

Galicia and Portugal. A fruitful courtship. New strategies for a Euroregion and Eurocity identity

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Abstract: The implementation of European policies at the regional level is realized through the creation of intervention mechanisms, specific organizations, and funding within Euroregions and Eurocities. The Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion, due to its historical and cultural characteristics, has been benefiting from these policies. In this paper, we aim to start from a shared political and cultural history between Galicia and Portugal, particularly at the border delimited by the Minho River, to see how this border experience serves, or not, as an affirmation of European citizenship. Around the concepts of Frontier/border and Euroregion, we analyze two case studies: the Agenda 2030 of the Cerveira-Tomiño Eurocity and the creation of the Galician-Portuguese Intangible Cultural Heritage Center. The goal is to explore the potential of a policy of proximity and participatory citizenship for a stronger assertion of European citizenship.

Keywords: Frontier; Galicia-North Portugal Euroregion; Cultural Identity; Intangible Cultural Heritage; European Citizenship.

Introduction

The concept of 'Frontier' (border) has a rich yet challenging and fruitful polysemy for geographical, sociological, and geopolitical thought. The *Houaiss Dictionary of the Portuguese Language* presents various meanings of the word '*fronteira*' (frontier). Among them, we emphasize "the extreme part of an area, region, etc.; the bordering part of one space in relation to another; the contiguous area to that extreme part." Following these, terms like '*raia*' (frontline), '*marco*' (boundary marker), '*linha divisória*' (dividing line), and '*limite*' (limit) emerge. From these meanings, the dictionary develops the concepts of a 'physical border,' 'artificial border,' 'tension border,' and 'linguistic border' (where it describes: "an edge that delimits two linguistic systems [The lines of demarcation between different languages are usually well-defined. However, those that separate dialects are fluctuating, and their delineation varies according to the features taken as characteristic] cf. linguistic geography and isogloss").

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When analyzing the border between Upper Minho in Portugal and the part of the autonomous region of Galicia (Spain) delimited by the Minho River, we encounter much of the diversity encompassed by the concept of a border. We are facing a physical border (the Minho River), two extreme parts of two political geographies, a 'limit' between two spaces, a dividing line, a 'raia' (frontline border). However, when we consider the temporal dimension, this border was, in the past, a 'tension border,' which is no longer the case in the present; it seems to be a 'linguistic border' (that edge that delimits two linguistic systems) now when it wasn't in the past, and it recognizes an 'isogloss.' Increasingly, it presents itself simultaneously as the 'extreme part of a space in relation,' overemphasizing different belonging, and a 'space in relation' that, due to historical and political impositions, is forced to question what is common and what is different, making an effort to forget the differences.

This work develops an analysis of a border region with two insurmountable characteristics: Firstly, it faces a border with a centuries-old, almost millennial history, where the experience of sharing a close culture and a mutually comprehensible language on both sides of the border defines a common sense of belonging and familiarity. Secondly, this region is located in a peripheral area of the EU, marked by difficult economic development, where emigration has been one of the historical survival strategies. The dual condition of being a peripheral region, subject to marginalization and with few resources – somewhat abandoned by central powers – has nonetheless maintained a very strong identity and a continuous cross-border relationship. From the beginning of its common history, through the difficulties of political division and the dictatorships of Spain and Portugal, to the recent rediscovery of a sense of belonging to a shared cultural family, economic and cultural relationship strategies, among others, have strengthened current dynamics within the EU.

The social and economic development policies of the EU are becoming increasingly comprehensive in their themes of action. Initially, European policies essentially revolved around the economic dimension and the creation of the single market, promoting the development of Europe and relations between states, overcoming borders. Borders were seen as an obstacle. However, this strategy created some political and social problems, as there was a growing disconnect between the aspirations and desires of local populations and the decisions of Brussels bureaucrats and decision-makers. The question arose as to whether the decisions lacked the desirable democratic legitimacy. Meanwhile, the scope of EU action has expanded, including ecological dimensions, social and cultural well-being, issues associated with participatory power, health, and culture. The EU, aware of its responsibilities to its citizens and the world, is no longer just a 'facilitator' of economic and social exchanges, through the creation of robust legislation to govern the economy and the basic principles of organizing the single market, but aims to create the pillars of a political, economic, and social union. It was at this moment that the EU contemplated a 'European identity' and a possible Constitution, a project thwarted by the same reasons of disagreement between national identities and those envisioned for the European Union. Several treaties followed, some more significant than others, to deepen this Union and this political desire in an increasingly globalized and problematic world, where Europe aimed to have one strong word.

The most interesting aspect of this process was finding it possible to work on this identity of the Union, strengthening local and regional identities. The sense of belonging and participation around the issues experienced in a smaller space, while also being conceived from a transnational/transborder practice, reinforced the added value of integration into a political and economic space like the EU. Increasingly aware of the real validity of this policy, the EU not only created funding programs for cross-border projects but also established regional cooperation entities to implement European projects with local and regional expression.

In this text, we will first develop a historical and cultural characterization of the northwest Iberian Peninsula, focusing on the relationship between Galicia and Northern Portugal, with particular attention to the border established by the Minho River. Does the shared common cultural history favor relationships within European organizational structures, facilitating the implementation of joint projects? In a second moment, we will specifically examine the discussion of transborder policy at the European level and its application/discussion in the Galicia-Portugal Euroregion and in Eurocities. That is, the already significant literature on this Euroregion concludes or not on the previously mentioned specificity, and this is reflected in the degree of execution of European projects? Finally, we will take two case studies in which we actively participate: the creation of the 2030 Agenda for the Cerveira-Tomiño Eurocity and the development of a Galician-Portuguese Intangible Cultural Heritage Center. While not the oldest Eurocity, as there are others like Chaves-Verín, or Valença-Tui in the same territory delimited by the Minho River, the Cerveira-Tomiño Eurocity requires a more complex reflection due to the less obvious relations between urban structures, as they are neither large nor immediately contiguous, unlike Valença and Tui. However, the inclusion of this case arises from our experience working on this 2030 Agenda. On the other hand, the analysis of the Galician-Portuguese Intangible Cultural Heritage Center is based on more than two decades of work around the intangible cultural heritage of this region, both at an individual level and integrated into collaboration with the Cultural and Pedagogical Association Ponte... nas ondas!, within the scope of which this project is being developed. Conceived as part of an initiative of the Galicia-Portugal Euroregion, this project demonstrates the importance of culture and education in the realization of European policies.

1. The Unimagined Frontier

The term “fronteira” (Machado, 1977, p. 94) with its etymological origin in Latin associated with ‘frons’ (forehead, exterior part, what is in front), or from the Latin noun ‘frontaria’ (records of this word date back to 1263 with the meaning of “border”); or perhaps from the French ‘frontière,’ meaning limit, mark, division, or separation (with the modern origin of the term directly linked to the French word, which, in turn, still originates from Latin ‘frons’ (cf. *Dicionário Houaiss*).

The notion of a frontier is entirely different when faced with a narrative about political and geographical borders, or through diplomatic documentation and the exercise of power by a national authority, compared to what is understood and experienced by communities residing in proximity to the border. For these communities, the reality of the existence of a political and administrative frontier (whether with physical boundaries or not) is not a sufficient reason for immediate separation, regardless of how peaceful or violent the historical relations between the two sides may have been. Here, it is impossible to live without considering the ‘other’ (the ‘frons’ that stand face to face – countries, cultures, etc.). Therefore, it is important to clarify the numerous possibilities of engagement between proximity and distance, negotiation and conflict, as elucidated by political theories influenced by interdisciplinary and multidimensional contributions. So, exploring the concept of frontier and related theories involves a wide range of academic disciplines, including geography, geopolitics, history, sociology, and more (Lange, 2012).

