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European Union network governance? Third sector experiences in the Basque and Irish border regions

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Abstract: This paper involves a comparative examination of Third (not for profit) sector cross-border co-operation in the Basque (France/Spain) and Irish (UK/Ireland) border regions. The aim is to provide evidence-based research on cross-border co-operation and the role of the Third sector in network governance and Europeanisation. The paper's objectives are: to examine institutionalised cross-border activity involving the Third sector in two comparable EU border regions and use its empirical findings to interrogate concepts of Europeanisation and network governance; to specify and assess factors which help and hinder Third sector cross-border cooperation; and to add to the existing scientific literature on comparative approaches to Basque and Irish politics which, thus far, has been primarily concerned with questions of identity and culture, ethno-national conflict and conflict transformation. In particular, we examine cross-border co-operation in the areas of minority languages, tourism and ecotourism, and sustainable economic development. We also consider the question of the sustainability of network governance in these regions in light of the less favourable EU funding environment following EU enlargement in 2004 and the post-2008 economic turmoil affecting the relevant EU member states.

Introduction

Border security, economic turmoil and the EU political crisis have become the inter-related priorities of political, media and academic discourses on the process of European integration. Long gone are the days when the subject of cross-border co-operation generated a healthy interest among academics and reflective journalists. The drama of 11 September 2001 marked a sea change in interest and discourse. Yet, EU cross-border co-operation did not suddenly cease. Funding applications continued to be submitted, projects were launched and, yes, many continued to be realised. It may no longer be fashionable but cross-border cooperation continues to live, albeit in straightened economic times and through the EU's prolonged political crisis. Indeed, this dark economic and political climate suggests that cross-border co-operation is now more relevant than ever. Involving as it does sub-state transterritorial mobilizations, civil society and Third sector as non-state and non-market political and economic agency, and overlapping of socio-economic, political and identity-related issues, cross-border co-operation potentially helps address the economic turmoil and political crisis faced by the EU and its member states and regions. Therefore, its study is as pertinent now as it was in good economic and political times.

This paper emanates from research¹ involving a comparative examination of Third ‘not for profit’ sector cross-border co-operation in the Basque (France/Spain)² and Irish (UK/Ireland)³ border regions. The aim is to provide evidence-based research on cross-border co-operation and the role of the Third sector in network governance and Europeanisation. Does Third sector cross-border activity help constitute ‘network governance’ across the respective borders? In this context we follow Klijn and Skelcher’s reference to network governance as ‘public policy making and implementation through a web of relationships between government, business and civil society actors’ (2007, p. 587). The involvement of these ‘civil society actors’, more precisely, the Third ‘not for profit’ sector is our primary focus.

Our key research questions are: What is the nature of cross-border network governance in the Basque and Irish border regions? Is it genuinely cross-border or is it ‘back-to-back’ co-operation whereby groups co-operate cross-border at the funding application stage then establish separate projects on either side of the border once funding is secured? To what extent do Third sector groups actively contribute to new governance networks which are moving ‘beyond the institutionalised peak bargaining of corporatism to more dispersed, flexible and, in some cases, transparent modes of agenda-setting, policy-making and implementation’? And, how integral are they to ‘new hybrid organisational forms that play a major role in shaping and delivering public policy to citizens and communities’ (Klijn & Skelcher, 2007, p. 588)? What does it reveal about the balance between the ‘service delivery’ function of Third sector organisations and their role, as campaigning organisations, in shaping a cross-border public sphere, that is, in shaping a common discourse on policy across state borders? Finally, as a crucial factor in the Basque and Irish cases, what is the role played by identity politics in structuring or hindering these cross-border relations?

Methodologically, the research builds on a fieldwork conducted by the two authors in their respective border regions. The approach adopted by each is qualitative with semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and process tracing being the integral elements. In addition, this research adopts a comparative analysis to advance knowledge of Third sector involvement in cross-border co-operation and ‘network governance’. The paper is structured as follows: section 1: the approach adopted; section 2: policy background: the institutionalization of cross-border relations in the Basque and Irish border regions; section 3: sectoral illustrations; 4: conclusions.

1. The approach adopted

Our approach is anchored in the existing literature on two inter-related issues: Europeanization and cross-border cooperation on the one side, and the more specific literature on the Basque-Irish comparison.

¹ This research collaboration associates the Centre Emile Durkheim (CNRS-Sciences Po Bordeaux) and the Centre for International Borders Research, and the School of Politics, International Studies, and Philosophy both at Queen’s University, Belfast. This paper is an output from the research project *Transfrontier network governance ? Third sector experiences in the border regions of the UK and France* (Aquitaine Region-Sciences po Bordeaux). Xabier Itçaina also acknowledges the support of the European Commission under a Marie Curie Fellowship grant at the European University Institute, Florence.

² The Basque border region comprises of the French Basque region, which is part of the department of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques, and the Spanish Basque areas belonging to the Basque Autonomous Community and to the Foral Community of Navarra.

³ The Irish border region comprises of local authority areas that are contiguous to the border, North and South.

- Europeanisation and EU-sponsored cross-border cooperation.

