Euro-Meso-Macro: The new regions in Iberian and European space
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Euro-Meso-Macro:

The new regions in Iberian and European space

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Abstract:

The European integration process, which has been supported by European Cohesion Policy since the end of the 1980s, is witnessing the establishment of an increasingly large number of the so-called Euroregions and similar structures, mainly as a result of experiments and projects carried out under the INTERREG community initiative, in all its strands (cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation), in a quest to search better adequate socioeconomic development and multilevel governance solutions.

This article explores the emergence of these new Governance Spaces in Europe and, in particular, in the Portuguese-Spanish border area, and aims to assess their contribution to inject new tailor-made regional/local development strategies and also to provide a conceptual clarification of these spaces, which became more relevant with the advent of the Macro-Regions that have come into being since 2007.

Keywords: Euroregion, Macro-Region, Territorial Cooperation, Territorial Governance, EGTC and INTERREG.

INTRODUCTION

This article sets out to examine the territorial cooperation structures in the European Union (EU) in general, and in the Iberian Peninsula (Portuguese-Spanish border area) in particular, which may be contributing to the establishment of new models of territorial governance, such as the Euroregions and Macro-Regions. These cooperation spaces aim
to establish a shared intervention development strategy, in order to solve common problems in cross-border and transnational spaces. The empirical focus is mainly on the Iberian cross-border spaces, because of the surprisingly short-term shift from a long back-to-back cross-border relationship existence (MEDEIROS, 2010b), into a proliferation of cross-border associations and infra-structures (more than 80 – MEDEIROS, 2010), with special relevance to the recent implementation of three European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) and a similar number of Euroregions.

In this context, particular emphasis will be given to the role of the INTERREG community initiative as the ‘creator’ of these ‘New European Regions’, as corollary of an in-depth analysis of its territorial impacts on the Portuguese-Spanish border, since its first generation (1990-1993), till the present, in a number of research projects conducted by the author over the last seven years (2003-2010) in this area, which implied numerous contacts and interviews with local/regional stakeholders and policy makers. All this work provided additional evidence that this initiative strengthened the foundations for the emergence of structures designed to stimulate the process of cross-border cooperation (Euroregions and Working Communities) which did not exceed 33 in Europe until 1990 (beginning of INTERREG), and now extend beyond 130 entities.

In overall terms, the post-war efforts of some European cross-border local and regional authorities to work together through informal cross-border cooperation arrangements have become more solid at all levels, making most European cross-border regions suitable “terrains for producing new transnational actors and new opportunities for existing actors” (PERKMANN, 1999: 657), thus drawing attention to pioneering forms
of cross-border governance in the European Union (see KRAMSCH and HOOPER, 2006). In this scenario, where local and regional authorities play a major role in the evolution of transfrontier initiatives (CHURCH and REID, 1999: 644), the cross-border structures known as Euroregions intend “to provide the institutional framework within which economic and social actors may come to formal and informal contacts and relations across national borders” (VAN HOUTUM, 1998: 11).

However, the auto-designation of Euroregion by many of these entities is very controversial and is justified, in most cases, by the need to stimulate and accelerate the cross-border cooperation process, and to facilitate the attraction of Community funds. This is also the aim behind the recently created EUROACE (Euroregion Alentejo-Centro-Extremadura) and the EUROAAA (Euroregion Alentejo-Algarve-Andalusia) in order to promote cross-border and inter-regional cooperation. The ultimate goal of these entities, which extend beyond the boundaries that separate one or more European countries, is the establishment of a common development strategy with permanent and strengthened capacity, with important participation and cooperation of several actors from local to regional levels, and in particular the civil society. In parallel, it is intended that the various types of cross-border flows are strong and, at the same time, help structure the territory. In addition, the stimulation of the joint use of social/cultural facilities and the economic/technological cooperation base should be pursued.

At another level, this article aims to give a concise overview of the newly created European Macro-Regions in order to clarify the main differences between them and the Euroregions, since some transnational European spaces involving three or four NUTS II are already calling themselves Macro-Regions (ex: Sudoeste Europeu – North of
Portugal, Galicia and Castilla y León), which does not seem very appropriate. In this regard, special attention should be given to the Baltic Sea region, which marks a new beginning for the territorial cooperation policy of the European Union, since it is the first truly integrated approach adopted by the Member States and other neighbouring countries (11 in total: Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Finland, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Belarus, Lithuania, Norway and Russian Federation), that face the same set of problems, with the intention of achieving a more effective coordination of financial resources and reinforcing the main cooperation initiatives. Needless to say that the implementation of this initiative is much connected to the transnational dimension of the INTERREG community initiative, since one of its programmes covers precisely the Baltic Sea region. Following a similar idea, the Danube Macro-Region, which involves 14 countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Bosnia, Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine) drew up a joint regional development strategy, inspired by the need for shared responsibility in environmental preservation and sustainable development of all the region surrounding the Danube river.

Finally, we will elaborate a critical analysis and reflection on the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation legal instrument, in the Iberian Peninsula, which seeks to overcome the legal obstacles to cross-border cooperation, and to improve the multilevel governance process, by involving local, regional and national authorities in a single cooperative structure, in order to facilitate and consolidate the process of territorial cooperation in Europe.
We must say, however, that in some European countries, the idea behind the formation of an EGTC is still not yet very well welcomed yet. Interestingly, the first Iberian EGTC (North-Galicia) was the third to be established in Europe, even taking into account the long back to back cross-border cooperation history between the two Iberian States, at least until the late 1980s. In line with this experience, two other similar structures were established along the Northwest of the Iberian Peninsula (Duero-Douro and Zasnet), and some others are thought to begin its work in the border area between Extremadura and Alentejo and Algarve-Andalusia, in the nearby future, which makes the entire Iberian border region a case study at European level in this issue.

THE EMERGENCE OF ‘NEW REGIONS’ IN EUROPE

In a sense, the title of this article suggests the idea of an emergence of ‘new regions’ in the European space, which justifies the author’s attempt to clarify some key concepts associated with this process: (Region, Europeanization, Globalisation, Euro-Regionalisation), in a necessarily brief way.

