

Integration, Memory and Cultural Heritage in Galicia-Northern Portugal Border Region

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Abstract: Within and across the Portuguese-Galician (Spanish) border interesting social, cultural and political processes are observed. These processes can be traced and analysed from a wide variety of information sources. Among them, we will retain media, literary and political discourses as well as diverse products of material and immaterial culture. Taking into account that social and cultural practices in any border area are hugely politicised we pay special attention to a border in which memory, cultural heritage and expectations around the constitution of transborder institutional structures are of significant importance for border inhabitants. For instance, the boundary openness and the improvements in transport infrastructures have resulted in an important increase of tourist flows within and across the border area. These new trans-border relations are affecting the self-identification of most border inhabitants who realise that Galicia and Northern Portugal are, at least potentially, a unique region characterised by a set of common cultural features as well as economic and institutional networks.

Introduction

Recently, the EU has implemented a set of political and economic instruments intended to avoid differences existing in national contexts and to create a sort of “supranational” society in Europe. However, recognising the importance of such transborder policies, they demonstrated to be insufficient to originate the needed harmony in transborder relationships between people and authorities at each side of the border. In fact, cooperation doesn't come from “no-where”: a rich diversity of common needs and mental representations are needed to make cooperation and transborder contacts desirable.

These reasons encouraging communication and transborder joint projects can be classified as follows (Moncusí 2005):

- *Functional reasons*, based on common problems and concerns at both sides of an international border which are judged to be better managed from a transborder cooperative approach.
- *Ideological reasons*, based on the impact of singular and collective identities which are contacting and conflicting across a boundary. We distinguish *primordial* identities, characterised by the affirmation of one's own identity in opposition to others, and *instrumental* ones, used to promote the optimal development of a human community. Static, national, regional, local or others identities combine to generate multiple, fluid, spatial and non-spatial identities within and across politically institutionalised territories.

Both types of reasons are determined by “political will” and institutional legitimation. In the case of Galicia-Northern Portugal border this legitimation task is mainly an affair of non-state, sub-state and trans-state actors and agencies. This is a result of the predominant “superimposed” character of the boundary on people and places, at least in cultural terms.

The Iberian Raya/Raia can be considered as one of the most ancient (since the Treaty of Tordesillas, in 1297), largest (1.234 km) and most authentic border areas in the world. This authenticity derives from its good grade of conservation within the European context. Moreover, it is possible to retrace the Iberian Raia historic organisation, fortified by military strategies, with a web-defined system of twin fortified towns, symbols of territorial sovereignty defence. The military function obsolescence and the administrative disappearance of borders call for a new conceptualisation and patrimonial planning of these “war-machines”.

No doubt that, in our field of study, transborder relations, movements and interactions have always had a significant importance, recently deepened by the European integration process, resulting in highly permeable boundaries with its “sovereignty” functions diluted. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that people living within the border zone are the main responsible for boundary definition whilst states are key actors in the discursive production and reproduction of social territorialities nearby the boundary (Donnan & Wilson 2001).

In particular, the modern notion of powerful states regulating the whole social life is in crisis due to globalisation and the increased mobility of people. In the past, only a very restricted minority of a given

national population were able to abandon their own country. In present days, the improvements on accessibility, transport, and communication have resulted in a spectacular increase of border crossings around the world, especially between developed states (Lois González 1997). In sum, these particular borderlands are dynamic spaces of interaction, subject to continued processes of negotiation involving people who are active agents in the politics of border life, as stated by Donnan & Wilson (2001).

However, we should retain that borders “are mainly concrete phenomena crucial for the spatial organisation of the contemporary world” (Paasi 2005). As a matter of fact, there are material and immaterial (ideological) practices having crucial effects on mental representations and everyday lives of individuals. The former are highly determined by the structure and action of the state’s apparatus whilst the latter show a remarkable impact of nationalist ideologies. In any case, these practices are seemingly reproducing the state-centric territorial rationale at regional and local levels.