Taken together, debates on Europeanisation and network governance amount to an attempt to encapsulate the impact of European integration - principally but not entirely conceived as EU integration - on the national arena (Borneman and Fowler 1997; Shore 2000; Snyder 2000; Featherstone and Radaelli 2003; Delanty and Rumford 2005; Dell'Olio 2005; Richardson 2006). EU-sponsored cross-border cooperation has been considered from the perspective of identity politics and affiliations (Lijkanen, 2008; McCall, 2003; Smeja, 2007;), conflict transformation (McCall, 2013); spatial labour mobility and cross-border commuting (Gottholmseder and Theurl, 2007), geoeconomics (Sparke, 2002); institutionalist perspectives on strategies of cross-border integration (Hansen and Serin, 2007), and micro-regionalism and regional development (Gorzalak, 2006; Reuter, 2007). We locate our research within wider debates about evolving forms of EU governance. Primarily, our research evidence can be used to assess a centripetal movement in governance whereby decision-making in some policy areas affecting the Basque and Irish border regions has spun away from the nation-state level (Marks and McAdam, 1996). In particular, network governance has emerged as a key EU policy strategy, particularly in the realm of regional policy. In this regional realm network governance strategy is based on cross-sectoral, multilevel, 'transnational collaborations' for tackling socio-economic problems that defy modern state approaches⁴ (Reuter 2007). Transnational collaborations are understood here to refer to 'border transcending' relationships designed to function across state borders, rather than be delimited by them.

Such collaborative efforts may involve state actors as well as non-state social partners including Third sector actors. By "third sector", we refer first to the third 'non profit' sector as those organisations presenting a formal constitution, a legally private status, the presence of a form of self-government, the non-redistribution of profits and the presence of volunteers are included in (Salamon and Anheier, 1995)⁵. The focus on the Third sector is justified for three reasons. First, Third sector organisations are particularly suited to the networked forms of decision-making that have to manage uncertainty, resolve problems, access expertise and enable citizen engagement in a complex society with dispersed power and resources (Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004). As a significant illustration, the network governance perspective has been applied to the role of the Third sector and the community involvement in social housing and urban regeneration (Bortel, Mullins, Rhodes, 2009). Second, in a context of global economic crisis and deep recession in the UK, Ireland, Spain and France it is important to concentrate on this median sector located between the public and private sectors. Third, both the Irish and the Basque border regions are places where social economy, Third sector and, more widely speaking, civil society organisations have always played a significant role. The biggest European cooperative complex (Mondragon) is located in the Spanish Basque country. The French Basque region also presents specific dynamics on microfinance, workers' cooperatives, cultural associations and cooperatives, sustainable agriculture. Significant cooperatives also feature in the Irish border region. For example, in the agribusiness industry, Lakeland Dairies group in County Cavan is Ireland's second largest dairy co-operative with an annual revenue of €472 million while Town of Monaghan Co-op (County Monaghan) has an annual turnover of €208.1 million⁶. In addition, the Third sector

⁴ 'Cross-sectoral' includes public, private, trade union and the Third (voluntary and community) sectors.

⁵ 'Multilevel' includes local, regional, national and supranational levels of governance.

⁶ However, we will also consider the cross-border configuration of "social economy" oriented organisations (such as workers' cooperatives), as well as local authority networks in these regions when they engage in cross-border collaboration with Third 'non profit' sector organisations.

⁶ See <http://www.top1000.ie/town-of-monaghan-coop> (accessed 20/04/2013).

was given a major fillip by being integrated into EU cross-border funding programmes, principally Interreg and the EU Peace Programme for Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of the Republic of Ireland from 1995.

- A new contribution to the Basque/Irish comparison:

The comparison also aims to fill a gap in the existing scientific literature on comparative approaches to Basque and Irish politics. Most of the research to date has been devoted to a comparison between militant nationalisms (Irvin, 1999), political violence and ‘unconventional’ political participation (Justice, 2005), historical approaches to the rise of nationalisms (Flynn, 2000), centre-periphery national conflicts (Letamendia, 2001a, 2001b), conflict transformation processes (Alonso, 2004; Bew, Frampton and Gurruchaga, 2009; English 2009) and linguistic policies (Mezo, 2008).

Basque and Irish politics certainly share the central role played by identity politics, but it is now apposite to address Third sector dynamics in an evolving institutional context signalled in both cases by the Europeanisation of public policies and grassroots dynamics. The key added value of this research is its ‘decentring’ approach through shifting the focus from governments, political parties and militant organisations to Third sector groups involved in cross-border co-operation (Kramsch and Hooper 2006). Identity politics are contextualised here as ‘horizons of meaning’ shared by the actors (Taylor, 1992). However, these horizons of meaning inform rather than provide the central focus for our research. Our focus remains firmly on the substantive role played by Third sector actors in the new networks of cross-border governance and on how these networks are helped and hindered by hierarchical forms of governance. By doing so, we do not eliminate *a priori* the role played by ethnonational, ethnoreligious and/or ethnolinguistic identities. On the contrary, we argue that in both cases identity has been and is still a crucial factor in the structuring of cross-border cooperation/non-cooperation; but we do not focus on the political institutions and organizations which have built their legitimacy on identity politics. Rather, our endeavour consists of assessing in a qualified manner the degree of influence identity – understood in a constructivist sense - plays in the involvement of third sector actors in the cross-border cooperation in both regions.