Considering a ‘region’ as an internally consistent area in the Earth surface regarding aspects of physical and human geography, making it a significant unit which can be distinguished from the surrounding area (GOODALL, 1987), it would make some sense that these new European transnational spaces showed some uniformity in certain domains (economic, cultural), in spite of being purely political constructs. Yet, as Vidal de la Blache (1911) noted many decades ago, the regional divisions depend on many factors. In this regard, DUBOIS (2009: 17) stresses that, “under current usage the term ‘region’ can refer to anything from an administrative unit to a functional area”.

In equal measure, the idea that the regions are immutable can be called into question, taking into account the significant changes in the organization and dynamics of territories resulting, for example, from the process of globalization, which increases the development of the growing interconnections between several territorial units in the world. As a consequence, ancient forms of space appropriation are changed, as the distances are annihilated and the time is shortened in handling communications and resources, products and people, which translates into major transformations in national social spaces and significant changes in the role of the State and its attributes of independence, sovereignty and security, as well as on its role and institutions (ORTEGA and LÓPEZ, 1993).

In Europe, and in particular in the European Union, these changes in spatial and political organization have also been induced to accelerate the process of European integration, as a result of the adoption of European Union guidelines and policies (ex: Cohesion Policy), in particular after the 'Delors Commission' decision to stimulate and implement the 'single market' idea, in 1985, thus contributing greatly to the reduction of barriers between Member States. Since then, the implementation of European policies to enhance the degree of territorial integration (economic, social, environmental) of the community space continues its progress, with implications in the policies of several Member States, which many call the process of Europeanization, in its simplest sense (MAGONE, 2006 and VINK, 2002), and can be viewed as a process of redistribution of power resources between actors in the domestic arena resulting from EU membership (KOHLER-KOCH, 1996).
The question that arises now is to know how these (Europeanization and Globalization) and other on-going processes may contribute to the genesis of most of these new cooperation spaces in the European area, taken into account that, in a purely administrative viewpoint, a region usually refers to a territorial unit which exists between local and national levels (DUNKERLEY et al., 2002), and it constitutes the heart of any social interaction (ALBET I MAS, 1993), thus contributing to model individual and collective identities (CLAVAL, 1993).

Nevertheless, and given the breadth of this theme, we decided to focus mainly on factors and motivations that led to the creation of so-called Euroregions, Meso-Regions, Macro-Regions and the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation in Europe. We also present a comprehensive picture of their main territorial strategies, viewed either as new processes of ‘institutional’ or ‘rebel’ euro-regionalisation, or understood as a process of transferring powers from the Central State to Transnational European Regions, in order to improve the territorial management and promote regional economic development.

Curiously, Orlando Ribeiro (1987) said that when describing the major regions of a country, climate and structural units are usually the forces behind their delimitation. It is curious to note that, in many cases, these assumptions are still valid today. For instance, it is clear that the two already established European Macro-Regions (Baltic Sea and Danube), were delimited around a European transnational physical geography element of large proportions: the Baltic Sea and the Danube River. However, was this the main reason underlying the establishment of these spaces? After all, the creation of these Macro-Regions is very recent.
In essence, it seems to us that most of the auto-proclaimed Euroregions are essentially 'subsidy-regions', both in the material sense of the term (facilitating access to community funds, including the community initiative INTERREG), and in the political sense (application of the subsidiarity principle). Concerning the latter, João Ferrão (1995), stressed that the subsidiarity and inter-territorial solidarity constitute two key pillars to build a community space and that the territorial communities have gained until recently unsuspected prominence, given that, in general, the restructuring of the Nation-State in most advanced countries has been followed by a rhetoric which favours the decentralisation process.

Although the European political and institutional context is clearly favourable to establishing new European territorial units, the sustainability of some is questionable, especially if they do not establish strong links with the local civil society in implementing their regional development plan. Alongside, the creation of these ‘intermediate governance levels’ should follow the model of an ‘aggregated and sustainable decentralization’. By contrast, if they do not detach themselves from a permanent EU-subsidised paradigm, they will eventually wither, and fit the opposite model of ‘fictitious or misleading decentralization’ (FERRÃO, 1995).

In our view, this New Europe of Euro-Meso-Macro Regions (Fig. 1), where new cross-border and transnational areas with supranational intervention strategies seem to emerge every year like mushrooms, can only make sense if they can provide a more balanced development of the territory and, as Jorge Gaspar (1982) stresses, can contribute to the equitable development of men. This will require that such ‘territorial units’ are indeed
able to intervene in areas that have direct consequences on people’s lives, in order to mobilize them to the regional cause.

FIGURE 1

This intervention capacity requires some degree of autonomy in the regional administration which, according to Guimarães (1980), is normally facilitated by the presence of a ‘functional region’, which is a region with a strong network of relationships and interdependences, translated by the existence of flows between the main regional hubs. However, there is hardly any positive correlation between the establishment of these new territorial units and the location of the main European and Iberian urban centres (Fig. 2), mainly because most of them are located in border areas, which are normally peripheral spaces. Perhaps not entirely surprising is the creation of these more or less complex forms of ‘New Administrative Territorial Hierarchies’, in rural and depopulated areas, with small urban influences, such as the Duero-Douro EGTC, in order to materialize the subsidiarity principle and counteract the negative vicious development cycle. Anyhow, we believe that the sustainability of such experiences depend largely in the collective awareness of the local population/stakeholders, and its capacity to increase the quality of life of its citizens.

FIGURE 2

EUROREGIONS AND EGTC IN EUROPE

The financial support provided essentially by the INTERREG community initiative, to strengthen the process of cross-border cooperation in the EU territory justifies the
largely proliferation of entities (over 70) which call themselves 'Euroregions', perhaps
with a view to follow in the footsteps of the first Euroregion created in 1958, at the
border that separates Germany and Holland (Euregio). Additionally, some 60 entities
known as 'Working Communities', are distributed over several European border regions,
most of the times, with the same strategic objectives of the ‘Euroregions’.