Various aspects of frontiers and theories associated with this concept are, for example, the influential work in postcolonial theory discusses how frontiers and borders are constructed and how they impact cultural identity or the construction of frontiers and cultural representations, with historical, political, and cultural aspects (Bhabha, 1994; Diener & Hagen, 2012). The concept of frontiers, borderlands, is influenced by the new notion of political

territory and the development of the nation-state, and national security (Elden, 2013). In such a way, the concept of domain and control over territory has become integrated into historical and political theoretical discussions as a hallmark of modernity (Branch, 2013). This has compelled the transformation of borders into a field of territorial investigation and political management in geopolitics (Dodds, 2019).

The extent of cross-border exchanges and relationships leads to considering the border as a transactional space. Between the perilous and the opportune, the border creates new possibilities within the confines and rules it necessarily imposes. Studying frontiers, economic and cultural exchanges involves exploring how diverse cultures and economies interact and influence one another in border regions. Cultural exchanges across frontiers have long been recognized as significant contributors to societal development. As Anderson (2006) posited in his seminal work on *"Imagined Communities"*, national borders often act as cultural constructs, shaping identities and fostering a sense of community within defined territories. However, this concept is not static. With the advent of technology and increased connectivity, individuals residing near national frontiers often engage in cross-border cultural interactions that challenge traditional notions of identity and belonging (Smith, 1991, 2001). The interconnectedness between cultural and economic dimensions at frontiers can yield synergistic effects. A study by Gereffi, Garcia-Johnson, and Sasser (2001) on global value chains highlights how cultural factors, such as language and shared values, play a crucial role in the success of economic collaborations. The development of transnational cultural identities can contribute positively to cross-border economic activities, fostering trust and mutual understanding (Inglehart, 1997).

The concept of frontiers, both geographical and political, has been the subject of extensive theoretical exploration (Burns, 1989; Febvre 1928; Sacchetti, 2001; Marchueta, 2002; Molen & Ietswaart, 2012). The concept of frontier is appropriated by Frederick Jackson Turner (Turner, 1920) for the American history and culture. He argued, with the theory of "Frontier Thesis", that the American frontier experience shaped the unique characteristics of American society and culture. Turner's thesis emphasized the role of the frontier in American history. After geopolitics theories, we synthesize the political theories about the frontiers/borders. The modern international system introduced the concept of state sovereignty and the principle of territorial integrity, which established the idea that states should respect each other's borders. Is the conclusion of the Peace of Westphalia (1648). But now we are two new theories: the 'critical' and postcolonial theories. The first, challenges traditional geopolitical perspectives and explores how the concept of frontiers is used to shape national identity, power, and discourse. It considers how frontiers are constructed and portrayed in political narratives (Dalby, 1990; Asjley, 1988, 1989). The second examine the impact of colonial frontiers on identity, power dynamics, and cultural representations. They argue that colonialism often redefined frontiers and reshaped societies (Bhabha, 1994).

Critical geopolitics challenges the traditional geopolitical approach, which often focuses on state-centric analyses of borders and territories. It questions the assumptions and biases embedded in these traditional perspectives, emphasizing the need to deconstruct them. One of the key tenets of critical geopolitics is the understanding that frontiers are not objective or fixed entities but are socially constructed. They are shaped by political, cultural, economic, and historical factors (Pires, 2012). This perspective highlights that frontiers are not natural or static boundaries but rather products of human interaction and power relations. Critical geopolitics examines the role of discourse and representation in the construction of frontiers (Lange, 2012). It investigates how political narratives, media, and official rhetoric contribute to the portrayal of frontiers in specific ways. These representations can influence public perception, policy decisions, and national identity. Frontiers are viewed as symbolic spaces in critical geopolitics. They are not merely physical borders but also

carry deep cultural, ideological, and historical meanings. These symbolic aspects of frontiers play a crucial role in shaping national identity and political discourse. Critical geopolitics acknowledges that frontiers are often sites of power struggles and contestation. States and other actors seek to control and define frontiers to advance their interests.

This critical perspective is very important for understand the most fundamental questions of the present, like hybrid identities, environmental management, integration in the research and political action of different actors or marginalized groups. Therefore, frontiers are seen as spaces where identities can be hybrid and fluid. The mixing of cultures, languages, and traditions at border regions challenges simplistic notions of national identity. These hybrid identities may not fit neatly into traditional geopolitical narratives. Critical geopolitics also considers the intersection of frontiers with environmental issues and resource management. It examines how ecological factors influence the construction and management of frontiers, especially in the context of environmental challenges such as climate change. The imaginations of different actors, including states, non-state actors, and marginalized groups encompass how actors perceive frontiers, security concerns, and geopolitical strategies. In turn, the absence of an inclusive and attentive critical perspective to the complexity of the border experience hinders the effective management of political strategies for intervention in these spaces and realities. And this is very important on policy and decision-making. It underscores the importance of critically assessing the narratives and discourses that inform government policies related to frontiers, border security, and international relations. This approach enriches our understanding of how frontiers are not just physical boundaries, but also symbolic spaces deeply embedded in political and cultural contexts.

Perhaps it may seem inappropriate to address postcolonial theory in this context of the word 'frontier,' given that our work involves a situation between two neighboring European countries. However, the focus here is to understand how a hegemonic, unequal power, exercised over a long period, impacts the perception of the border between the two banks of the Minho River. Postcolonial theory offers a nuanced and critical perspective on the impact of colonialism (or unequal power) on frontiers, identity, power dynamics, and cultural representations. In our case, one unequal power (central state power) redefined and imposed their own frontiers. These frontiers were often arbitrary, disregarding existing local boundaries practices and cultural relations. The imposition of frontiers aimed to facilitate state control. This theory examine how power dynamics were established and maintained at state frontiers. Central state authorities exercised control through various means, including economic, political, and cultural dominance. However, these frontiers were also sites of resistance, where local populations challenged state rule and asserted their agency.

Applying postcolonial theory to other situations and spaces beyond traditional colonial practices, but which have experienced the consequences of hegemonic powers imposing political, economic, and social strategies that minimized or concealed, under political force or violence, we must then consider the responses that societies and communities subjected to such force and violence have practiced. The consequences of authority imposed by states persist over time, as they defined borders that separated stable cultural communities, even if this occurred centuries ago. The effects continue.

Overcoming these experiences of separation, of establishing a different identity defined by central state authority, has been one of the main achievements in peripheral areas, in inter-border spaces, as Portugal and Spain transitioned to democracy. This appreciation became more visible in Spain with the creation of autonomous communities, in this case, Galicia, while in Portugal, a strong centralism persisted due to the lack of progress towards regionalization, as envisioned by the Constitution following the April 25, 1974,

revolution. This achievement was affirmed with membership in the EU (both Portugal and Spain joined simultaneously in 1986) and the creation of the Schengen Area (2003). In turn, the experience of building the Single European Act (SEA), the reinforcement of cohesion policies, and the innovations of shared regional experiences have strengthened and provided new possibilities for sharing responsibilities. These have taken on particular administrative organizations, such as Eurocities. The new European administrative strategies, and measures, have served as a sort of decolonization of nationalist mindsets. However, whenever these co-responsibility measures are activated, and new models of territorial management emerge, they must contend with old mentalities and atavistic processes from the past, rooted in national divisions.

In border areas where conflicts were more severe and political struggles intensified, reinforcing ethnic or identity divisions, European measures aimed at pacification and the construction of new relationships. However, in our case study, at the northern border of Portugal with Galicia, conflicts are known through history books. The notion of the border was strengthened only to control the population (in emigration and trade) during times of dictatorship. This reinforcement, along with the past, caused the awareness of sharing a common culture, in its normal diversity, to fade. Despite social and economic relations existing along the border, this experience was not shared and acknowledged as strategic for the communities in the region. All of this changed with numerous projects and shared experiences, of which we will provide two examples here.