2. Policy background: the ongoing institutionalization of cross-border relations in the Basque and Irish border regions

In the context of a border region, it may be argued that network governance is a particularly appropriate strategy for dealing with problems arising from socio-economic peripherality and ethno-national complexity because it prioritises local expertise and attempts to transcend the inhibiting effect of state borders in addressing such problems. The Basque and Irish border regions may be seen as laboratories for network governance in that the EU Commission has sought to engage the Third sector actively in decision-making, implementation and monitoring of its regional programmes INTERREG and Leader and, additionally in the Irish case, the EU Peace programmes for Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of Ireland (commonly known as the ‘Peace programmes’) 1995-2013. In both cases, the progressive institutionalization of cross-border relations was strongly supported by the EU and opened a new set of opportunities for the increasing participation of third sector actors,

albeit within two different contexts. In Ireland, the EU-sponsored cross-border relations emanated directly from the institutional process of conflict transformation, whereas in the Basque country EU-sponsored cross-border collaboration developed first on a socio-economic and – at first glance - depoliticized basis. These new policy instruments were however seized by the nebula of the Basque social movement in order to enhance the affirmation of a cross-border ethnonational identity. In both these contexts, third sector actors played a key-role in this ongoing process of institutionalization.

- Changing territorial and cross-border institutional settings

Since 1998, the political, institutional and funding environment in the Irish border region has altered radically. The 1998 Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement provided a new form of devolved consociational (power-sharing) government for Northern Ireland, involving Ulster British unionists and Irish nationalists, supplemented by the North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC) which is dedicated to cross-border co-operation, collaboration and co-ordination, and a number of North-South Implementation Bodies for the implementation of policy on a cross-border basis⁷. By far the most important Implementation Body is the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) which is charged with managing EU programmes. The SEUPB represents an extra institutional tier at one remove from, but accountable to, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Irish Dail (Parliament). In theory, it is a ‘border transcending’ institution that straddles 2 states and has a remit to manage and promote network governance in the Irish border region (O’Dowd and McCall 2008). In this regard, it manages Intermediary Funding Bodies, drawn from the Third Sector, which oversee the funding of specific cross-border projects.

However, with the suspension of the guiding NSMC between 2002 and 2007, due to a political disagreement on the disarmament of the IRA, the SEUPB faced a difficult infancy in balancing management and development, as well as all-island and cross-border aspects. During this suspension its pivotal position in a transnational governance network stretching from the local community level to the supranational level was constrained by traditional hierarchical territorial governance, particularly in the form of the Northern Ireland Department of Finance and Personnel which attempted to keep a tight reign on the SEUPB during this period. Though the institutions of the Agreement have been fully functioning since 2007, Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) politicians serving as ministers in the Northern Ireland devolved administration have attempted to stymie cross-border projects. For example, Finance Minister Sammy Wilson postponed signing off on matching funding for the construction of the Narrow Water Bridge between County Down in the North and County Louth in the South - to advance Tourism in the Mourne Mountains and Cooley Peninsula⁸ - despite greater contributions from the EU (via the SEUPB) and Irish government having been secured.

No equivalent to the SEUPB exists in the Basque border region. However, there has been an increase in the number of cross-border bodies since the 1980s. On both sides of the border, public policies began to reflect aspects of Europeanisation, principally through the development of cross-border programmes from the early 1990s. Existing ‘border transcending’ civil society networks thus began to acquire a more institutional dimension (Letamendia 1997) (Itçaina 2011a). The evolving institutional context was characterised by

⁷ East-West, British-Irish institutions - the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference and the British-Irish Council - were also provided by the Good Friday Agreement.

⁸ Irish Times, 22nd April 2013.

the leadership of local authorities; the multiplication of institutional initiatives to enhance cross-border collaborations including EU programmes; and strong participation from Third sector actors who were already familiar with cross-border relations since the early 1970s. The stabilization of the democratic regime in Spain and that country's accession to the European Community in 1986 favoured cross-border cooperation in Basque areas, which at this time took two very different, not to say opposed, forms (Letamendia, 1997). On the one hand, inter-state cooperation over border controls was strengthened by European anti-terrorist and immigration policy. At the same time, European integration helped establish a framework of cooperation favourable to interventions by regional and local authorities, this framework having been hitherto exclusively reserved for states.

From 1983, the French Aquitaine region and the Spanish Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) were among the nine border regions which founded the Pyrenean Labour Community (*Communauté de Travail des Pyrénées/Comunidad de Trabajo de los Pirineos* - CTP). Spain's entry to the Common Market saw a proliferation of institutional cooperation schemes. Cooperation between the BAC and Aquitaine developed after 1989, a period which coincided with the reform of structural funding and the impetus given to regional policy by the Single European Act. To the identity-based cooperation of social networks was now added institutional cooperation, stimulated in particular by European funding from INTERREG programmes after 1990. In the Basque Country, INTERREG funding took over from existing collaborations between local authorities. The BAC and Aquitaine added to the numerous structures in existence by setting up a common intervention fund for research, development and training. Navarre joined this fund in 1992, before withdrawing in 2000 because of political tensions with the Basque government⁹.