Memory and the border

One cannot speak in the strictest sense of a border until the second half of the 13th century and the first half of the 14th century, a time when spheres of power were measured, quantified and delimited. The integration of Galicia into the newly created Spanish monarchy (the dynastic union of Castile -which controlled Galicia -, and Aragon) was reinforced towards the end of the 15th century. Later, during

the Portuguese Restoration War, between 1640 and 1668, the Galician-Portuguese border became a battleground once again. During this period, xenophobic messages proliferated on both sides, intended to the idea of belonging to different states, and the principle of their superiority over the other (Palmeiro 2006). This is also a period of construction of some of the most important border fortifications.

This border is perceived as a stable and well-defined territorial marker only since the definitive independence of Portugal, during the second half of the XVIIth Century. Anyway, this border was not a clearly designed line but the result of some fortified towns' areas of influence. These towns ruled each own's territory, with high performance in the Minho area and in a lesser degree in the interior lands. The notion of a strictly defined limit was more promptly assumed in Portugal, where there was a major preoccupation on preservation of national sovereignty and identity. The result was the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon (1864), in which the boundary between Spain and Portugal was (more or less) clearly designed.

From XVIth to XIXth Centuries the towns and cities situated along the Atlantic coast (Compostela, A Coruña, Pontevedra in Galicia, and Porto in Northern Portugal) grew and consolidated as main urban centres of the transborder region. This indicates a progressive distancing of urban development axis from the border itself, especially from its interior part.

At the same time, transborder mobility and stable relationships (such as marriages) between individuals from each side of the border have been constant until now. Only the simultaneous dictatorships of Franco and the Portuguese *Estado Novo*, during the

middle of the twentieth century, abruptly closed and militarised the border for a long period. The authoritarian regimes managed to agree that both had a common historical mission, contrasting with school texts of that time, in which mutual distrust and fear were incited. Nevertheless, the smuggling continued as a relevant activity in the area and the most important common features, language and culture within very similar rural areas, played a role in maintaining a general conscience of cultural proximity (Lois González 1997).

In sum, under an appearance of antiquity, this border was clearly delimited very recently (during the second half of the XIXth Century) and it has been more open to every kind of flows than it is normally admitted. The border was always perceived as an ambiguous notion and the institutional prohibitions were never totally accepted. The traditional transborder ties comprehended from marriages and celebrations to economic (trade) relationships.

Integration in the Galician-Portuguese border

In a brief description, the main characteristics of the Galician-Portuguese border area can be resumed as follows:

In sociological terms, the societies separated by the boundary have ignored each other for a long time during the Contemporary Age. As a result, the border is predominantly composed by peripheral, isolated rural places. One of the reasons is in the fact that since the independence of Portugal, in 1640, a dense network of