2. North Portugal and Galicia

Before we analyze the historical relationship between Galicia and Northern Portugal (or even Portugal as a whole), it is important to note that when we express this relationship, especially in the present day, the two parties, Galicia and Portugal, do not perceive this relationship in the same way. The long process of constructing and asserting Portuguese independence, spanning almost 900 years, seldom raises questions of identity or a sense of national autonomy, grounded in that centuries-old history and a language, Portuguese. When Galicians think of Portugal, they see it within a shared identity, however complex (Medeiros, 2013; Kavanagh, 2011; Villares, 2004). Thinking of themselves as a sub-state (García-Álvarez, 1998; Catt & Murphy, 2002), a national identity founded on language (Beswick 2007), landscape, and their popular culture (Edensor, 2002, García Álvarez, 2004).

The same cannot be asserted regarding Galicia, which is currently an Autonomous Region integrated into the Spanish State. Therefore, when the Galician elite thinks of Galicia, they contemplate it within issues of affirming their cultural identity and, even, the necessity of a struggle that asserts their nationalism (Beramendi & Nuñez Seixas, 1995; Warfa & Ferrash, 2015). These issues are more acute today, as a kind of national and cultural affirmation in a globalized world and within the context of belonging to the European Union (Martinez-Herrera, 2002; Romão, 2008; Hooper & Puga Moruxa, 2011; Colmeiro, 2017, 2018). Thus, when discussing a project or event between Galicia and Portugal, beyond the objective dimension of what is at stake, often surprising interpretations arise.

The historical and cultural relations between Portugal and Galicia, have deep roots and continue to be significant today. Both Portugal and Galicia have shared historical roots dating back to very old periods. Ancestries ethnic groups and the organization of the territory in the Roman Empire², and later Germanic tribes, all left their marks on the region's history, contributing to the cultural similarities between the two.

2 In the late 3rd century, the Roman Emperor Diocletian reorganized the Iberian Peninsula's administration, giving rise to the province of *Gallaecia*.

One narrative about the influence of the Celtic culture, and their permanence in this part of the Northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, is substantially used to characterize the people of this region, especially in their oral, musical culture, and rural worldview.

During the Middle Ages, the Kingdom of Galicia and the County of Portugal were distinct but neighboring territories. The process of independence and gradual autonomy of the County of Portugal from the Kingdom of León and Galicia culminated in the 12th century. The establishment of Portugal as an independent kingdom, in the 12th century, marked a significant development in the region's history (Reilly, 1998, 1988, 1982; Mattoso, 1998, 2002; Marques, 2007, 2004). The Portuguese nobility and ruling class often had connections to Galicia, and there were exchanges of people, ideas, and culture between the regions³. The absence of solid political and administrative borders in the early centuries of the Portuguese kingdom favored the maintenance of familial, feudal-vassallic, and transfrontier patrimonial ties established during the phases of political and administrative unity preceding Portuguese independence (Mattoso, 2002, 1998; García Oro, 1981; Lopez Sangil, 2002). Very important for this 'familiar experience' is the language. The Galician-Portuguese language, a medieval Romance language, was widely spoken in both regions during the Middle Ages⁴. It had a profound influence on the development of Portuguese literature, particularly troubadour poetry. Today, both Portugal and Galicia have their own distinct languages (Portuguese and Galician, respectively), which are closely related and share similarities. There is a mutual understanding of the languages, and cultural similarities persist in cultural traditions. Galician-Portuguese is considered one of the origins of Portuguese. Currently, philologists and linguists recognize the origin of Portuguese in Galician-Portuguese (Cintra, 1971; Fernandez Rey, 1990; Saramago, 2006; Afonso & Saramago, 2012).

If for centuries, since Portugal's independence, the predominant construction has been a sense of division and belonging to different kingdoms and countries, it is worth noting that even during this long period, two realities compelled mutual relations and cultural exchange and influence (Cendón Fernández, 2006). These are the fact that the Diocese of Tui administered the parishes between the Minho River and the Lima River, which were in Portuguese territory, until the 14th century (1381)⁵, and the practice of the Camino de Santiago, a religious ritual of significant cultural and political impact. The Christian pilgrimage route of the Camino de Santiago, which passes through Galicia, attracted pilgrims from all over Europe, including Portugal. This pilgrimage route fostered cultural and religious interactions.

In recent decades, with entry into the EU, commercial and tourist exchanges have grown significantly. Cultural relations and administrative experiences have been revived, bringing the two regions, namely Northern Portugal and Galicia, closer together. What was once a practice among the people of the border, sometimes illegally and clandestinely – consider the history and stories of smuggling (Gonçalves 2008) ,

3 In the cultural realm, observe the influence of Galician Romanesque architecture in Northern Portugal, not surprising given the administration of part of the Portuguese territory by the Diocese of Tui. The workshop of the Cathedral of Tui was a school of arts and knowledge that had followers and practitioners south of the Minho River (Almeida, 1978; Rosas, 1987; Cendon Fernández, 2006, p 130).

4 In a study on the language used in mountain communities in Alto Minho, specifically in the parishes of Castro Laboreiro (Melgaço) and Riba de Mouro (Monção), we observed how the Galician-Portuguese language persists. These communities, largely resistant to the influence of modern Portuguese, have managed to preserve this linguistic heritage (Campelo, 2022).

5 Much like the Diocese of Porto, the Diocese of Tui is said to have originated from a division of the northern territories of the ancient Diocese of Braga, which occurred between the I and II Councils of Braga. From its origins until 1381, it occupied a transfrontier Atlantic strip, bounded to the north by the Ria de Vigo and to the south by the Lima River. This geographical profile placed it at the heart of a *Gallaecia*/Galician kingdom, where *Portucale* corresponded only to its southernmost extremity.

which here have their own terms – *'trapiche'*; *'trapicheiras'*⁶ – has evolved into a regional development strategy. Ancestral familiarity with historical and cultural foundations takes on particular significance today. Galicians and Portuguese, those along the Minho border, rediscover this shared history, shared culture, a language that is close and understandable. The strategies of division and affirmation of the border, contingencies of centralist and, until recently, dictatorial and violent national authorities (Rodríguez Gallardo, 2008), have transformed into strategies of interdependence and complementarity. Dialogue and an increasing awareness of 'brotherhood' materialize in common interests and claims that go beyond the regional and national space, already asserting themselves in the European arena.

Economically, both regions have significant trade relations. Portugal is one of Galicia's important trading partners, with the exchange of goods and services contributing to economic development in both regions. Galicia and Portugal share a booming tourism industry, attracting visitors from all over the world. The scenic landscapes, historic cities, and culinary delights of each area contribute to the mutual appeal. Now, cultural exchanges continue to take place, with artists, musicians, and academics from both regions collaborating on projects and initiatives that celebrate their shared heritage and promote cultural diversity. The creation of the Euroregion and Eurocities in various locations along the Galician-Portuguese border has significantly contributed to the more visible realization of these relationships.

3. Euroregions and Eurocities in the frontier of the Minho Valley

Several studies already reflect on the economic, cultural, and social impact of the establishment of Euro-regions, in this case, the one built between Galicia and Portugal (Cairo *et al.*, 2009; Cairo, 2011; Cancela Outeda, 2013; Domínguez, 2008; Varela *et al.*, 2015). But the increasing appreciation of Eurocities is, in a way, a response to the challenges in managing Euro-regions, submerged in the complexity of agreements between countries and in the actual autonomy and effectiveness of the authorities arising from these regional pacts. In fact, Varela "consider the Euro-region Galicia-North of Portugal as a metaphor and a device of the Government and its agents, which aims to organize formal, institutional and material activities on a fraction of the border between Spain and Portugal" (Varela *et al.*, 2015, p. 78). With the creation the Galicia-North of Portugal Working Community (1991), the cooperation between Portugal and Spain in cross-border territory increase. Several institutions and documents born after this new cooperation. The negotiation is between states, but is regional administration the members of discussion, in Spain the *Xunta de Galicia* and, in Portugal, the *Comissão de Coordenação e Desenvolvimento Regional do Norte* (CCDR-N). In this proximity, the role of municipalities and associations of municipalities, namely *Eixo Atlântico do Noroeste*, *European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation* (EGTC), or *Rede Ibérica de Entidades Transfronterizas*, (RIET), is extraordinary and the basis for others institutional organizations and cooperation⁷. Lately, a new organizational model has been used, the EGTC: *European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation*⁸.