Among other experiences, the Bayonne-San Sebastian Eurocity established cooperation in planning matters between the two urban areas. The Bidasoa-Txingudi Eurodistrict (established in 1992) followed by the Bidasoa-Txingudi *consorcio* (1998) brought together the French town of Hendaye and the Spanish towns of Fuenterrabia and Irun in one inter-municipal structure. The *consorcio* became an exemplary success story for Pyrenean cooperation (Harguindéguy 2007). The Treaty of Bayonne, signed by France and Spain in 1995, strengthened the legal framework for cooperation by granting more room for manoeuvre to local authorities. Small-scale experiences of local cooperation between Navarrese and French Basque border municipalities and valleys flourished (CDPB 2003). Finally, the Aquitaine-Euskadi Euroregion, inaugurated on 12 December 2011, in the form of a European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation, represents a new stage in setting up a framework for cross-border cooperation at inter-regional level¹⁰.

The process has had to overcome institutional asymmetries and political divergences. As regards the first of these, the gap between the Aquitaine region and the BAC which has a budget ten times greater, not to mention the Chartered Community of Navarre, has created an asymmetrical situation. The same applies to the difference between the extensive fiscal powers of the Basque Provincial Deputations and those of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques General Council, and the central role of the representative of the French state. At a political level, the perception of cross-border cooperation by political elites on both sides of the border has been marked by different forms of representation of the border. The Aquitaine region leaders have

⁹ As a consequence Aquitaine maintained separate protocols with Euskadi, Navarre and Aragon.

¹⁰ The General Council of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques department and the Regional Government of Navarre also re-launched their cooperation agreement in April 2012.

had a functional and not identity-based perception of cooperation. To the south of the border, the BAC was controlled between 1980-2009 and since 2012 by the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), either alone or in coalition, which at this period saw cross-border cooperation as an opportunity to strengthen ties between Basques and to develop a “paradiplomacy” (Totoricagüena 2005) while disregarding the level of the state (Ithurralde 2002; Bourne 2008). The Navarrese government, in a territory sometimes seen as the “Basque Ulster” due to its attitude under the II Republic (Blinkhorn 1974), represented a third configuration, with conservative or socialist majorities which favoured a functional approach to cooperation, carefully distancing themselves from Euskadi.

Until the mid’ 1990s, the lack of territorial institutions in the French Basque Country served as a brake on the effective development of cross-border cooperation. This situation changed in the 1990s with the institution on the Development Council, the Council of Elected Representatives for the Basque Country, and the Basque Cultural Institute. In 1997, the French Basque country was recognized as a “*pays*” (1995 law). These institutions were compromises between nationalists, civil society and public authorities which were partly intended to compensate for the refusal by the State to create a new *department* (Letamendia 1997). The joint expertise of these new institutions led to the signing by local, regional authorities and the state of territorial development plans which covered all sectors. Cross-border cooperation thus figured among the new priorities. Far from being monopolized by *abertzale* (Basque nationalist) parties, cross-border policies were promoted by heterogeneous coalitions of actors who have instrumental and/or identity-related visions of the border¹¹.

In sum, both territories under examination here experienced a process of institutionalization of cross-border relations, both sponsored by the EU, but within different political contexts. In the Irish border region, conflict transformation provided the impetus for the institutionalisation of cross-border co-operation and network governance between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The 1998 Good Friday Agreement was a milestone in a concerted collective effort aimed at ending a protracted violent conflict that was centred on the territorial status of Northern Ireland and involved Irish republicans, Ulster British loyalists and UK state security forces. The Agreement proposed a new form of governance that had consociational (Northern Ireland power-sharing) and transnational (cross-border, North/South) dimensions. However, the work of North/South transnational network governance institutions - the NSMC, secretariat and Implementation Bodies (including the SEUPB) – has felt the restraining influence of territorial actors and institutions, as well as Northern Ireland unionist ministers who remain anxious about the place of Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom and see ‘North-Southery’, to use their pejorative term, as something to be curtailed lest it give succour to Irish nationalist ‘United Ireland’ ambitions.

The Irish peace process constituted a source of inspiration for Basque parties and social movements, especially but not exclusively¹² on the *abertzale* side. However, these efforts did have a consistent involvement of EU institutions in conflict transformation¹³. The opposition

¹¹ By the way, the partial Europeanization of public policy (in the sense of the uses made of European schemes for cooperation) has not necessarily entailed a Europeanization of norms and values, even within the border territory properly speaking (Bray 2004).

¹² Several visits to Northern Ireland were organized by the Basque peace organizations for representatives of Basque political parties, including *abertzale* and socialist elected officials, who, apart from learning from their Irish counterparts, could also find there an occasion for long and quiet talks outside the Basque context (Interview, elected official of the Basque Socialist Party, Sestao, May 2012).