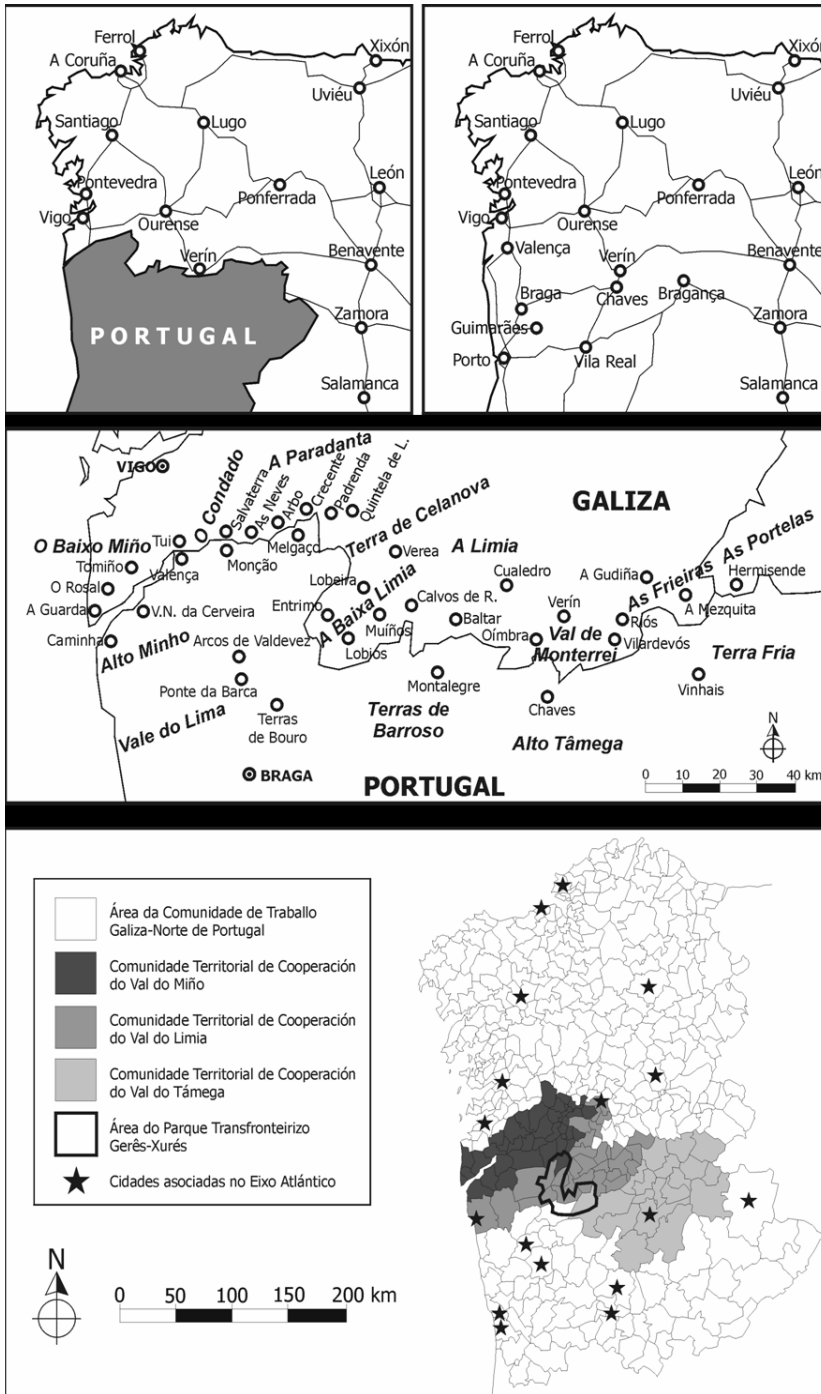


Figure 1. Maps of the Galician-Portuguese transborder region. Taken from V. Paül et al. (2005).

fortified places has been built. Traditionally, the border was full of significance where two urban centres were confronted and it diluted in rural areas. The boundary was delimited and mapped precisely only from the second half of the XIXth century, at a time when contraband activities developed in this area. More recently, the border has been used as a show-case gate offering an external image of each country.

The most important current feature of this border is cooperation, promoted by the European integration process. But complexity and heterogeneity remain: we distinguish two borders. Firstly, one dynamic, “wet” border designed by the river Minho. This is situated in the middle of a highly urbanised area, where common economic and social advantages are intensively exploited. On the other hand, we have the “dry”, interior border, characterised by a continuous loss of population and economic activities. However, in the whole Galician-Portuguese border the crossings are mostly related with tourism and, in a lesser degree, with labour and estate purchases. In any case, the transborder labour flows have been, until now, modest. This may show that the integration process is still in its earliest stages. In spite of all the improvements achieved since the integration of both countries in the EEC, the boundary subsists as a strong factor of territorialisation, materialized by incongruity of political and administrative units across the border. Nevertheless, under the effect of increased contacts, the traditional national *clichés* are rapidly diminishing. Even so, we should not subestimate the persistence of some prejudices, noticeable in Portugal through an exclusive understanding of Spain as a homogenous national unit and, in Spain,

through a general ignorance and contempt of Portuguese culture. In addition, some Portuguese social groups and media tend to show Spain as a sort of economical invader, threatening Portuguese national identity.