6 *Trapiche*: Smuggling practice; *Trapicheiras*: women engaged in smuggling.

7 The main European of cross-border, inter-regional and territorial cooperation program is INTERREG (other is POCTEP).

8 In Portuguese: Agrupamentos Europeus de Cooperação Territorial (AECT). In our region, the AECT-Rio Minho (Miño). The Eurocities of Monção-Salvaterra de Miño (year 2015), Cerveira-Tomiño (year 2018), and Tui-Valença do Minho (year 2012) are included in the EGTC Rio Minho. (<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/pl/sheet/94/agrupamentos-europeus-de-cooperacao-territorial-aect>)

The Euro-regions introduced the regions and municipalities, their governments, administrations and citizens in the European multilevel space. Without them, the Europe of the States, Regions and Cities decapitates itself. The involvement of sub-national entities in European governance can increase its legitimacy and enhance its social perception, gradually. Because we already know that multilevel and cross-border governance is the method that best allows us to manage the conflict (Varela *et al.*, 2015, p. 84).

One of the most relevant problems is the perception by the inhabitants of the Euro-regions, about meaning, organization, objectives, and practices of these institutions. A large majority of people are unaware of the Euro-regions and lack knowledge of their organization and practices; the same can be said when inquiring about the cultural, social, and economic reality of the different region from the one being questioned, which is part of the Euroregion they belong to (Ferreira *et al.*, 2012). We need a new generation of border cooperation and governance (Jurado-Almonte *et al.*, 2020). In this way, the paradigm of multilevel governance (Hooghe & Marks, 2001) is applied. Managing and governing at various levels provides the opportunity to integrate various social actors and institutions. Could the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion be such a 'metaphor' for governance (Varela *et al.*, 2015, p. 78)?

The usage by the authors emphasizes a governance where the multi-level state is based on a 'liquid' social model, an evolution from the power of a 'solid' state (cf. Bauman's expression). The shift from a more formal and material management of border practices, practiced within and from governmental institutions to another form of management described as "informal and intangible cooperation based on citizens' practices and interactions" (Varela *et al.*, 2015, p. 80), suggests this liquid condition.

From an institutional perspective, Euroregions facilitate the development of strategies between national and regional authorities. The conventions for cross-border cooperation between Spain and Portugal began with the establishment of the Galicia-North of Portugal Working Community in 1991, focusing the analysis on this part of the Spanish-Portuguese territory. The organization among cities and municipalities revolves around the Atlantic Axis of the Northwestern Iberian Peninsula (1992) and Uniminho. The creation of the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) has materialized in a more effective organization of cross-border cooperation, utilizing funds from INTERREG.

Euroregions as a way of institutionalizing transnational cooperation at the regional level (Medeiros, 2011a). The institutionalization of border relations through programs and organizations supported by European regional policy strategies is met with other local strategies without institutional organization or under national authorities. While the former responds to power and knowledge sustained by political and economic elites, the latter emerges from local grassroots initiatives among associations and local actors in the aforementioned informal action. There is a concern that, in the first case, that of territorial management institutions derived from elites and extremely hierarchical and complex in formalization, citizens' perception may not reflect an understanding of their objectives (Ferreira *et al.*, 2012). Decisions and actions related to cross-border relationships go unnoticed by local populations. The gap between decision-makers and the recipients of regional intervention programs persists on both sides of the border. Programs are implemented, but each party does not grasp the impact of the program on mutual understanding among actors in different border areas. Knowing the reality of the 'other' is as crucial as understanding the processes of the relationship established in building convergence between neighboring regions.

European programs for Euroregions seem to be more of an opportunity for each of these border regions to think about their own development, still within a conception of relations between territories with identities

founded on nation-states, rather than the construction of a new border identity that responds to the challenges of valuing a new territorial conception, where the concept of the border is disruptive and innovative (Williams & Van der Velde, 2005; Wilson & Donnan, 1999; Melon Jiménez, 2014). However, at their core, the objectives of Euroregions sought to implement cultural cooperation programs, to create a 'cross-border identity,' as such a 'regional identity' is essential for any cross-border cooperation to have sound bases.

After regional policies formalized in Euroregions, the realization of greater proximity and participation can be observed in the creation of Eurocities (Vassi & Salas-Olmedo, 2014). We transition from a different form of cooperation: between the regional level (Euroregions) to the municipal level (Eurocities). We can say with Blatter (2003) that, once again, border regions have always been laboratories for international institution-building. The change in the 'level' of cooperation necessarily alters the style and forms of governance (Araújo & Varela Álvarez, 2014).

Eurocities is a term referring to a network and association of major European cities that work together to address common urban challenges, promote collaboration, and advocate for the interests of urban areas at the European Union (EU) level. It represents a platform for cities to exchange ideas, share best practices, and influence EU policies that impact urban life and development. The Eurocities network was established in 1986. Its primary purpose is to facilitate cooperation and dialogue among European cities. It is a non-profit organization that serves as a platform for city leaders, policymakers, and urban professionals to come together and work on issues of mutual concern⁹.

This project serves as a knowledge-sharing platform where member cities can exchange information, experiences, and best practices on a wide range of urban topics, including sustainability¹⁰, social inclusion, transport, innovation, and more. It contributes to policy development at the EU level by providing input and expertise on various urban issues. Additionally, it collaborates with EU institutions and agencies to shape policies that are more responsive to the urban context. The historical role of cities and their current prominence in sustainability, mobility, social inclusion, and managing people's expectations (Gehl, 2010; Fainstein, 2010), motivate the importance that the EU places on cities, and in this case, on Eurocities.

European policies for cross-border Eurocities aim for innovation in discussing values such as how we treat the territory and foster social integration and cohesion. While introducing innovative action strategies and contemplating cross-border relations within greater participatory proximity, the EU seeks to optimize the application of European funds. This approach allows for the analysis of the complexity of local problems, perceived meanings, and potential conflicts. Providing a response to the needs of residents in the influence area of cross-border cities, with shared services and joint actions to address common challenges, reinforces citizens' sense of belonging and commitment to European policies. National and European policies rarely descend to this level of action, which the experience of many municipalities has revealed as essential for effectively resolving problems and pooling efforts (Heinz, 2012). The most interesting aspect is considering that this proximity policy (Europe and the Central State reaching the community) has educated people to be more critical and participatory,

⁹ Official website: <https://eurocities.eu>

¹⁰ See the Paris Agreement (2016) and the Urban Agenda for the EU: in:

https://cdn.locomotive.works/sites/5ab410c8a2f42204838f797e/content_entry5ab410fb74c4833febe6c81a/5b97d05514ad66062f99bd66/files/C40_Report_Cities_leading_the_way.pdf?1541690095 and <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/urban-agenda/>

creating space to elevate their issues to positions of power, fostering cross-border cooperation from a bottom-up perspective (Medeiros, 2018; González Gómez *et al.*, 2019).