¹³ Apart from the Basque Friendship Group that was created in 2006 the European Parliament in order to promote the peace process in the Basque Country.

of Spanish and French governments to any internationalization of the conflict impeded any consistent involvement of the EU in an Irish-type institutionalized peace process. Thus, cross-border cooperation followed a distinct line from the Irish one. Its institutionalization since the 1990s corresponded to a more functional use of EU policy-tools by Regions, *then* seized by Basque activists – including the Southern governmental ones - to reinforce their previous cross-border informal networks. The functional approach to cooperation engendered institutional schemes that could have remained empty boxes if Third sector actors had not used them repeatedly. However, and in a similar way to other minority nationalisms in Europe (Elias 2008), the Euro-enthusiasm of the Basque government gradually gave way to a form of Euro-pragmatism in response to the stagnation evidenced by the Europe of Regions project. The Basque Nationalist Party's (PNV) strategy long consisted of using the EU to make the role of nation-states redundant. But nationalists quickly realized that the EU could be used for exactly contrary strategic aims by the Spanish state and other Autonomous Communities, which would shift disputes about the Basque tax regime to the European level (Bourne 2008).

- A structural opportunity for the Third sector?

The development of a cross-border institutional framework in the two regions, as well as the role of the Third sector in the design and delivery of EU and other programmes provides ground for the establishment of some form of network governance. The Third sector may be viewed seen to be at one remove from territorial government and better placed to network with grassroots organisations on the ground. On the island of Ireland, the ability of SEUPB and the Third sector to nurture a form of network governance for the Irish border region is not solely a function of continued EU support for the Peace programmes, INTERREG etc. - it is also a function of Third sector groups' ability to exploit global, EU and nation-state level opportunities (McCall and O'Dowd 2008). However, whereas the two states, potentially at least, provide strong and durable institutional support for inter-governmental or inter-national co-operation, the institutional support for cross-border network governance is very weak. Only a skeletal institutional framework for transnational cross-border co-operation exists comprising of the EU Commission, the SEUPB, the Third Sector and cross-border projects at grassroots level. Additionally, EU funding for Third Sector cross-border initiatives is diminishing and precarious. Compounding the challenge is a condescending disregard for transnational actors among territorial elites (O'Dowd and McCall 2008). When interviewed by the author about issues of cross-border co-operation and the operation of the SEUPB in Ireland the then Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs asked disdainfully, "the SEUPB? What's that?"¹⁴.

Similarly, the ability of the Basque Third sector groups to exploit all the institutional and social opportunities to enhance cross-border collaboration has been proved. The informal cooperation between third sector actors – notably via the cooperative movement - had anticipated the institutionalization of cross-border cooperation. With the ongoing institutionalization, Third sector groups engaged in EU programmes (INTERREG and Leader in particular) as well as in cross-border policies implemented by the Regions of Aquitaine, Euskadi and Navarra, and by local authorities. These policies were implemented sometimes through *ad hoc* "hybrid" bodies¹⁵ which draw upon INTERREG, Leader + and bilateral

¹⁴ Interview, 22 May 2007.

¹⁵ For example, the Cross-border Agency of the Basque Eurocity (1997) the Consorcio Bidasoa-Txingudi (1998), and the Xareta and Lindux/Orreaga associations between French Basque and Navarrese local municipalities and valleys.

regional (Aquitaine-Navarra, Aquitaine-Euskadi) funding, is also crucial. However, as mentioned in the Irish case, this engagement of Third sector initiatives remained fragile, mainly for two reasons. First, the economic crisis, specially hard in Spain, made the potential public funding less likely to become effective. Then, the cross-border projects were frequently limited to a phase of diagnostic and mutual knowledge, and had difficulties to overcome an initial statement of structural differences between both sides of the border. As an example, the experience of the Cross-Border Social and Solidarity Economy network (*Réseau Transfrontalier de l'Economie Sociale et Solidaire* - TESS) initiated in 2010 aimed at promoting the social economy in generic fashion in the border territories of Navarre, Euskadi and the Pyrénées-Atlantiques. The network comprises three regional organizations: ANEL (*Asociación Navarra de Empresas Laborales*) in Navarre, Konfekoop (*Confederación de Cooperativas de Euskadi*) in the BAC and CRESS Aquitaine (*Chambre régionale de l'économie solidaire et sociale en Aquitaine*). The network was based on the Spain-France-Andorra Programme for Territorial Cooperation (POCTEFA) 2007-2013 and on FEDER European funding. The project initiators were quickly faced by the differences between their own organizations and between the realities of the SSE in the three territories. The partners investigated both the gap between institutional definitions of the SSE in each of the territories¹⁶, and the socio-economic differences between the SSE in the three territories. The project was intended to result in exchanges of good practices and in the development of pilot projects. It already marks an unprecedented attempt to encompass the whole of the cross-border social economy, but fed into a situation where sector-based cooperatives experienced different realities and hardly went beyond the single dissemination of information.

3. Sectoral illustrations

This section aims at deepening our comparative endeavour through sectoral illustrations. Although this is an ongoing work, the first findings from our respective fieldworks can already be compared on three sectors: minority language, culture and historical memory, tourism and ecotourism, environment and sustainable economic development.

- Minority languages, culture and memory:

This is a common feature shared by the Irish and the Basque border regions. The existence of a cross-border cultural identity, signalled by the importance attached to minority languages (principally Gaelic and Basque), has historically given impetus to cross-border mobilisation, mainly coming from the Third sector. In the Basque border region, grassroots mobilisation was aimed at compensating for the shortfall in the legal status of language on both sides of the border. In Ireland, the 1998 Good Friday Agreement constituted a North/South language Implementation Body in response to lobbying by minority language activists and the cultural identity agendas of Irish nationalist political parties in negotiations leading to the Agreement.