In this largely confusing context, we decided to clearly distinguish what is the entity
which manages the process of cross-border cooperation (the Working Community) and
the 'region' in which it operates, which can be viewed as an ‘Euroregion', if it meets
certain criteria (MEDEIROS, 2011). To put simple, we can say that an Euroregion is a
‘region’ or ‘sub-region’, with an area of less than 200,000 km², which extends beyond
the boundaries that separate one or more European countries and when: (i) it has a
perspective of a common sustainable development strategy, with high levels of active
involvement of local and regional authorities and in particular the civil society, on both
sides of the border. This strategy must be coordinated by a cabinet with institutional
binding capacity (e.g. EGTC); (ii) the barrier effect in all its dimensions is greatly
reduced through intense cross-border flows which contribute to structure the territory
and provide positive socioeconomic effects on both sides of the border; (iii) the sharing
of social and cultural equipment is largely disseminated over the border; (iv) there is a
strong cooperation and networking levels between major research centres and cross-
border business entities.

As stated, we defend the idea that a ‘Euroregion’ must be understood in the
depth/region. That does not mean that the various existing cross-
border cooperation structures known as Euroregions should be regarded in a less
important perspective, since many of them have had a crucial role in bridging border territories in several European countries, and also in applying the principles of subsidiarity and partnership which, according to the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR, 2008), is a fundamental precondition for managing successful programmes of cross-border development.

Accordingly, we believe that the possibility of creating a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (Regulation No. 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006), with the aim to facilitate and promote the process of cross-border, transnational and/or inter-regional cooperation in Europe, could contribute to reducing the administrative and legal trade obstacles between border regions, taking into account that these Groupings have legal personality, within the limits of the powers conferred by the national law. Such possibilities allow, for example, a grouping of bodies from different Member States without need to sign prior international accords ratified by national parliaments (CE, 2007). At the present moment ten of these groupings are already in operation (Fig. 1) and other 25 are in preparation (CR, 2010):

- Amphictyony (Greece, Cyprus, Italy and France)
- EGTC Duero-Douro (Portugal and Spain)
- Eurodistrict Strasbourg-Ortenau has declared its willingness (France and Germany)
- Euroregion Pyrénées-Méditérranée (Spain and France)
- Galicia-North Portugal (Portugal and Spain)
- Ister-Granum (Hungary and Slovakia)
- Karst-bodva EGTC (Hungary and Slovakia)
- Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai (France and Belgium)
• West-Vlaanderen/Flandre-Dunkerque-Côte D’Opale (Belgium and France)

• Zasnet (Portugal and Spain).

THE MESO AND MACRO-REGIONS IN EUROPE

Unlike a Euroregion, which covers a border area between two or more countries, without exceeding, as a general rule, the 200.000 km$^2$, a Macro-Region, as its name suggests, is a region which covers a very wide (transnational) territory. So, based on the available data of two already established European Macro-Regions, we propose the following definition for this type of ‘Governance Units’: a region with over 700.000 km$^2$, involving more than two countries with contiguous territories and a common development strategy in certain socioeconomic domains (ex: environment).

In this line of thinking, we also propose a definition for a similar type of ‘transnational territorial groupings’ (countries and/or regions) with a smaller geographical area, which we will designate as Meso-Regions: a region covering at least two countries (or vast areas of several countries) with contiguous territories, covering more than 200.000 km$^2$ and less than 700.000 km$^2$, with a common development strategy in certain socioeconomic domains.

In these definitions, we essentially use the variable ‘territorial extension’ to differentiate the Meso from the Macro-Regions. However, Petrakos (1996), when discussing the formation of a future Macro-Region in the Balkans, invoked other factors beyond the geographical proximity, like the cultural/historical and other non-economic factors for its establishment. The same author underlines that it only makes sense to go ahead with
this type of supranational entities if regions are able to fully exploit the opportunities
offered by the establishment of a transnational network of contacts.

Even more so, the establishment of Meso and Macro-Regions “challenges the
installation of new modes of governance in order to literally fill the organisational and
institutional vacuum that emerges” once they are produced (DUBOIS et al., 2009: 17).
In this view, the same author(s) regard Macro-Regions as a ‘specific interface between
different established scales’, which might provoke ‘power struggles’ between them.
Nevertheless, in this definition it is not clear which scales are involved. This might give
rise to some ‘confusion’ with the Euroregions which also revolve around several levels
of territorial governance (local, regional, national). Furthermore, Dieleman & Faludi
launch an interesting idea when they argue that Macro-Regions may not only consist of
nation-states (DUBOIS et al., 2009: 18). Nonetheless, the idea of a polynucleated
Macro-Region cornered by the metropolitan areas of the Randstad, Rhine-Ruhr and the
Flemish Diamond defended by these authors seems to fit better on the Meso-Region
concept, due to the limited territorial dimension covered by the area concerned, when
compared, for instance, with the Baltic Sea Macro-Region. Yet, it is not completely
inappropriate to accept the existence of Macro-Regions within such vast countries as the
U.S.A, Canada and Russian Federation.

In parallel, evidence suggests that these ‘Macro Territorial Agreements’ are not just a
result of a momentary European macro-regional political will, but instead, can be taken
as a step by step process which has been solidified by the experience gained through
various INTERREG B (transnational cooperation) programmes in the EU, which acted
as a kind of laboratory for transnational reinforcement bounds, thus enabling the
consolidation of transnational networks between entities with common interests. To that extent, there seems to be a clear relationship between the INTERREG-B in the Baltic Sea Region and its Macro-Region, even though its territorial delimitation is not precisely the same. Similarly, the INTERREG-B programme CADSES encompasses, to a large extent, the territory of Danube Macro-Region (Fig. 3).