There are several studies on the evolution of the Spain-Portugal border within the European integration process (Cabero Diéguez & Caramelo, 2001; Trillo Santamaria & Lois González, 2011) and on the Galicia-Portugal Euroregion (Ferreira, 2019), its challenges, and problems (Medeiros, 2011b; Pardellas & Padín, 2017), as well as its specificity (Venade, 2004). The same applies to the Eurocities on the Iberian border as new cooperation strategies (Jurado-Almonte *et al.*, 2020, Cabero Diéguez & Caramelo, 2001; Jacinto, 2005; Medeiros, 2010, 2011; Ribeiro & Valente, 2013; Cancela Outeda, 2013). In an assessment of the action of the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion, we cite the work of Durà *et al.* (2018). The construction of Euroregions on the Iberian border should not forget the historical process we initially mentioned, the reality of certain historical moments involving a profound lack of knowledge among the populations about the reality of each country, despite historical and cultural proximity (Melon Jiménez, 2014, p. 20).

But, as we have been developing, the European process and regional policies have provided political, legal, and economic means, along with social and cultural elements, for the establishment of Euroregions. And among these, the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion stands out. In an analysis of the various Euroregions along the Iberian borders, how is it summarized? The analysis of best practices in the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion¹¹ (date of creation : 2008; countries: ES/PT; area: 50 000 km²; population: 6 500 000) can be found on pages 102 – 103 of Durà *et al.* (2018). The authors provide a summary of the Euro-region:

The border area between Galicia and Northern Portugal has been marked by a relatively recent but solid tradition of Cross-Border Cooperation. Even before the birth of the Euroregion, a dedicated Working Community was set up in 1991 and a cross-border city network (Eixo Atlántico) followed in 1992. The Euroregion was therefore considered as a form of consolidation of the border area on a regional scale. Its wide territory occupies the entire space of the northwestern Iberian Peninsula, which despite being far from the main European axis, it is characterized by the presence of numerous urban areas. Furthermore, rural and coastal environments also form part of the territorial composition of this geographical area. At the institutional level, the EGTC (one of the first employed in the EU) allows a faster approach to the development of projects, hence making the Euroregion the executive branch of the Working Community and thus sharing with them the management board. Its general strategy is oriented towards supporting public/private actors' partnerships reinforcing cross-border action in different thematic sectors and at different territorial levels (Durà *et al.*, 2018, p. 102).

We should highlight the fact that, initially, the priorities of the Euro-region were focused on issues of accessibility and transportation, social cohesion and integration, R&I, and local economic development. It is noteworthy that there is no mention of education and culture, governance, health, environment, security, and territorial planning (Durà *et al.*, 2018, p. 102). However, the only project that the authors highlight in their reflection on Best Practices on this Euroregion is the 'IACOBUS PROGRAM.' The program involves various public universities and polytechnics in this Euro-region. Certainly, it was conceived within the R&I priority, but it is also clearly associated with education. This program is described as follows:

11 The report also analyzed the Chaves-Verín Eurocity, which is located within the territorial space of the Galicia-North Portugal Euroregion.

The rationale for this CBC program can be found in the Protocol of Cultural, Scientific and Pedagogical Cooperation between Universities and Higher Education Centers of the Galicia-Northern Portugal Euroregion (which was signed in 2014 by 12 educational entities, the Xunta de Galicia and the CCDR-N). Its main objective is the promotion and development of higher education and scientific and technological research at the Euroregional level. It is an action planned among the priorities of the Joint Investment Plan of the Euroregion (2014-2020) and financed thanks to the funds of the Operational Program of Cross-Border Cooperation Spain-Portugal (POCTEP). Specifically, the Program promotes cooperation activities and exchange between human resources (teachers and researchers, administration staff and services) of the aforementioned educational entities for the sharing of training, research and dissemination activities (Durà *et al.*, 2018, p. 103).

Most studies on transborder spaces, in the discussion about Euroregions and Eurocities, have been conducted by geographers, economists, sociologists, and even historians. Anthropological studies have often focused on these border territories and how they construct a 'border culture' and 'border identities.' Donnan & Wilson's research (1994, 1998, 1999) provided an anthropological approach to the construction of border identities within the traditional relationship between the State and the Nation. Borders are places of cultural exchange, where distinct identities experience the discovery of 'self' and 'other.' In the specific case of Donnan & Wilson (1999), it reveals how the border itself facilitates the role of the State, ethnicity, symbols present and demarcated on each transnational side, influencing attitudes, behaviors, and rituals of identity.

In this context of a border's ability to emphasize or attenuate identity differences, the discussion about so-called 'border identities' can be interesting (Uriarte, 1994; Valcuende del Rio, 1998; Amante, 2007). Nation-States often find it beneficial to emphasize icons and narratives that reinforce differences, turning border crossing locations into reinforcements of national identity construction, in contrast to the identity of the 'other' situated beyond the border. Sometimes, this identity of distinction is claimed by social actors, reproducing power stereotypes (Silva, 2018; Medeiros, 2005). In turn, the experience and daily life of the border, the knowledge, and the sharing of this condition among interacting communities, support this condition of 'border identities' (Cunha, 2006; Pereiro *et al.*, 2008; Orduna Portus, 2016).

In the case of the Minho River border between Galicia and Northern Portugal, beyond the specificity of the centuries-old history of the Portuguese-Spanish border, other dimensions mentioned provide new possibilities in a globalized world where the meanings of borders have blurred (Albuquerque, 2012; Herzog, 2015). Moreover, in this case, it is even more 'immaterial' as the construction of the EU has nullified the experience of internal borders and created mechanisms for integrated territorial management, for greater cohesion (Perkmann, 2003; Cavaco, 1997). While some saw economic possibilities, particularly those related to tourism (Hernández Ramírez, 2017), others valued another condition of regional citizenship and its implications for changing cross-border relations (Löfgren 2008; Pujadas Muñoz *et al.*, 1999; Paasi, 2009). There are also realities that were always present but overlooked by an elitist and centralist mindset that was unaware of the relations and collaboration potential in territories peripheral to their own countries and, therefore, marginalized.

What is at stake is the ability of populations to manage their daily lives, a kind of empowerment to take control of their individual and collective lives, independent of the organization of centralized power. This ability to have power and control over family and community life was seen in the early anthropological studies in Portugal when the focus was on studying so-called 'communitarian' societies. Noteworthy, in the case of

cross-border communities, is the work of Jorge de Dias in *Rio de Onor, an agro-pastoral communitarianism* (Dias, 1981 [1953]). He not only observed what he considered a communitarian society but also noted that this community had relations with the one on the Spanish side of the border, treating them as a single community. Returning to this field of research, whether local or with another approach, highlights relations between the margins and blurs the reductionist view of communitarianism (Brito 1996). The works of anthropologist Paula Godinho (cf. Godinho 2014) or compilations organized by Xerardo Pereiro (Pereiro *et al.*, 2008) in the Galician-Portuguese border region, particularly between the territories of Trás-os-Montes and Galicia, offer a different perspective on cross-border relations. Analyzing historical conflicts, particularly during the dictatorship era, smuggling, or the historical reality of Couto Misto/Mixto, reveals a complexity of relations and identity affiliations. These communities, situated in peripheral and marginalized areas, developed unusual relationships of complicity and familiarity, a kind of 'refugee identity,' managing violence and centralized power, both from Madrid and Lisbon. Current experiences, materialized in new local civic and cultural associations, events, and community practices related to gastronomy and the memory of smuggling, reinforce a shared identity and a belonging managed by the communities.

The experience of Couto Misto/Mixto does not happen at the Minho River border, but complicity and identity affiliations frequently intersect. Any reading and interpretation of citizens' practices must focus on this complexity and not be reduced to the valorization of a single perspective, whether reinforcing national identity, refuge, or a simple 'regionaut.' The implications of the moment or the issues being debated and the actors in dialogue or confrontation define the identity position taken by the interlocutors. However, to conclude, the mechanisms, organizations, and affiliations created or made possible by European cohesion, cross-border programs, and institutions will place previous identity affiliations on another level, reinforcing or questioning them, creating a new position. This happens with any activity or organized action within the concept of a Euroregion or Eurocity. The reinforcement of the sense of belonging, even if supported by these new ways of organizing and thinking about the border, varies and finds more or less acceptance based on the experienced history of cross-border relations. The case of the Galicia-Northern Portugal relationship and the Eurocities created there, while fitting into a common European process, takes on another identity participation due to historical relations and cultural identities.