However, in Northern Ireland, Gaelic is closely identified by British unionists with the 'Irish republican struggle' (McCoy, 1997; Pritchard, 2004). In an effort to counteract the development of Gaelic in Northern Ireland, and especially its ability to attract UK government funding as a medium for education, unionist cultural entrepreneurs resurrected an 18th century Ulster-Scots dialect of the English language (McCall, 2002). Institutionally, the result has been that the North/South Language Body is composed of 2 bodies: Foras na Gaeilge

¹⁶ A gap that became less significant following the redefinition brought about by the Spanish law of 29 March 2011 on the social economy. (Interview, TESS project, Anglet, 2010)

representing the Gaelic language and Tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch representing Ulster-Scots. Cultural difference in ‘post-conflict’ Northern Ireland is often asserted in terms of the Gaelic language versus the Ulster-Scots dialect. As such, these markers of identity provide a platform for the extension of conflict by cultural means. Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) resistance to an Irish (Gaelic) Language Act for Northern Ireland is but one pillar of this conflict that has the potential to destabilise the post-1998 power-sharing dispensation between unionists and nationalists in Northern Ireland.

A similar identification between language activism and minority nationalism can be verified in the Basque country. Such a perception was reinforced by the cross-border dimension of many of the organizations supporting linguistic and cultural mobilisations. These cross-border organisations generally reproduced in their internal structuration the seven provinces of the Basque country. A second cross-border flux was constituted by fundings and partnerships passed between public bodies from the South (Basque government, provincial deputations and local councils) and associative bodies from the North, due to the lack of an institutionalized body for linguistic policy in the French Basque country. A policy-change occurred in the 1990s and overall in the 2000s with the emerging institutionalisation, on the French side, of Basque culture first, with the foundation of the Basque cultural institute (ICB) in 1990, and language policy then with the Public Office for the Basque Language (OPLB) in 2005. Both bodies were conceived as mediators between public authorities and civil society organisations in cultural and linguistic matters, the former remaining an association (ICB) and the latter endorsing a public status (OPLB). Both engaged in cross-border partnerships associating third sector bodies and public authorities, via EU schemes and cross-border bilateral agreements, such as the 2006 agreement between the OPLB and the Euskadi government.

This starting institutionalization did not prevent Third sector actors to keep on self-organizing on a cross border basis, sometimes by referring to EU policy instruments for social economy. As a significant illustration, a European Cooperative Society was created in 2009 between the Northern and Southern networks of Basque language immersive schools *Ikastolak*¹⁷. Even if not as conflictive as in Ireland, this process of institutionalization met some resistance, especially on the French side. Along with the expected Jacobine and centralist reactions, there was also an attempt to revitalize the *gascon* language on the French Basque coastal zone, partly as a response to the predominance of Basque language activism. This local “Ulster-Scots like” revitalization did not have any significant impact given the very weak sociolinguistic situation of this variant of the Occitan language, but still a minimum level of official recognition was achieved, as testified by the trilingual (French, Basque, Gascon) road signs in the city of Bayonne.

Beyond properly linguistic issues, local historical memory cross-border projects have been important repositories of the ethno-national conflict experience, as well as, cross-border, cross-community shared experience. These projects usually involve the participation of Third Sector organisations. In Ireland, for example, the Cross Border Archive Project, funded through Interreg IIIA, was a joint initiative between Newry and Mourne Museum in the North and Louth County Archives Service in the South. It provides web-based historical information on the development of the Newry & Mourne – Louth region that may be of interest to tourists, schools, academic researchers, and the general public. Its stated aim is to provide a forum for social inclusion, cross-community dialogue, peacebuilding and reconciliation¹⁸.

¹⁷ Most of the *ikastola* were already under a cooperative status (of parents, of teachers, or mixed) in the Spanish Basque Autonomy.

¹⁸ See <http://www.louthnewryarchives.ie> (accessed 22 April 2013).

In the Basque border region, local historical memory was endorsed by a few publicly funded cross-border projects, on sectoral and micro-territorial issues. The Aezkoa-Garazi project involved a cultural project on the memory of cross-border relations between the valley of Cize-Garazi (Lower Navarre) and the valley of Aezkoa (Navarre). Supported by the valley authorities and included in the local Leader programme for the Basque mountain, the project was conducted by a French Basque local television, itself a multi-stakeholders cooperative (SCIC¹⁹) associating the municipality community of the valley (Garazi-Baigorry)²⁰. However, most of the recent initiatives in terms of local historical cross-border memory were endorsed by Third sector organisations more or less related to the Basque leftist nationalism (*ezker abertzalea*). In 2012, the commemoration of the 1512 conquest of the kingdom of Navarre by Castilla gave birth to a series of initiatives and events denouncing the conquest, and re-reading it as the end of the golden age of a cross-border Basque independence. The memory of the border was, again, highly politicized.