FIGURE 3

Seen from this standpoint, the INTERREG community initiative has been having a pivotal role in the emergence of these macro-spaces, by encouraging the involvement of various levels of government and governance in the process of territorial cooperation, while supporting the establishment of sustainable cooperation structures that finance and implement strategies of cross-border and transnational programmes.

In this regard, the reading of the main strategic guidelines proposed by the two already mentioned Macro-Regions demonstrates, firstly, the awareness that some of the major problems that affect them need a transnational, and even a trans-community approach (CROSSETO, 2010) (Table 1). On the other hand, it is also possible to infer that there are three main areas of territorial intervention touching their strategies:

- Environmental recovery and preservation;
- Improve the accessibility and connectivity;
- Maximising socio-economic development.

TABLE 1
In more concrete terms, the recognition of the need of a common strategy for the Baltic Sea Region was expressed in a European Parliament report published by the end of 2006. One year after (14 December 2007), the Council of Europe proposed the establishment of a territorial intervention strategy for the region, which was launched by the European Commission on 10-06-2009, with the purpose to address the environmental degradation of the Baltic Sea and to support the region's economic growth. At the same time, it was intended to make the area more attractive, accessible and secure (CE, 2009). However, it is worth noting the low level of public debate concerning this Strategy, and the uneven interest expressed by the ‘member-countries’. Concerning the latter, Sweden and Germany can be regarded as the large motors of the Baltic Sea Region Strategy, with the argument that its implementation would increase employment and a better management of the region resources (NORDREGIO, 2009).

Under a certain look, the genesis of such kind of 'Giant Natural Regions' can be seen as a milestone in the process of the EU territorial governance, in exploring new avenues of cooperation. It is clearly a new challenge, since it requires the coordination of a large number of countries, regions and organisations involved in the approved transnational projects. Nevertheless, it is anyone’s guess if this 'macro spatial level' can prove to be adequate to resolve the main problems that affect those regions, when it comes to the application of the subsidiarity principle defended in the EU Treaty. At this point, we have our doubts. Concomitantly, in this issue, the Swedish Minister Cecilia Malmström acknowledges the limitations of the Baltic Sea Region Strategy, referring that it cannot solve all the problems of the region [1].
To venture furthermore in this debate, one can also question the ‘capacity’ that these ‘new forms of regional cooperation’ have to be sustainable over time, in ensuring better coordination and cooperation on the trans-European scale. On the other hand, this type of regions are characterized by the absence of independent political status and institutions (CR, 2010), and do not necessarily entail additional funding (INFOREGIO, 2009). Furthermore, the inclusion of financial support to Macro-Regions is not on the EU political agenda, within the framework of the Cohesion Policy for the next programming period 2014-2021.

Even so, from our point of view, the sustainability of such regions is largely dependent on the stability of the financial support, taking into account the great socioeconomic and demographic diversity that characterizes them (DUBOIS and SCHMITT, 2008; INTERACT, 2010). In addition, Crosseto (2010) discusses and examines these and other problems associated with the creation of Macro-Regions, questioning even the interventional capacity to act in a coordinated and integrated mode and their degree of efficiency, bearing in mind the lack of political legitimacy and the large territorial scale. Despite all these setbacks, there are clear indications that other Meso and Macro-Regions strategies are being elaborated in Europe (ex: Alps, Carpathians, the North Sea and the Mediterranean), maybe even with overlapping areas, as already happens with some INTERREG programmes, but always bounded around a natural element of European scale.

It was in this ‘winds of change’ scenario that in June 2009 the Council of Europe called on the Commission to prepare a strategy for the Danube Macro-Region, to be presented until the end of 2010. However, the public consultation only started in February 2010.
Ultimately, this strategy is supported on three strategic pillars: (i) improve communications/transport systems, energy, information society; (ii) preserve the environment and prevent natural hazards; (iii) strengthen the socioeconomic development (CR, 2010; INTERACT, 2010). In short, this strategy is intended to bring the Danube river to the fore, as a vital artery to the European socioeconomic development, by providing and enhancing the environmental, economic, cultural and tourist resources, for those who operate in the area, an by increasing the visibility and attractiveness of the region as a whole, thus creating conditions for a more balanced and sustainable territorial development.

With regard to these new Macro-Regions that are in the pipeline, we highlight the North Sea Macro-Region (channel tunnel), which intends to create a new level of supranational cooperation amongst the eight countries involved (Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Holland, Belgium, France, United Kingdom and Norway), in an area characterized by a large commercial and socioeconomic dynamic (it is one of the busiest maritime areas in the world), and a central European energy production hub (CR, 2010). Although this stating socioeconomic scenario seems quite favourable, important issues of environmental nature (pollution, depletion of fish stocks, introduction of invasive species, destruction of coastal areas, maritime traffic congestion, discharges of fluvial network, etc.) require joint transnational interventions, partly because new challenges present themselves in the coming years in areas such as tourism, renewable energy, integrated coastal area management, maritime research, the sustainable use of sea (CE, 2010). Based on this background, this Macro-Region advances the following strategic guidelines of intervention (CR, 2010):
• Protection of the ecological system;
• Adaptation to climate change;
• Use of the economic potential of the area;
• Development of marine resources, for example, maritime research;
• Transport and energy connections.

THE NEW REGIONS IN IBERIAN SPACE

For Chauvel (1995), Portugal and Spain are the Western European countries which have
greater interregional diversity regarding the national sense of belonging within their
regions. A more careful observation at the Iberian NUTS II (Fig. 4) predicts two
regional outbreaks and a more prone solidification of the 'regional governance process'
in Galicia and the Basque Country, both in Spain. As regards the rest of Europe, the
same author reveals that the emergence of Euroregions in the 'Germanic Europe' is the
result of a low citizen's sense of belonging to their respective countries in this part of
Europe.