3.1. Agenda /Axenda 2030 Eurocity Cerveira – Tomiño

The EU has developed a significant body of reflection and documentation for urban policies (Decoville *et al.*, 2015; González Medina & Fedeli, 2015). Concerns for inclusive, sustainable, and cohesive urban development (Dale, 2001) have led to discussions about the process of an Urban Agenda (Atkinson, 2001). The interest extends to both large cities and smaller ones located in marginalized spaces, outside major European centers, i.e., peripheral areas. It is in this peripheral dimension that some cities situated in border regions stand out (Sohn & Stambolic, 2013). The potential for cooperation between cities in cross-border spaces, as is the case with Eurocities, whether small or medium-sized, proves to be challenging (Decoville *et al.*, 2015). These Eurocities challenge governance systems. However, this does not eliminate all difficulties:

...many Euroregions today still confront a significant number of legal, economic and administrative obstacles that limit the optimal implementation of cross-border initiatives. Furthermore, Euroregions are too often subject to fragile and everchanging governance structures based on the political will of its territorial members, while usually manned by small technical teams forced to override complex juridical frameworks to make cooperation work (Durà *et al.*, 2018, p. 17).

Involving civil society, associations, and individuals in dialogue forums, consultation processes, and decision-making is the strategy for flexibility and democratization of the decision-making and governance process.

This participation is particularly relevant in the case of Eurocities because it must be inclusive and open to the 'other,' to the different, which brings about a conscious and familiar sense of belonging. It's a form of horizontal governance (Jambrovic 2018). The governance process itself must be an educational process of alterity and the discovery of a new community of belonging. This sense is cultivated and should be promoted from the very beginning in this new form of governance.

The case study we want to present here about Eurocities, arises from the construction of the 2030 Agenda/Axenda for Cerveira – Tomiño Euricity (Portugal – Galicia). The working criteria were based on the EU policies for cities and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030. The SDGs are a set of global objectives aimed at addressing various social, economic, and environmental challenges to achieve a more sustainable and equitable world (AAVV 2017)¹². It is formally known as the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." Adopted in September 2015, the agenda outlines a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 169 targets, addressing a wide range of global challenges.

The primary aim of Agenda 2030 is to promote sustainable development, which encompasses economic, social, and environmental dimensions. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals cover various issues, including poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality, clean water, affordable and clean energy, decent work, industry innovation, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace, justice, and strong institutions, and partnerships for the goals. Organizations and countries around the world use the Agenda 2030 framework as a guide for shaping their policies and initiatives to contribute to a more sustainable and equitable future. The strategy for the Agenda/Axenda 2030 Cerveira – Tomiño Eurocity, are the criterion for reflection and implementation the objectives of the UN's Agenda 2030 (Gusman; Lois Gonzalez & Campelo 2023).

If European policies, through the creation of Eurocities and the promotion of local identity by decentralizing power and encouraging problem-solving through the participation of local populations¹³, define a new legitimacy of power, this mark has been present since the beginning in the construction of this Agenda 2030 for Cerveira-Tomiño. As objectives of the Agenda/Axenda 2030 for this Eurocity, we cite:

¹² See the Official Website of UN: Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: <https://sdgs.un.org/publications/transforming-our-world-2030-agenda-sustainable-development-17981>

¹³ The published work describes, in galician language, the process and European funding for this Agenda: *The participatory process for the development of this Agenda 2030 is part of Project 0780_AMIZADE_1_P: 'Strategic consolidation of transborder cooperation between Cerveira and Tomiño,' co-financed at 75% by the 6th call INTERREG VA POC/TEP 2014-2020, EU FEDER funds.*

Cerveira and Tomiño share the need to address the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 and the environmental challenges, social integration, mobility, and collectivity prioritized on the European scale for 2021-2027. Circular economy, sustainability, energy transition, and efficiency. The promotion of the local economy and the preservation of natural and cultural heritage will be priorities in the joint activity of the two municipalities (Gusman, Lois Gonzales & Campelo, 2015, p. 12).

To achieve these objectives, public officials, politicians, and technical experts entrusted a team of researchers to shape the Agenda. The methodology employed in implementing this project was to, after involving technicians and decision-makers in the defined strategy, develop the concept of good governance. This governance involves identifying and engaging key actors (stakeholders), responsible for decision-making in different areas of the Agenda, ranging from civil society and the private sector to elected authorities and public administration. This expresses the aspiration for the Eurocity community:

In the case of the Eurocity Cerveira – Tomiño, governance is ensured by a governance model based on technical and political cooperation, the Strategic Management Committee, consisting of leaders from each entity, and assisted by a Joint Technical Structure. Governance should be inclusive, transparent, and participatory, ensuring the representativeness and diversity of perspectives in defining the objectives and actions of the agenda (Gusman, Lois Gonzalez & Campelo, 2015, p. 13).

Managing an Agenda 2030 requires technical expertise and specialized monitoring units focused on the implementation and tracking of actions. However, defining a governance model in line with the strategic goals of societal integration, in an inclusive and representative proposal, requires its implementation at the very moment prior to defining the implementation of the SDGs. Hence, the involvement of the general population, even those not part of civil society organizations, is imperative. The concepts of 'sense of belonging' and 'involvement of the population' are based on the understanding of territorial identity and operative and dynamic citizenship. The success of an Agenda for the Eurocity is only possible by combining technical knowledge with public consultation and participation. In other words, democratic legitimacy is no longer limited to delegating decision-making power to elected authority but involves a continuously active process of dialogue and action. Hence, the emphasis on the communicational process:

Communication plays a fundamental role in all phases of the Urban Agenda. It is crucial to establish effective communication channels to inform, engage, and mobilize various stakeholders. Clear and accessible communication helps disseminate the objectives, results, and benefits of the Agenda, while also encouraging public participation (Gusman, Lois González & Campelo, 2015, p. 14).

The development of the Agenda followed these principles, and initially, it gathered statistical data on the demographics, economy, social and natural composition, culture, and infrastructure of the two bordering municipalities that constitute the Eurocity Cerveira-Tomiño. To assess the statistical values, official data available at the national and local levels were used; for other dimensions, municipal representatives, specialized

technicians, and the population were consulted. A series of sectorial meetings, both at the level of specific areas and with age groups having diverse interests and concerns, took place throughout this project. The objective was to gather information, understand the problems, and assess the real aspirations and expectations of the population for the next decade.

The meetings were conducted in sessions where members from both municipalities (i.e., both countries) participated. The long common history, as well as a very close 'cultural identity,' strengthened the shared commitment to the defense of a development that adheres to the criteria of the SDGs. More than convincing the population about the importance of inclusive, sustainable territorial development and overcoming the significant challenges that future society will face, the conclusions from the working groups gave rise to a demand from the community representatives for planning this type of development. Some points were highlighted: the demographic issue, mobility, and the sharing of synergies (especially in services), awareness of a shared culture, the need for an economy capable of attracting and retaining populations and valuing endogenous resources. Critical to the Agenda is the monitoring of the implementation of this development and citizenship strategy, using established tracking indicators. This way, there will be a continuous assessment of the strategy and defined objectives, incorporating the population into this evaluation and monitoring. This methodology allows for an analysis, with well-defined criteria, of the measures decided in the Agenda, checking how they were or were not implemented, their effectiveness, and the community's understanding of the process in the Eurocity.