- Tourism, ecotourism:

Cross-border relationships are developing innovative projects involving new forms of tourism: eco-tourism, socially responsible tourism, cultural tourism, etc. Indeed, many EU-sponsored programmes are aimed at developing this sector.

Institutionally, tourism in the Irish border region benefits from the provision of Tourism Ireland Ltd by the Good Friday Agreement. Tourism Ireland markets the island of Ireland abroad as a tourist destination and is, in effect, another Implementation Body under the direction of the NSMC. In the Irish border region local authorities also have a central role in tourism proportion and use Interreg funds to that end. For example, in addition to jointly developing plans for the aforementioned Narrow Water Bridge, Newry and Mourne District Council and Louth County Council developed a close working relationship on tourism and other projects including the redevelopment of Victoria Lock outside Newry.

Like the Basque border region, Third sector groups are involved with some notable examples including the Greenbox project which delivers a range of ecotourism packages to visitors to the Leitrim, Fermanagh, Donegal, Sligo and Cavan cross-border 'Greenbox region'. Developing an ecotourism standard through networking 100 product providers and community groups throughout the region has been a key goal of the project. Again, Interreg funding has provided the incentive for Greenbox activities²¹.

In the Basque border region, local authorities and territorial economic institutions (such as the Chambers of commerce) are the central players in this field, with a significant use of EU schemes. Tourism was in 2012 among the priorities of the cross-border Chamber of commerce *Bihartean*, founded in 2010 as a European Economic Interest Grouping by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Bayonne-Pays Basque and the Chamber of Commerce of Guipuzcoa. However, active participation of Third sector organizations was rather to be found among small-scale local cross-border partnerships such as the aforementioned intercity

¹⁹ *Société cooperative d'intérêt collectif*.

²⁰ See for instance, the broadcast devoted to the treaties for reciprocal use of mountain pastures between the valleys of Garazi (France) and Aezkoa (Spain): http://www.kanaldude.tv/Itatiko-Sekretuak-Garazi-Aezkoa-Fazeria_v1144.html (accessed 10 May 2013).

²¹ Greenbox Managing Director Mary Mulvey's interview with author can be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_LcZn5dYIA (accessed 22 April, 2013).

consortium Txingudi on the coastal zone, the Xareta zone between Labourd and Navarre, and between the Lower and Upper Navarre in the inner countryside. Far from being neutral, any public debate on tourism inevitably leads to a debate over the image of the territory that should be “marketed”. In the Spanish Basque region, the *abertzale* coalition Bildu presented in 2012 the creation of a “*Euskal Herria*” (Basque Country) brand as a key point of its foreign policy agenda, including it in its strategy of international aid. Very different was the “*marque territoriale Pays Basque*” (Basque Country territorial brand) which was promoted in the French Basque Country by the Chamber of commerce and the aforementioned Council for Development for economical, commercial and touristic purposes. Originally conceived on an intersectoral basis, the territorial brand generated a debate where issues of territorial identity and territorial marketing were intrinsically linked. The debate was particularly acute among representatives of the farming sector, where representatives of agro-business, supportive of the brand, were opposed to the Third sector organizations representing small and sustainable farming (*Kalitaldeak* or “quality groups” collective). The latter had been involved since the early 1980s in the founding of local quality brands, and saw the new territorial brand as an initiative implicitly aiming at decreasing the quality standards for local food products²². Tourism and territorial marketing were not *explicitly* politicized as in Ireland, but again, identity was “there” as soon as local actors started debating the *image* of the territory.

- Environment and sustainable economic development:

Directly related to the former one, this sector is part of an EU and global trend towards sustainable development. INTERREG has supported Irish border region projects in this sector including five research development training and information projects (in 2009-11) housed together in ‘The Ireland-Northern Ireland Cross-border Co-operation Observatory (INICCO). Additionally, the East Border Region (one of three local authority led cross-border networks) has developed a ‘SustainAndBuild.com’ website that provides information forum for builders and clients on planning, building and sustainability, including sustainable design, construction methods, best practice guides for renewable technologies and energy saving²³. This initiative is especially poignant given the dire consequences of the 2008 economic crash for the Irish building industry, North and South.

The Sliabh Beag Cross Border Partnership provides evidence of successful Third sector involvement in sustainable development forming as it does an association of 10 community groups across the Monaghan, Tyrone, Fermanagh border. Core activities of the Partnership include walking and cycling trails, recycling initiatives, and craft development. Less successful has been the Foyle Basin Council which was dedicated to the preservation of the Foyle Ecosystem spanning the Derry-Donegal border. The project faltered with the end of Peace 1 funding and party political disagreement among associates (Ellis, Motherway, Neill and Hand, 2004).

In the Basque border region, some of the projects funded by INTERREG and LEADER-FEDER programmes were devoted to this sector, especially between associations of bio-agriculture from the Lower Navarre and Upper Navarre. In agriculture, the becoming of cross-border relations evidence a strong intertwining of sectoral issues, territorial and identity issues. In the French Basque country, the social movement for sustainable farming, led by the ELB union (Basque branch of the Confédération paysanne), founded in 2005 an alternative Chamber of Agriculture (*Euskal Herriko Laborantza Ganbara*, EHLG) in order to

²² “Les paysans se démarquent de la marque territoriale”, *Enbata*, 8 décembre 2011, n°2206 : 4.