FIGURE 4

According to more recent data (CASTELLS, 2004) suggests an East/West dichotomy
regarding the national sentiment in Europe, which is slightly stronger in the West
(South-Western Europe-64%; North-West Europe-62%). In equal measure, he notes that
the emergence of these 'New Transnational Regional Spaces' with some degree of
autonomy (Euroregions, EGTC, Macro-Regions) in Europe are mainly a result, directly
or indirectly, from specific EU interventions to facilitate and encourage the establishment of networks of institutional, social and political relations, whose magnitude and complexity will increase in the coming years, as new countries fully integrate into the European Union. The same author argues that this trend will not make the Nation-States disappear. However, it can contribute to converting them into hubs of a wider network of political institutions (national, regional, local, non-governmental and international) forming a 'New Europe' governed by a State network of shared sovereignty and multiple levels and instances of a negotiated decision-making process.

In the case of the Iberian Peninsula, it is safe to assume that this process of 'shared multilevel territorial sovereignty', at the cross-border level, seems to have entered into an irreversible process of experimentation and implementation, as the set up of several European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation and the so-called Euroregions seem to suggest. Indeed, Diéguez (2004) says that the time has come for continuous cooperation and to put aside the Spanish arrogance/indifference and the Portuguese suspicion, in order to cement a common peninsular development path process, which history did not favour, and also to highlight an inter-European trans-nationality which contributes to mitigate the Iberian peripherality (SANTOS, 1993).

At the same time, this new adventure in creating ‘new governance spaces’ in Iberia, may contribute to modify the long standing Portuguese preference for developing its coastal area, which was one of the pillars of the political survival against its giant neighbour country (MEDEIROS C., 1998). It might also help to reduce the excessive degree of 'localism' which is, according to Gaspar (1982), rather than the regionalism, the most notable feature of the Portuguese territoriality, most often institutionalized at two levels: municipalities and counties.
Needless to say that this new ‘Iberian Territorial Cooperation Panorama’ at the national and regional level is essentially a result of the EU integration process, which reduced the border barriers and started a new dynamic of joint participation in projects financed with funds from the European Union, with special relevance to the INTERREG programme which, in our point of view, has been playing a central role, for the establishment of local/regional networks, thus helping to foster long-term sustainable cooperation. In this regard, the creation of cross-border structures, like the so-called Euroregions and the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation, can be seen as a decisive step to solidify the territorial cooperation process in Iberia.

THE EUROREGIONS IN IBERIAN PENINSULA

As we have noted, we do not entirely agree with the use of the word Euroregion to denominate the cross-border cooperation structures, especially if the border region where they operate have not yet reached a genuine type of cross-border cooperation, and consequently achieved high levels of border permeability in all the dimensions of the barrier effect (see: MEDEIROS, 2011). Such criteria may seem too demanding, however, they usually represent the corner stones of the so-called Euroregions development strategies, including the three already established Iberian ones (Table 2).

TABLE 2

The reading of the Iberian Euroregions strategic main intervention axes reflects a collage with the ones chosen for the implementation of the INTERREG-A in those
areas, which makes a lot of sense. Even so, the principle of concentration, which should
guide the development of these strategies, by limiting the number of thematic priorities,
does not seem to have been achieved yet, in any of three Iberian Euroregions, partly
because the chosen strategic guidelines are immensely similar to one another, and do
not detach themselves from the regional development strategies drawn for each region
involved (North, Galicia, Alentejo, Algarve, Centro, Extremadura and Andalusia).

In equal measure, those strategies reveal, in a large degree, a lack of perception of their
own geographical specificities, and consequently they do not always focus their
attention in the uniqueness of their regional socioeconomic, cultural and environmental
element, and incorporate their territorial diversity in concrete policies. Indeed, this type
of a very general and technical intervention generates an endless number of written
objectives, which shows a lack of selectivity and realism. Notwithstanding, there are
some positive elements which counteract this general rule. For example, the Galicia-
North Euroregion seeks to enhance cooperation under the sea and marine resources, as
well as initiatives to clean the Galician rivers and estuaries in the North of Portugal,
thus ultimately focusing in exploring one of the most important regional resources of
this region.

In the case of the EUROACE, established on 21/09/09, their 2020 intervention strategy
shows a limitless ambition, perhaps unrealistic and utopian, by trying to intervene in
virtually all the areas of development. Still, some very interesting proposals emerge: (i)
promote a polycentric nature of the urban system; (ii) correct the absence of cross-
border public transports; (iii) create quality brands for local products (iv) create a local
investment platform; (v) maximise tourism.
With these remarks we do not want to criticise all the efforts put by an immense number of local and regional actors, involved in the elaboration of the EUROACE strategy. However, in our view, it would make more sense to build its strategy around a central topic and build the whole strategy around this main goal. For example, the latest of the three Euroregions discussed in this study, the EUROAAA (established on 08/06/2009), could perfectly have focused its action plan on the exploitation of the solar energy sector. From there, the cooperation could be extended to: (i) the cooperation between local universities and institutes in the field of solar energy efficiency; (ii) supporting the local production of solar energy related equipment; (iii) support human capital by creating specific courses with a view to prepare young students to work in the solar industry; (vi) to engage a new era of green technology use, in order to reduce the energy bill and to take advantage of the energetic solar potential of this area, which should be associated with the use of the most modern technologies for seawater desalination, in order to increase the regional agriculture demands for this precious liquid.

In parallel to this shift into a more simplified and dedicated policy measures, we also believe that the EUROACE and EUROAAA areas should be considerably reduced and should avoid the present scenario of overlapped territories (Fig. 5), which is a result of a 'institutionally correct' regional policy option, leading to the inclusion of all the NUTS II territory. However, this political choice gives rise to several setbacks in the implementation of a truly effective territorial development strategy. In this respect, we stress an opinion from an Alentejo Tourism officer, which remembered that the strategy of EUROACE focuses primarily on inland tourism and totally disregards coastal areas. To solve this problem, the Euroregion area should cover only the border NUTS III,
following the example of the INTERREG-A programme, thus avoiding, for instance, the presence of all Andalusia area in this endeavour, which obviously does not make any sense, taking on consideration the main goals of these transnational structures.