The Agenda 2030 project for the Cerveira-Tomiño Eurocity, however technical it may seem, was a citizenship process. It also realizes the objectives of European policies when it established the possibility of Eurocities; it strengthens political legitimacy and gives the local population a sense of territorial belonging, deepening the goals of Euroregions.

4. Portuguese and Galician Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)

Throughout this work, we present various historical, political, and cultural dimensions of the proximity between the territories of Northern Portugal and Galicia (Spain). The fact that these territories have shared a common past, which has always connected them despite historical vicissitudes, reflected in cultural and linguistic familiarity, gives them capabilities and opportunities rarely found among bordering regions. We are familiar with other European border territories that can claim shared cultural practices and historical moments, but, due to various factors, none 'feels' this familiarity and 'complicity' as the populations of the extended territory divided by the Minho River border¹⁴.

As we have seen, from the early struggles for independence in Portugal in the 12th century to the contemporary impact of the two Iberian dictatorships in the 20th century, they have marked the relations between Portugal and Spain and, consequently, between Northern Portugal and Galicia. However, historical is the presence of influential and powerful families from Galicia in the new Kingdom of Portugal, and in the 20th century, the relationship between Galician intellectuals and those from Northern Portugal. But if this awareness of familiarity (or even kinship) and the relations of proximity existed among the populations of the border region and among an

¹⁴ This closeness and familiarity are well described in the famous poem by the poet João Verde: "*Vendo-os assim tão pertinho/ a Galiza mail' o Minho,/ são como dois namorados / que o rio traz separados / quasi desde o nascimento./ Deixal-os, pois, namorar / já que os paes para casar/ lhes não dão consentimento.*" ("Seeing them so close together / Galicia and Minho / are like two lovers / that the river keeps apart / almost since birth. / Let them, therefore, court / since the parents for marriage / do not give their consent.").

intellectual elite, the same did not apply at the level of a more extensive territory. It is the end of the dictatorship and the common membership in the EU that will abolish the 'experience' of physical border and initiate new complicity and discoveries.

The sharing of a common culture, in its diversity, given the historical specificities and different influences endured over centuries, and a language that has such close proximity, as we have already analyzed, shapes the cultural, political, and even economic relations that exist today. The symbolic imaginary, festive traditions and rituals, oral literature, etc., when compared, highlight the similarities, the common origins, the aforementioned sense of familiarity (Coordenación Xeral PNO! 2015).

The students from schools on both sides of the Minho River, hailing from the Galicia region and Northern Portugal, once lived such an experience. When the road bridge between the town of Monção in Portugal and Salvaterra do Miño in Galicia was inaugurated, Galician and Portuguese teachers from this region decided to undertake an unprecedented activity. Through two local radios, they engaged students from both banks of the Minho in dialogue and celebration of their cultural heritage. The experience was so enthusiastic and surprising that they continue to commemorate this event even today, nearly 30 years later, under the organization of a Teachers' Association called "Ponte... nas ondas!¹⁵". When they did it for the first time, the young students were surprised to discover that they shared very similar folk songs! After all, those on the other side of the border were closer than they had imagined. The concept of a 'brotherly people' finally had evidence for them that they had never perceived before. Hence, the emotion of feeling, in some way, members of a single family. Here is a transcription of what the three main responsible individuals for the "Ponte... nas Ondas!" Association wrote when they celebrated 20 years of work:

Ponte... nas ondas!" is a Cultural and Pedagogical Association that was established in the year 1995 as a communication project between Galicia and Portugal, providing an opportunity to build the Euroregion from the grassroots level. Moreover, this communication experience served to introduce a new way of working with ICTs and media into the educational system (Coordinación Xeral Ponte... nas Ondas, 2015, p. 17).

The success of the "Ponte... nas ondas!" project over almost three decades is acknowledged by the school community, cultural institutions, and regional, national, and international authorities. A vast number of research and cultural heritage exhibition activities focused on Galician-Portuguese heritage, always involving young students, along with publications and cultural festivals, constitute a cultural heritage collection of this association. The impact of its pedagogical methodology is studied in universities (Cid, 2015), as well as the significance of promoting Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) from the Euroregion to the continents of Africa and South America, where communities also serve as heirs and contributors to the expression of this cultural heritage. The project has so effectively united and created bonds among the custodians of the common cultural heritage that the association and these custodians collaborated on a UNESCO World Heritage nomination. However, for various reasons, the UN organization advised that the nomination be reformulated due to the extensive and diverse nature of the proposal (Campelo & González

¹⁵ The name of the association, "Ponte... nas ondas!" explains its origin: it was born at the inauguration of a physical bridge connecting the two towns separated by the Minho River. It also explains the creation of an event through a non-physical 'bridge,' existing in the waves of radio. This Cultural and Pedagogical Association explores information technologies to communicate the material and immaterial culture of Galicia and Portugal in schools and educational interaction spaces.

Reboredo 2015). This reformulation never materialized into a new nomination submission, but the work within the spirit of UNESCO has always been a advocated strategy, uniting the local community and the school through heritage and cultural life. Following this work, Ponte... nas ondas! became integrated as a consultant for UNESCO on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), participating in events and contributing activities. Finally, the highest recognition of the Ponte... nas ondas! work and methodology emerged in 2022, with the designation of Ponte... nas ondas! as a Best Practice in Intangible Cultural Heritage by the Committee of Experts and through unanimous voting by all UNESCO Member States.

This UNESCO recognition is due to the exceptional work of Ponte... nas ondas! in schools with intangible cultural heritage, using innovative techniques and collaborating with school communities from different countries, united by cultural heritage. The perseverance of this association and the maintenance of its working methodology do not solely result from the numerous awards received over the decades. It corresponds to an experience of satisfaction and acknowledgment from the school community, which, despite being from different countries, discovers in cultural heritage a means of communication, knowledge, and wisdom contributing to their citizenship and intercultural dialogue. By recognizing the inherited heritage, they assume the responsibility to preserve, understand, and promote it. Moreover, they take on the duty to innovate learning, to be creative in building an inclusive, sustainable, and peaceful territory, in line with UNESCO's objectives.

The history of Ponte... nas ondas!, the collection resulting from numerous research and publication efforts, as well as the desire to continue and provide physical proximity to the project, led to ongoing discussions about the possibility of having a physical space to showcase their project and the intangible Galician-Portuguese cultural heritage. It is from these discussions, combining wills and institutions managing the Euroregion, that the project for the Galician-Portuguese Intangible Cultural Heritage Center emerged.

4.1. The Center for Galician-Portuguese Intangible Cultural Heritage

The creation of the Galician-Portuguese Intangible Cultural Heritage Center, following collaborative work with the NGO Ponte nas...ondas! and other institutions. Following a European project on cultural heritage, the organization 'AECT – Rio Minho/Miño'¹⁶ invited the Ponte... nas ondas! association to develop a project to survey the ICH (Intangible Cultural Heritage) in its area of responsibility¹⁷.

During this project, the working group of Ponte... nas ondas! sensitized the technicians of the project within AECT – Rio Mino/Miño to the need for a place where the ICH could be exhibited and experienced by the Luso-Galician community and the school communities on both banks of the Minho River. At a certain point, the discussion shifted to political authorities presiding over AECT, emphasizing the project's opportunities for the border territory and even for an international dimension, given the association's activity's projection since its recognition as a Best Practice with ICH by UNESCO. The headquarters of AECT – Rio Miño is in the city of Valença do Minho. This city is on the opposite bank of the Galician city of Tui, and together they form the Valença-Tui Eurocity. Thus, the possibility of locating the said Center in Tui was also evaluated, but at a certain moment, the Mayor of Valença understood the relevance of the project and the opportunity for differentiation it would bring to his city. As a result, he presented a location and building that had previously been desired

¹⁶ European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

¹⁷ The project was "Livhes – Sudoe (See: www.livhes.eu).

by the idea's promoters but seemed inaccessible: the building of the old Customs House, very close to the entrance, on the Portuguese side, of the old bridge that connected the banks and the countries¹⁸.