²³ See <http://sustainandbuild.com> (accessed 22 April 2013).

have a specific institution for the French Basque territory, apart from the departmental one. This initiative, that generated an enduring legal dispute with the French state administration (Itçaina 2011b), was materially and symbolically supported by the cross-border *abertzale* social movement organizations as a way to compensate it for the lack of public resources coming from the French side. As a non-profit-making body, EHLG could not benefit from the para-fiscal taxes paid by farmers, which are the main resource of the official Chambers of Agriculture. Moreover, local authority subsidies were allegedly illegal. The lack of resources motivated the promoters of EHLG to look for individual and collective donors, partly on a cross-border basis. Thanks to the contribution of the *Manu Robles Arangiz* Foundation, created by the moderate Basque nationalist union ELA, EHLG could purchase and renovate its headquarters. EHLG could also take advantage of institutional support from the Southern regional government. On 2 November 2007, EHLG signed an agreement with the cross-border association of local councillors *Udalbide*, and another one with *Itsasmendikoia*, a public agency for rural development related to the Basque Autonomous government. With a total budget of 410,000 euros for EHLG in 2007, 41 per cent came from French Basque donors, 27 per cent were proper receipts, 26 per cent came from *Itsasmendikoia* and *Udalbide*, and 3.9% came from Spanish Basque donors.²⁴ These cross-border partnerships²⁵ were additional arguments for EHLG in its dispute with the state, as well as the regional and EU funding they gained on various projects. Transnational support gave rise to cross-border projects such as the release of a trilingual guide to the Basque countryside and a comparative study on agriculture in the French Basque Country, the Spanish Basque Autonomous Community and Navarra. Once more, economic, territorial and identity issues were intrinsically mixed.

4. Conclusions

In Ireland as in the Basque Country, the current engagement of Third sector organizations in cross-border relations has contrasting forms of operation which needs to be reviewed on a sector by sector basis. There is need for further research, but we can however point to some preliminary conclusions:

- The ambivalent role of ethnonational identities:

In Ireland, unionist/nationalist ethnonational identities have shifted in large part from a conflictual relationship based on antagonism to a working political relationship that may be described by agonism (Mouffe, 2005). Thus, adversarial ethnonational identities still inform attitudes to cross-border cooperation: nationalists are overwhelmingly in favour, unionists are much more wary and circumspect. The temptation to ‘play politics’ with cross-border projects is evidenced by the reluctance of the DUP Minister of Finance to allocate a contribution to the funding of the Narrow Water Bridge in 2013. However, Third Sector ‘unionist’ groups have engaged with many cross-border cooperation projects, especially those with a conflict transformation aspect.

In the Basque border region, identity (also) played a double role of resource and constraint for the establishment of cross-border networks of governance. First and

²⁴ Euskal Herriko Laborantza Ganbara, *Trois ans, 14/01/2005-19/01/2008*, internal document, 19 January 2008.

²⁵ This cross-border impetus was also the continuation of an older partnership between French and Spanish Basque farmers’ unions: ELB on the French side and EHNE (*Euskal Herriko nekezarien elkartasuna*, Union of the farmers from the Basque Country) on the Spanish side, both members of the transnational Via Campesina.

despite an apparent paradox, initiatives motivated strongly by identity (here: minority language and culture, but also sustainable agriculture), despite being constructed historically as alternatives to action by public authorities, are today effectively spearheading cross-border governance networks. The ability of identity activists, who are *also* experienced Third sector activists, has become a source of expertise for a framework of public action which is now looking for projects that offer some structure. In contrast, the example of the social integration through economic activity - not developed here²⁶ - would emphasize how, within a sector with no particular links to Basque identity, institutional asymmetries and differences in the sector's structure currently work *against* the emergence of this type of network governance. On the contrary, the issue of Basque identity clearly played a negative role by hindering the institutional relations between the regional governments of Euskadi and Navarra, thus leading to separate agreements with their French regional counterpart.

- In both territories, EU schemes were used to enhance cross-border cooperation, but with different scopes. In Ireland, the participation of Third sector actors was seen as a crucial condition for conflict transformation, through cross-community and cross-border relations. In the Basque border region, the institutional framework for cross-border relations did not refer to a potential peace process, rather it provided a functional rationale to cross-border initiatives. Third sector actors used these new institutional opportunities to reinforce their previous cross-border networks.
- The 2008 economic crisis impacted these processes of institutionalization, in both territories. In Ireland, the promise of British-Irish intergovernmental funding for cross-border cooperation to replace EU funding has largely failed to materialize. Consequently, the issue of sustainability for Third sector groups and their projects is an ever present concern. The continued role of the SEUPB in a climate of decreasing EU funding through Interreg and the Peace Programme is also in question. The consequences of the economic crisis were present, but to a lesser extent, in the Basque border zone. However, and even if the Basque autonomous community and Navarra were in relative better situation than the rest of Spain, budget constraints decided by the regional authorities had also some consequences in the cross-border cooperation, notably in the linguistic-cultural field (Harguindéguy and Itçaina, 2012).

(to be developed...)

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²⁶ See: (Manterola 2013; Itçaina and Manterola, 2013).

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