FIGURE 5

Just as important, however, are the implications and transformations in the ‘Iberian Territorial Governance’ in establishing these cross-border structures, which may constitute a major turning point in creating opportunities for producing ‘new bottom-up strategic interactions’ by giving this intermediate administrative territorial level a formal role in the EU policy-making process (euro-institutionalization). At the same time, it is expected that the vertical interactions and interdependencies between all levels of government, as well as the horizontal interactions between governments and the civil society will increase overtime. Basically, it is intended that these Euroregions can actively ensure the legitimacy of political interventions and promote innovative governance tools tailored to the needs of regional development. To this end, it would make sense that the Iberian Euroregions would structure themselves around the more articulated Iberian cross-border urban networks (Fig. 6), in order to take advantage of the presence of human capital and innovation centres in the main border urban agglomerations. And in fact, the three analysed Iberian Euroregions are located alongside the only three cross-border Iberian articulated urban axes.

FIGURE 6

THE EGTC IN IBERIAN PENINSULA
The EGTC is the first European cooperation structure with legal personality and was adopted by the European Parliament in 2006, following two studies prepared by the Association of European Border Regions[2], with a view to decentralize the process of territorial cooperation at local and regional level (AEBR, 2008). Basically, this new community instrument with regulatory scope is expected to open up the prospect of new forms of multilevel governance by allowing a deeper involvement of national, regional and local authorities and territorial cooperation entities with their own legal personality (CR, 2007). Ultimately, this instrument brings a profoundly innovative approach (VENADE 2006) to the territorial cooperation process in all its strands (cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation) by providing a more stable legal framework than the past less binding instruments, thus contributing to simplifying its administrative and regulative burdens (CR, 2010b).

Secondly, according to the AEBR (2008), the legal basis for cross-border cooperation permitted by this ‘instrument’ should ensure that the process of territorial cooperation is genuine, sustainable, and impermeable to political and administrative changes. At the same time, it is intended that it ensures binding forms of social involvement and constant monitoring and evaluation from the regional and local authorities in the implementation of cooperation projects, to strengthen the decentralisation of community programmes.

These general assumptions should be followed by each Member-State specific rules and regulations that take into account the particular situation of their cross-border process. Thus, considering the case of the two Iberian countries, an agreement was signed (MAOT, 2009) where recommendations and suggestions were made to guide and direct
the establishment of EGTC in the Iberian space, which can be seen as a EU case study in the early implementation of such ‘territorial cooperation structures’ (MEDEIROS, 2009), since there are already three of them functioning in the northern part of the Iberian border area (Fig. 5), and at least four more are planned to be established in the nearby future (Guadiana Central, Chaves-Verin, EUROACE, EUROAAA). In summary, the Iberian agreement recommends that the EGTC brings an added value and shows an increased efficiency compared to other cooperation instruments. At the same time, the strategic objectives must be clear and geared towards the achievement of territorial competitiveness, quality of life and territorial cohesion (MAOT, 2009). Finally, it suggests a relatively long duration period of the EGTC (ex: 5 years), with successive renewals being admitted and that the location of the headquarters should be balanced on both sides of the border.

Concerning the Iberian EGTC main intervention areas, there are no clear distinctions from the Iberian Euroregions, since they intend to leave their footprint in most of the territorial development spheres (socio-economic, environmental, cultural, rural, urban, infrastructural and innovation). Beyond this, it should be noted that in Portugal these groupings must have specific territorial cooperation tasks or projects co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund or the Cohesion Fund [3]. In turn, in Spain, the Council of Ministers may prohibit any activity of the EGTC which violates internal rules of public policy, public security, health or public morality, contrary to public interest [4].

Under this new scenario of innovated experiments in territorial governance, one should raise the question if this ‘new intermediate levels of territorial management’ can
promote a more effective supranational approach by improving the quality of decision making and the prospects for effective bottom up development policies which can capture benefits in creating sustainable jobs and regional economic growth. This issue arises since these groupings have a clearly demarcated territory. Yet, it is sometimes coincident with a so-called Euroregion, as is the case of the first EGTC established in Iberia: EGTC Galicia-Northern Portugal, which intervenes in these two NUTS II (CCDRN, 2008). However, in this particular case, the role of this grouping is clearly identified, as being responsible for the implementing and the operational management of contracts and agreements signed within the framework of the working community, as well as to contributing to the achievement of the main objectives set out in the strategic plan for cooperation between the North and Galicia (2007-2013) (ALMEIDA, 2008).

Thus, the third established European EGTC (North-Galicia on 23/10/2008), is a tool to facilitate the promotion of more effective and sustainable common policies, with a view to strengthen territorial cooperation and to convert the Atlantic Arc into a peninsular space for innovation and growth in the 21st century (CCDRN, 2008), in an area with high degree of economic interdependence and cross-border mobility.

As noted above, there seems to be enough ‘administrative space’ to establish Working Communities/Euroregions and EGTC in the same region, if the competences are clearly demarcated. However, given the preferences of the North-Galician territorial cooperation strategy to the maritime economy, thus neglecting the most rural and peripheral/interior and undeveloped areas, one might think that this was a major factor behind the establishment of the other two regional EGTC (Duero and Douro - Zasnet), which expand their domains into the Spanish NUT II of Castilla y León. From this
perspective, one of the central purposes of the Zasnet EGTC (established on 27/01/2009) strategic intervention regards the collaboration with the Bragança-Zamora working community (Table 3) in implementing its development strategy. Nevertheless, this EGTC is considered by some regional actors as a mere 'financial engineering instrument' in order to promote and enhance the region's economic progress through joint initiatives by building new infrastructure and public services, promoting business development and enhancing the cultural values, ethnography and tourism[5].