The building itself is a monument of high symbolic value, in addition to its exceptional architectural and artistic features (From the beginning of the sixties). Symbolic in that, as an administrative building on the Portuguese side of the border, it encapsulates all the difficulties of crossing the border. How much legal and administrative history it preserves! How many stories were lived there by people who wanted to emigrate, visit Spain, or trade products! It is the ultimate symbol of the difficulties, fears, and closures between two peoples so close and with such a familiar culture. And what about the presence of cells for people caught in illegality constructed by the dictatorships? But it is also an architectural and artistic monument. A modernist building, project of the architect José Carlos Loureiro (1925-2022), spacious and open (unlike the administrative/police body that managed it), it features a mural by the great modernist artist Júlio Resende (1917-2011)¹⁹ and a work by the exceptional sculptor Arlindo Rocha (1921-1999), pioneer in abstract sculpture in Portugal.

The adaptation project of the Customs building in Valença do Minho to the Center for Galician-Portuguese Intangible Cultural Heritage will be developed based on a candidacy already submitted to the Interreg-Sudoe 2014-2020 program.

These communities have always coexisted with the imaginary line that separates them and with the different ways of turning it into an added value rather than a constraint to their quality of life. The ties created by a shared history with encounters and disagreements generate a material and, above all, intangible heritage whose value is not adequately recognized. It is in this context that the CPCIR_A_RAIA project is presented, whose main objective is the joint preservation, protection, and promotion of the cultural heritage of the Raia Minhota. Centred around a symbolic building of raiana culture – the Customs House – and based on the well-established transborder cooperation of the Eurocity Valença-Tui and its influential territory, the project aims to promote research, protection of historical memory, diffusion, and promotion of the cultural heritage associated with the Galicia-Northern Portugal border. (Abstract of the INTERREG Funding Application Form for this Project).

In the submitted application, the following points are emphasized the different actions in the Activity 1:

Research, identification, characterization, and inventorying of the intangible cultural heritage of the Minho border region.

Interactive map of the intangible cultural heritage of the Galician-Portuguese culture.

At the root of Eurocitizenship: the Raian culture – a program for dissemination and promotion.

¹⁸ See the press release delivered to the media: "The installation of the center, according to the results from the signing of a cooperation protocol between the Municipality of Valença, the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) Rio Minho, and the Cultural and Educational Association Ponte... nas Ondas! According to the district municipality, "this new structure will be developed within the scope of the European project Livhes – Sudoe, which chose the work of the Ponte...nas Ondas! Association as a representative good practice experience of the Euroregion."

<https://www.diariodominho.pt/noticias/regiao/antiga-alfandega-valenca-tui-recebe-centro-de-patrimonio-imaterial-galego-portugues-246042>

¹⁹ The authorship of the panel has been attributed to various individuals over time. The authorship of José Gastão Seixas (1926-1982) still appears in several texts. However, during a restoration of the artwork in 2015, the true identity of the artist was revealed, as the name "Júlio Resende" was discovered. This authorship is testified in a comment found in the newspaper "Público" (05.04.2017) when the news was published. The commentator, named Querubino Silva, wrote: "I was about 9 years old, and these little stones were all cut from 2x2 tiles into four, by me and the Daughter of the late Prof. Resende, on weekends."

The development of this project has already had an initial task, which consisted of creating a website on the Internet, named “*Alfândega Imaterial*” (Immaterial Customs)²⁰.

The initiatives and work on defining the objectives and means of implementing the Galician-Portuguese Intangible Culture Center, despite having a historical precedent stemming from the work of academic researchers and individuals associated with Ponte... nas ondas! projects, continue to generate debate and strengthen dialogue among institutions, public administrations, and local society, where schools play a crucial role. However, the promoters believe this project to be a milestone in the valorization and understanding of Galician-Portuguese Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH). The potential of the Center will undoubtedly provide greater cohesion to the border territory, as it will support, through the awareness of a shared culture, other local development projects and the creation of forums for discussion among institutions, organizations, school structures, and society at large about the future of this border territory.

Conclusion

The challenges of implementing EU policies within a paradigm of Euro-citizenship and public participation at the regional and local levels have forced the EU to modify its initial programs. Simultaneously, as it seeks to assert its role in an increasingly globalized world, given the growing urgency to negotiate its geostrategic position, the EU recognizes the obligation to address the issues felt by European communities and citizens. Disregarding this latter objective means relinquishing its democratic legitimacy and conceding power to the growing nationalist and regional populist movements within the European space, ultimately leading to the destruction of the EU.

Contrary to what might be assumed, by emphasizing this policy of proximity and encouraging Euroregional bodies and Eurocities with specific funding, the EU strengthens both its power and image among populations and becomes more influential internationally. It may seem paradoxical, but as European actors and citizens feel like participants and perceive the relevance of European policies in their daily lives, they better understand the connection between these policies and what the European Union advocates on a global scale. The EU's global significance is measured by its relevance to the issues experienced by its regional and local communities. The awareness that global issues result from local concerns, such as sustainability, human rights, and the democratic participation of social actors, impacts the resolution of quality-of-life issues such as health, social justice, education, cultural citizenship, or sustainable mobility, making this relationship between the local and the global more evident.

The two case studies discussed here demonstrate how a transborder territory, a Euroregion, by valuing and building on a long-shared history, can move towards dynamics of change and development. Development in its most complex sense, where the dignity of people and their cultural heritage are the security of stability amid urgent changes. The fact that Galicia and Northern Portugal are heirs to a very rich ICH does not eliminate, from the outset, possible conflicts and discussions that national discourses or particular interests may encourage.

Over the past decades, with the end of dictatorships and the possibilities enabled by joining the EU, the disappearance of ‘closed borders,’ what this Euroregion discovered was a potential for coexistence and common development as it had never experienced in the past centuries. The existence of funding programs and

20 See: <https://alfandegaimaterial.eu> e <https://alfandegaimaterial.eu/agentes-do-patrimonio/>

specialized entities to manage these projects resulted in increased cross-border activities, economic growth, and the emergence of a cultural identity based on a shared past but now encouraged by Euro-citizenship. If from these collaborative action entities emerged the possibility of materializing a cultural organization that had already been conceived and desired by individuals and cultural and educational associations, this only confirms the usefulness and urgency of implementing European organizations and funding for cross-border regions. From the project of the Galician-Portuguese Intangible Cultural Heritage Center, we can summarize the following impacts on this Euroregion:

- The rediscovery of a shared intangible culture.
- The appreciation of traditional knowledge to address contemporary challenges.
- The construction of citizenship through culture and hybrid identities, capable of innovating and bringing a sustainable future to communities.
- A pedagogical experience that opens up to the world and involves children, students, at the center of the dialogue between cultures.
- An example that a project born from the social base, in schools, receives support from regional political authorities and European funding.

The cooperation between Galicia and Portugal, as a Euroregion or in Eurocities, is the best way to express the possibilities of building European citizenship in this territory. The experience of the two projects, the Galician-Portuguese Intangible Cultural Heritage, now with the projection of its dissemination and study center, and the construction of the 2030 Agenda/Axenda for the Eurocity Cerveira-Tomiño, demonstrated how the means used to bring people and cross-border decision-makers together unveiled a heritage that was previously undervalued. This heritage is the shared cultural heritage and the familiarity with the problems and expectations of local populations. Knowledge created by the peripheral situation has preserved the emotion of a struggle to overcome the difficulties that the two parts of the Euroregion (and now, the world in general) will have to face: greater social justice, understanding shared and sometimes hybrid border identities solidified through continuous negotiation, and finally, responses to the challenges of sustainability. These responses lie in the awareness of a Euroregional, European citizenship where power must come from a social cohesion built from the territorial base.

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