouring country. Sweden has to follow EU rules. Passage of goods and services. Mental barriers.
SR7	Health. Infrastructures. Norway doesn't belong to the EU. Different legislations and regulations. Transports. Technical and organisational differences. Taxes, labour laws, health insurance, pensions. Mental and informal barriers.
SR8	Customs and administrative issues. Taxes and pensions of cross-border workers. Transport.

Source: Author interviews

A good example of these recent trends in the CBC in the PSBR is the set-up of three European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), in the northern part of the border (1 Norte–Galicia; 2 Duero–Douro; 3 ZASNET), in order to reduce the institutional and legal ‘obstacles and difficulties encountered in managing actions of cross-border, transnational or interregional cooperation within the framework of differing national laws and procedures’ (MOT 2007, 6). Yet, strange as it seems to be, this is an important step that the SNBR didn’t take so far, in spite of the fact that most local and regional actors still consider the taxes, regulations, customs and other legal issues to be the main obstacle to the CBC process in this border area.

Moreover, the Iberian countries have been also showing an intention to improve the process of CBC in other important fields of cooperation, such as health (sharing equipment, e.g. Badajoz Hospital), research (Renewable Energy Investigation Centre, Badajoz and Nanotechnology Investigation Centre, Braga), public transportation (Madrid–Lisboa and Porto–Vigo TGV line) and civil protection (both countries fire corporations can enter 15 kilometres across the other side of the border to extinguish fires without need for permission).

Conclusion

PSBR and SNBR are both for the most part two typical peripheral territories within their respective countries and the core of Europe, with low territorial articulation, and low socio-economic and demographic dynamic. There are however cross-border axes where this is not valid and it comes as no surprise that these areas show better results

in using the INTERREG-A resources (Minho–Galicia, Évora–Mérida, Faro–Huelva and Oslo–Gothenburg) than the rest.

Despite these similarities, there are important differences that separate both INTERREG-A programmes. To begin with, in the PSBR the CBC process is, apart from the Minho–Galicia region (SR1), a very recent process, which has been strongly stimulated by the INTERREG-A funds. In the SNBR this process started long before the implementation of this programme in this region, which explains its higher maturity compared with the PSBR one, since their approved projects don’t focus so much on cross-border road infrastructure and instead mainly seeks to improve competitiveness and reduce regional disparities in economic development and employment.

However, recent developments in the PSBR CBC process have contributed to a gradual change of the initial non-cooperation attitude into an ever-growing intention to cooperate and to establish CBC networks at all governance levels, on both sides of the border. Indeed, the set-up of three EGTC in the northern part of the border area is a good example of a new CBC strategy.

Nevertheless, the CBC intensity level is, in general, still stronger in the SNBR, but the gap has been severely reduced during the last decade, mainly due to the INTERREG-A Community Initiative. However, the received funds weren’t able to narrow the persisting socio-economic gap that these two border regions have with their surrounding (peninsular) territory, but they were crucial in establishing strong foundations for a more poly-centric and balanced spatial development, by improving the physical cross-border connections (morphologic

dimension) and by creating and reinforcing CBC networks, legal entities and contacts (relational dimension), in both studied border areas.

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Note

- 1 Considering only the INTERREG-A Swe-Nor Programme territory, which doesn't match exactly all Dalarna and Västra Götalands NUTS III area.

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