Finally, the Duero-Douro EGTC, established on 07/03/2009, can be regarded as the most interesting case study of them all, due to the obtained results so far, and the interesting bottom up approach to development revealed in the proposed strategy. In fact, some months ago, we had the opportunity to visit its headquarters in Trabanca (Spain) where we could see some of the projects which are being carried out in the present moment and those in the pipeline for the next years. However, to gain a better understanding of the reason why this EGCT intends to focus in virtually all areas of development (equal opportunities, economic and local development, public transport accessible to all citizens, new technologies, environment, sustainable development, education, training and employment, health, social services and welfare, tourism, culture and heritage, local administration, research, innovation and development, transport and communications, sport, leisure and recreation) instead of choosing two or three flagship development domains, its General Director, José Luis Pascual, explained us that the main regional purpose is to establish a single tourist brand with worldwide recognition (Duero-Douro) which, in turn, requires a more global regional development strategy.
To this end, the Douro-Douro EGTC aims to strengthen the socioeconomic cohesion in that largely depopulated area which covers a similar area of the Zasnet EGTC (Fig. 5). This step forward in terms of territorial governance aims to open a new range of opportunities for the development of a strongly peripheral Iberian region, but with a huge touristic potential. In this view, this entity aims to stop the continuous process of depopulation, to create new jobs through an integrated employment plan and the joint management of the region, while ensuring the application of the principle of subsidiarity, advocated in the European Union. In this regard, we would like to mention some of the most emblematic projects that are being carried out by this EGTC:

- Schools cooperation and sharing of leaning materials;
- Cross-border cooperation Forum for young people;
- Creation of a coordinated response social platform;
- Heritage recovery protocols;
- Self preventive – Incorporate the goat to protect fires and create a local quality brand.

Given this emergent scenario of ‘New Iberian Territorial Cooperation Spaces’, which can be viewed as the children of an unfinished Europe without frontiers project, it is important to monitor their results, effects and impacts, because they depend directly on the degree of their administrative maturity, which usually passes through three cycles: in the initial phase, the system and governance is still based on ‘soft negotiation procedures’ without a legal structure. Subsequently it enters in a stage of intensification of cross-border institutionalization. In a second phase, there is a process of renewal of
integrated spatial vision. Finally, specific actions are implemented, focusing in particular on the border population’s daily life problems (URBACT, 2010). In this concern, a different typology is proposed by another study (CR, 2010b), which argues that there are four evolutionary steps of EGTCs: (i) start-up (cautious initial commitment and small budget); (ii) expansion & specification of portfolio (short-term commitment and medium budget); (iii) consolidation (medium-term commitment and pluri-annual budget); (iv) specialisation (long-term commitment and significant budget). However, in our view, it is still early to draw definitive conclusions regarding the position of the Iberian EGTC’s in these typologies. Be that as it may, it looks like the Iberian space is going through an irreversible change of its territorial governance panorama.

CONCLUSION

Since 1988, the EU Cohesion Policy has been providing some contribution to stimulate institutional and administrative change (vertical and horizontal) in the European Territory, as a result of the process of European integration. In this article, we consider the process of territorial cooperation one the main responsible factors for these changes, namely in generating ‘New Intermediate Levels of Territorial Governance’, like the Euroregions and Macro-Regions. Apparently, however, as case-studies show (see BACHE, 2008), in most cases, subnational actors are not necessarily empowered, even thought they were clearly mobilized, with a view of a maximum absorption of the EU available funds.
In this anti-globalizing scenario, in the sense that it seems to revitalize the UE regional arena, the true innovative territorial approach consists in the emergence of EU Macro-Regions (Baltic Sea, Danube), which generates a completely new ‘intermediate territorial level’ between the EU and the Member-States, established around a transnational European natural geographic element, which has been negatively affected by human activities, thus requiring a common intervention multisectoral strategy to solve the main problems affecting these spaces.

Regarding the emergence of cross-border cooperation structures in the EU, sometimes known as Euroregions, which already exceed 70 units, the novelty focuses on its increasing proliferation in the EU border regions, as a consequence of the INTERREG-A community initiative financial support. In any case, their main goal is to imitate the first entity of this kind, created in 1958 at the border region between the Netherlands and Germany (Euregio). Nevertheless, the great majority of these cross-border structures choose to call themselves Euroregions to facilitate the mobilization of subnational actors in order to intensify the process of cross-border cooperation in the institutional field and attract national and community funds, which accelerate regional development.

Similarly, the Iberian Peninsula embarked in an experimental process of establishing new cross-border structures, especially along the Portuguese-Spanish border area (Working Communities, Euroregions, EGTC), with the aim to strengthen institutional interdependencies and establishing common territorial development strategies, to counteract the syndrome of disadvantage in a largely depopulated and socioeconomic weak region and to take full advantage of the benefits of the expanded EU single market
(AEBR, 2008: 49). Yet, ultimately, the greatest challenge is to convince an over-centralized country (Portugal) and the opposite regionalized neighbour (Spain) that such intermediate levels of governance contribute to their development political agendas.

In the meantime, the willingness of regional and local actors in overcoming these and other obstacles to cross-border cooperation and joint development led to the establishment of one Euroregion and three EGTC in the northern part of the Iberian border in the last couple of years. Soon after, two Euroregions were established in the southern part of the border (EUROACE-2009 and EUROAAA-2010), and their intervention priorities follow closely the main strategic guidelines of their northern and older counterpart (Galicia-North of Portugal), whose strategic plan (2007-2013) already shows a high degree of maturity, by focusing in more restrictive and selected intervention goals, when compared with the largely dispersed strategic development plans of the southern and younger Iberian Euroregions.

It is also worth noting that this action plan (Galicia-North of Portugal) expresses the desire to take advantage of the potential offered by the legal possibility to establish a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) in the Euroregion, which facilitates the materialization of the strategic objectives and contributes to improve administrative effectiveness and economic efficiency. Nonetheless, we must wait for 2013 to draw the first conclusions based on the results and effects of this first Iberian EGTC (3rd in Europe), and the other two already established in close proximity (Duero-Douro 2009 and Zasnet 2010). Concerning these two, our analysis indicates the former (Duero-Douro) has showed a far larger dynamics than the latter (Zasnet), in promoting tailor-made development projects, some of them with innovative character, with the
objective to reinvigorate the regional economy by creating a recognized international
brand (Duero-Douro), that immediately brings to mind the region main attractions.