Concretely, the role of Galicia in the Iberian context is of special interest. Galician and Portuguese governments seem to have a common interest in achieving an increased economical and functional integration, expressed by the constitution of Galicia-Northern Portugal Euro-region. In Galicia, the relationship with Portugal is one of few political issues that are not polemic in discussions between the main regional parties. As examples of the main political attitudes and projects concerning the transborder relations between Galicia and Portugal, we summarize the positions of the three most important political parties in Galicia (Tempo Exterior 2001)¹: The conservative party, Partido Popular (PP), detained the regional precedence until 2005. The PP is still the most voted political force in Galicia and its importance in Galician social life is undoubted. This party’s political program agrees with the general consensus around the vital importance of fluent political and economical relations between Galicia and Portugal. It proposes an increase of contacts and complicity between both societies, until the achievement of a kind of transborder civil society; the overcome of the institutional framework and agenda designed by the European building process; and the promotion of Galician-Portuguese Euro-region to make it recognisable in the international scene.

The Galician Socialist Party, (currently the first political force in the Galician government) exposes a quite technocratic vision upon the potential and development of the Euro-region Galicia-Northern

Portugal, based on its economic virtues. He insists on the strategic importance of Euro-regional socio-economic cohesion, coincident with PP's point of view. Nevertheless, Mr. Pérez Touriño (leader of the Galician Socialist Party and president of Galicia) met the Portuguese Prime Minister, José Sócrates, several times after his election. In these meetings they agreed on relevant themes such as the construction of a high-speed railway joining the cities of Porto and Vigo and the constitution of legally recognised local transborder frameworks for cooperation. As a result of this common interest in deepening the transborder relations, a new agreement of transborder cooperation between the *CCDR* (Northern Portugal) and the *Xunta* (Galicia), was signed on February 24, 2006.

On the other hand, the Galician Nationalist Coalition (BNG) expresses a quite nuanced perspective on the type of transborder relationship that, in its opinion, should be between Galicia and Portugal as a whole. It states that, in spite of strong human and economic relations existing between Galicia and Northern Portugal, the Galician government should consider the whole Portuguese state in its transborder relations. It summarizes some goals beyond the economic success already obtained, such as the development of an integrated Galician-Portuguese economic space or the normalization of linguistic relationships. In this party is predominant the idea that the specific Galician spelling rules should be overcome by the integration of Galician language in the Portuguese-Brazilian linguistic system. Another important goal for this party is the establishment of normal institutional relationships. The current institutional transborder initiatives would

be insufficient due to their "regionalist bias", avoiding the establishment of direct communication between the two executive powers of Galicia and Portugal. This has been partially overcome when the BNG's leader and Galician vice-president, Anxo Quintana, met the Portuguese President, Cavaco Silva, to discuss about cultural cooperation between both governments in Santiago do Cacém, Portugal, on July, 2007.

Reparsing these political visions on how the transborder relationship between Galicia and Portugal should be understood, it is possible to assume a major interest among Galician political actors to earn for their region partial or complete autonomy in international relations, namely with its neighbouring state (Portugal). We see clearly in this context, how identity issues have an immediate effect on transborder and international relations policies at both regional and national (statist) levels. On the other hand, the Portuguese general political vision of transborder cooperation is clearly state-centred and privileges the contacts and relationships between the sovereign states as recognised international relations subjects. The main economic and cultural actors in Northern Portugal are interested in a deepening of cooperation with the neighbouring Spanish regions of Castile and Leon and, above all, Galicia. The reason is a perceived excessive centralism of the Portuguese state apparatus inhibiting the Northern Portuguese interests to be evenly taken into account. On the other hand, some Portuguese perceive Galicia as a territory in which a part of the original Portuguese culture remains since the beginning of Portuguese monarchy, as a land in which "Galician-minhoto"²⁹ features mix with Spanish-Castilian ones. This

makes the transborder cooperation even more desirable for some actors.

However, the Euro-regional potentials do not deplete in institutional common interests. In fact, in the Minho border area there is a set of little and medium-sized towns where transborder economical networks have resulted in a relative specialization of some Portuguese towns in the provisioning of industrial infrastructures serving Galician enterprises' needs. Vilanova de Cerveira and Valença for instance, have promoted the construction of industrial centres to attract Galician investments. Related to this, the transport infrastructure's question is a key factor for the development of the Iberian Atlantic frontage. As a matter of fact, there is an urban Atlantic axis connecting the main cities of Galicia and Portugal but important improvements remain to be done in the transborder connexion of interior lands and the completion of the high-speed railway between Porto and Vigo. The result of these deficiencies is a deeper economic integration and mobility across the western part of the border, more developed and populated.