However, there is ample evidence that the national administrative level in Portugal, and
the national/regional level in Spain continues to dominate the local/regional
development agendas in the most peripheral Iberian areas, as well as the established
multilevel-partnerships. Even so, against this background, a new dialectic of
administrative territorial scales is on the raise in Iberia, and a more bottom-up approach
is likely to come into play in a slow and incremental way in the next decade, with the
secular establishment of other transnational entities with greater territorial autonomy,
which is already interfering with the established territorial status quo. Such
considerations explain the refusal of the Castilla y León President to talk with the
President of the Duero-Douro EGTC, and that the other regional structures such as the
EUROACE and the EUROAAA do not seem to look favourably to the establishment of
an ‘outsider’ EGTC (Central Guadiana) in their territory.

On a more general level, however, it is fair to say that the territorial relations between
Iberian adjacent regional levels seem increasingly solidified. An example is the
intention to establish a large cooperation area including the North of Portugal, Galicia
and Castilla y León NUTS II, revealed in 17/09/2010, to take advantage of the on-going
debate around the next Cohesion Policy programming period (2014-2020)[6]. Curiously
they denominate this area of approximately 145,055 km², as a Macro-Region, which
goes against the conceptual framework we propose in this article. In fact, we believe
that it would be more appropriate to call it an Iberian Meso-Region or even a ‘Large
Euroregion’. Whatever the case, more important than its proper designation is its
capacity to provide both a coordinated and inclusive framework which improves the quality of life in the region. It is also worth mentioning that this new cross-border structure shows a ‘healthy’ intention to enlarge its territory to other peninsular adjacent regions, which might one day lead to the establishment of an Iberian Meso-Region as we proposed in a recent seminar [7].

Finally, this analysis permits us to underline, once again, the crucial stimulus that the ‘Territorial Cooperation Process’ in the EU, supported by the INTERREG community initiative, gave to shape new transnational cooperation spaces in Europe, by providing vital funds and increasing vertical interactions and interdependences between all the government and governance levels (European, national, regional, local). Faced with the emergence of several Macro-Spaces in Europe, we strongly suggest that both Iberian countries would gain more in establishing an Iberian Meso-Region in order to resolve problems that are common to both countries, instead of embarking in several potential European Macro-Region projects which might follow the on-going experiences of the transnational INTERREG-B programmes (Atlantic Area, South West Europe and Western Mediterranean), whose intentions to create a more effective and sustainable development path is yet to be proved.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. European Union Macro-Regions Synthesis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Countries (full area)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Countries (some areas)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Countries (EU)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Countries (total)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Km² (approx.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inhabitants (approx.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population density</td>
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Source: Data: (NORDREGIO, 2009 + CR, 2010 + INTERACT, 2010 + Eurostat)
Table 2. Iberian Euroregions main strategic guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>North-Galicia (EURONORGAL)</th>
<th>Alentejo-Centro-Extremadura (EUROACE)</th>
<th>Alentejo-Algarve-Andalusia (EUROAAA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Promoting competitiveness and employment promotion</td>
<td>-Promoting competitiveness and employment</td>
<td>-Promoting competitiveness and employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Environment, heritage and risk prevention</td>
<td>-Environment, heritage and natural environment</td>
<td>-Environment, heritage and natural environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Planning and accessibility</td>
<td>-Accessibility and spatial planning</td>
<td>-Accessibility and spatial planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Socio-economic and institutional integration</td>
<td>-Promotion of cooperation and socioeconomic integration</td>
<td>-Promotion of cooperation and socioeconomic integration</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: Data: (CCDRN, 2007 + CCDRALE, 2009 + CCDRALG, 2010)
Table 3. Iberian EGTC main strategic objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>North-Galicia</th>
<th>Duero-Douro</th>
<th>Zasnet</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Promote transnational</td>
<td>-The elaboration, management and</td>
<td>-Articulate the common area and</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>relationship</td>
<td>implementation of a programme of</td>
<td>promote cross-border relations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>employment in rural areas</td>
<td>(environment, tourism, culture, firms)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Develop and promote</td>
<td>-The establishment and management</td>
<td>-Implement the cross-border</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>competitiveness of the</td>
<td>of new features, new services and</td>
<td>territorial cooperation in local</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>business fabric</td>
<td>new social infrastructure</td>
<td>policies for each Member</td>
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<tr>
<td>(innovation and</td>
<td></td>
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<td>knowledge)</td>
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<tr>
<td>-Convert the Euroregion</td>
<td>-The creation of an action plan for</td>
<td>-Cooperate with the Bragança-Zamora</td>
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<td>into a more attractive</td>
<td>the conservation and sustainable</td>
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<td>territory (transport</td>
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<td>and)</td>
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accessibility) development of natural protected spaces Territorial Community of Cooperation of Douro Superior-Salamanca

- Increase social and institutional cohesion
- The drafting and managing a tourism program
- Enhance the potential of endogenous resources
- Stimulating the establishment of the population and generating synergies to attract new inhabitants to the territory

Source: Data: [http://www.ifdr.pt](http://www.ifdr.pt) - summarized and adapted by the author
Fig. 1 - The New Europe of Euro-Meso-Macro Regions - 2010

Source: Data (several) – Author Cartography
Fig. 2 – Border Areas, FUAS and MEGAS in EU - 2010

Source: Data (several ESPON studies) – Author cartography
Fig. 3 - INTERREG-B in the Iberian Peninsula and in the areas of intervention of European Macro-Regions - 2010

Source – Data (several) – Author Cartography
Fig. 4 - Feeling of belonging to the Country in the Iberian Peninsula - NUTS II

Source: Data (CHAUVEL, 1995). Author Cartography - adapted
Fig. 5 - MEGAS and FUAS / Iberian Euroregions and EGTC - 2010

Source: Data (several). Author cartography
Fig. 6 - Main inter-urban connections in Iberia - 2010


Cartography