The dynamics of mobility

During the last twenty years we have assisted to a transition between a model of impermeable boundaries, characterised by scant mobility across them associated to institutional differences in highly-regulated markets, to other of open borders, recognisable by intense mobility associated to a wide variety of motivations and transborder economical, cultural and social integration processes. Until the 1990s the

main transborder flows were local in scope and mobility was encouraged by economic inequalities between Portuguese and Spanish socio-economic systems. As a result, a relevant percentage of displacements were for trade purposes aiming to take profit of price differentials and currency exchanges. In addition, there was a strong occurrence of smuggling, especially during autarchy periods (XXth Century dictatorships), encouraged by the relative marginalization of border localities in a context of "closed boundaries". The subsequent integration in the EEC resulted in a deep approaching of both countries' economic structures but not implying a crucial transformation of transborder mobility models.

In present days, the transborder relational logic is a reality in the economic field, but the territorial logic remains significant in most border inhabitants' customs and self-conceptions. There is an intensification of material economic flows whilst individuals' mobility is affected by declining traditional motivations, compensated by new reasons for transborder mobility, usually attaining longer distances. Among the new mobility reasons, we can summarize labour and *intra-firm* relations, leisure, tourism and the differential offer of health and educational services. We have to point out that these motivations are still of restricted importance (except, perhaps, the shopping visits) twenty years after the entry of both countries in the EEC.

Considering *labour mobility*, we can distinguish two preferent Galician destinations for Portuguese workers: the Vigo metropolitan area and some important border towns on the Minho region, such as A Guarda and Tui. On the other hand, many Spanish workers (almost all from Vigo and Tui) go to work to Portuguese

border towns, in which Galician enterprises are expanding.

Concerning *leisure and tourism mobility*, this is of greater importance among Portuguese citizens visiting Galicia. In fact, statistics (Turgalicia 2006) show that Galicia is more attractive for Portuguese tourists than for neighbouring Spaniards. Tourism is one of the activities more positively affected by the disparition of border obstacles. Besides the spatial proximity, a set of perceptions and attitudes have encouraged the leisure crossings across this piece of border. In Galicia, Santiago de Compostela and Vigo are the major destinations for Portuguese visitors. Vigo, at only about 20 km far-off the boundary, is a centre for rapid shopping and leisure visits. On the other hand, Compostela is a more distant destination for cultural tourists usually staying several days in town. Meanwhile, the most important tourist attractiveness for border inhabitants is that of fairs and celebrations taking place near the boundary.

In addition, most of the recent Portuguese visitors came from the Minho border area (Minho-Lima NUTS III region): from 25 to 30% of its total population have travelled to Galicia during the analysed period of time (year 2005). In our opinion, this behaviour indicates a strong relationship between local inhabitants within and across this border area, far beyond the mere economic and labour relationships. In fact, we believe that the Portuguese region of Minho-Lima is becoming a social and economic prolongation at the other side of the boundary of Vigo's functional area.

All in all, the boundary separating Galicia and Portugal can be easily crossed. Within this border area, we find one of the most dynamic spaces of the Spanish-Portuguese border: the Minho area, playing a role of transborder connection between the

urban areas of Porto and Vigo (the latter is situated at only about 20 minutes from the boundary by car). In fact, Vigo extends its labour recruiting area to the whole Minho region, beyond the boundary itself. In this area, there exists a proliferation of little and medium-sized industrial enterprises playing a decisive role in deepening economic integration at both sides of the border. As a result, there is a growing demand of urban soil in the area, indicating its new centrality after the disparition of obstacles imposed by the boundary. In the interior land, only a minor development axis between Chaves and Verin shows a modest economic integration in a context of rural, economically and demographically regressive areas.

This growing inter-relationship between the towns and cities in this region is a result of historical, cultural and social relationships in existence prior to the creation of the modern States, and of the relatively recent development of key cities with a considerable capacity for regional leadership, some of which are very close to the Galician-Portuguese border, and most of which are situated along the Atlantic Coast. We can cite recently developed cities such as Vigo, or others with a greater historical weight such as Braga, Guimaraes or Chaves.

Cultural heritage and its importance

One of the fields in which the cooperation potentials were partially fulfilled is that pursuing a sustainable development of cultural, ethnographic and historic heritage and local identities. It is easy to hear in the

Galician-Portuguese border towns that there are more ties between people living at each side of the line than those existing between them and national populations of Spain and Portugal. This perception is, sometimes, assumed and reproduced in local discourses whilst local practices show the striking reality of separation. The transborder region does still represent communitarian continuity only in collective memory and representations, and it is visible in cultural landscapes.

This ambiguous relationship of local inhabitants with the boundary leads to a sort of patrimonialisation of the international divisory. Within the diverse transborder cultural initiatives having the border areas as protagonist, we would stand out, firstly, the candidature of *Galician-Portuguese oral tradition* to the qualification of Human Masterpiece by the UNESCO. This project was originated in a couple of small border towns where a transborder cultural association called *Ponte nas Ondas* existed. The Galicia-Northern Portugal Work Community supported it, making explicit the cultural community existing in both regions. At the same time, the project explained that unity factors and transborder traditional signs of identity are in disappearance danger, mainly because of general decadence of traditional relationships with ecological space and of old professions and techniques.

In an information bulletin published by the Galician-Portuguese Work Community titled “The Galician-Portuguese Oral Tradition: a Heritage for Future!” is stated (page 32):

“The Galician-Portuguese immaterial heritage is a sample of a people’s collective identity that managed, since ancient times, to get adapted to a peculiar environment... The existence of

Galicia-Northern Portugal Euro-region in European Community endows with a specific geographical framework this project, hence facilitating the possibility to benefit from transborder cooperation dynamics...”

But, above all, what this initiative over Galician-Portuguese oral heritage represents is the almost complete unanimity around the support of an idea of a common traditional culture, shared by Galician and Portuguese.

Secondly, concerning the *material heritage*, we can point out that along the Galician-Portuguese border area, a rich variety of historical urban centres and fortifications, mixing military buildings with civil and religious architecture, prove the importance of constructed cultural heritage in this area. In general terms, fortified places and castles are not as well conserved in Galicia as they are in the Portuguese side of the border (González & Lois 1996). This is a historical result of the greater importance conceded by Portuguese to territorial integrity and border defence.

The struggles between Spain and Portugal during the Modern Age contributed to a reinforcement of those fortifications closest to the “Raia”. As an example, we can take into account the periods of the Portuguese Restoration War in which the Portuguese state get free from the Austrian dynasty of Spain (1640-1668), the Spanish Crown Succession War after the premature death of King Carlos II (1701-1714), and Napoleon’s invasions (1808-1814).

As it happens with economical and social features, the most important part of the border in terms of constructed historical heritage is the Minho area, where the majority and most important fortified towns, castles and military forts were placed. Other areas with a relevant density

of border fortified places near the Minho were the Lima valley and the coastal zone from Vigo to Viana do Castelo. In the interior, fortified villages and historical military structures are scant. The only relevant fortifications are along the Tamega valley, at each side of the boundary, in Monterrei (Galicia) and Chaves (Portugal). As a matter of fact, these were the only historically relevant towns in this area. In the rest of the interior border area there are only few patrimonial examples, almost always on the Portuguese side.

Taking into account the patrimonial civil elements, the border disappears completely in terms of constructed typologies and styles. This is another feature of a clear cultural continuity across the border. Civil architecture is, hence, an excellent indicator of past intense relationships between border inhabitants. Therefore, the shared border landscape is considered as a “melting pot” of patrimonial resources attaining a big singularity in the fortification systems, highly related to their surrounding territories. As a result, a single candidature to declare the Iberian fortified Raia as World’s Cultural Heritage has been presented. The goal is to study, research, catalogue, cartography, photograph, document, and rehabilitate the fortifications; valorise them as Military and Border History museums, as cultural and leisure centres, as tourist’s resources... To achieve these goals, it will be necessary to coordinate municipal, regional, transboundary, universitarian, political and other efforts. In addition, it is urgent to coordinate transborder policies in a global, common and shared Raia’s planning project (territorial, urbanistic, architectural, touristic and environmental). The main objective should be to demonstrate that

the Raia is no-longer separating people, but joining them for a sustainable exploitation of its patrimonial, natural and cultural potentials. The border fortifications are a highly valuable historic and artistic legacy, for they are useful to study socio-political mentalities, economical wealth, cultural, artistic, scientific and technical advances of a large period of time concerning more than 300 years.

Conclusion

To conclude, it could be said that the connections between historical memory, cultural heritage and supranational integration processes are fluent and open. The concept which best defines the meeting of the three aforementioned elements in the border area between Galicia and the North of Portugal is perhaps that of “identity” and, more precisely, “transboundary identity”.

A definition by the cultural anthropologist F. Barth seems appropriate to explain the Galician-Portuguese case: “Identity consists of the social relations among individuals who share some characteristics, experiences and common symbols which make stakeholders feel like a group. The key would be, therefore, the awareness of being part of a group and sharing something with others”.

Certainly, a good deal of identity is based on the assimilation by individuals and human communities of a series of past facts, which carry a symbolism that can give sense to the individual in its social and geographic framework. Such reference events become visible and apparent in the

landscape through a series of heritage and cultural “markers”, having a particularly significant density in border areas like ours, so antique and full of history.

These identity reference frameworks are under strain in a time of integration and reinterpreting of State borders. Such strains are stronger the stronger the difference between the respective national realities (assimilated by local populations with different means and intensities) and the ongoing integration process is. However, this extreme case is not the one typical of the Galician-Portuguese border. Rather, there were some previously clear cultural links beyond the mere border area related to different interpretations of History -historical memory- that take advantage of certain cultural and heritage resources common to both territories. But these interpretations, like its opposite ones –the ones that defend a clear essential difference between the populations on one side and the other of the border, highlighting the hallmark left in them by the Spanish and Portuguese “national” cultures-, are also simplifications.

Actually, if we consider the geographic dynamics on the use of space, the cultural landscape and mobility, we immediately realize that there are two clearly differentiated spaces in the Galician-Portuguese border area: Firstly, those places where the transboundary cultural identity -in its traditional sense- is more alive: the rural and sparsely populated areas in the Raia Seca, coinciding with less “patrimonialized” places on the border. That is to say: where identity was less filled with meaning. Secondly, the more urban and dynamic areas of the Raia Úmida and the small urban axis Verín-Chaves in

the inner area. These are the most clearly – symbolically – patrimonialized places by the respective States. Areas full of defensive fortifications, where smuggling was more difficult and the official mobility -the one admitted and controlled by the State- was easier. Nowadays, these are areas located in high demographic density axis which, with the enhancement of the transboundary communication infrastructure in the Atlantic Axis, allow connecting the main urban centres. In this respect, towns are the ones that get integrated, leaving the middle border area in a peripheral position. In our view, this is why local strategies to restore the value of border identities, of built and immaterial landscape heritage on the border -both as a tourist resource and to try locally the transition of identities strongly marked by division to others marked by integration and mutual understanding- are so important. This is a necessary attempt if we think about the more general process of European continental integration.

Notes

1. This summary is based on the articles of the three main political leaders of the moment in Galicia, quoted from *Tempo Exterior* nº3, 2001. Obtained the 6th June, 2006, in <http://www.igadi.org>.
2. The Minho is the river that designs a part of the Galician-Portuguese boundary and it is also a historic Portuguese region, situated in the Northwestern corner of the country. This is a quite symbolic region in Portuguese imagery, being the most ancient and “cradle” of Portuguese independence in the middle Ages. In addition, this Portuguese region holds, until now, large cultural similarities with neighbouring Galicia.

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