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Eurocities of the Iberian Borderland: A Second Generation of Border Cooperation Structures. An Analysis of Their Development Strategies

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Abstract: The new territorial structures for the governance of the borderlands between Portugal and Spain (Eurocities) constitute a novel and exciting example of a local commitment to cross-border cooperation (CBC). The Eurocities are feasible institutions in very close cities and municipalities, and have always had intense relationships. With different speeds, formats and intensities, Eurocities have been forming along the European Union's internal borders. Compared to other types of cooperation entities created mainly at regional or sub-regional scales (Euroregions and Eurodistricts), Eurocities are created at the municipal or local level, which are the most relevant protagonists of cross-border flows and relations. These new institutions are established based on different common objectives, such as economic dynamism, tourism, mobility, sustainability and access to funding, among many other fields of common interest. The present research deals with the geographical and institutional framework of these new Eurocities on the Portuguese–Spanish border, where they have increased in recent years. Their beginnings, evolution and characteristics are analyzed through a review work. In many cases, Eurocities become responses at the local and municipal scales. Some of these Eurocities have gone one step further by becoming a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), such as Chaves–Marín or Guadiana Eurocity. In addition, some of these second-generation CBC structures are integrating into higher regional levels, such as in the case of the Río Minho EGTC. Furthermore, the present study enables us to identify factors, such as the offer of common equipment and services offer, Eurocitizenship, enhancing access to European Funds, or the marketing and advertising of the Eurocity, as some of the critical factors for the success of the Iberian Eurocities.

Keywords: borderlands; common planning; cross-border cooperation (CBC); Eurocities; Iberian territories; strategic planning

1. The Starting Point: Deactivation of the Portuguese–Spanish Border and the Creation of New Structures for Border Governance

For many centuries, there have been confrontations and tensions on the Iberian borderlands [1,2]. However, nowadays, the institutional framework of cooperation of the European Union, with its different programs and formulas, seems to have decided to support the border territories [3–6]. Such spaces had suffered the consequences of receiving these administrative boundaries. The administrative boundaries had critical territorial implications, such as political, socioeconomic, regional or military implications, among many others [2,3,6]. With the implementation of these supportive EU policies, the borderland situation has undoubtedly improved in some structural ways,

e.g., bridges, roads, and other infrastructures [7–9]. However, they have not been as effective in banishing the severe depopulation problems and economic decay that affect most of the Iberian border territories [2,3,10]. As such, those policies were not able to compensate for the loss of a historical and commercial local border economy based mainly on customs control's existence.

With the fall of the two dictatorships and the emergence of incipient democracies, the first stage of the deactivation of the border between Spain and Portugal started. The formalization of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in November 1977 opened a new era after the mistrust and inherent problems of the previous Iberian Pact in 1942 [11,12]. Thus, a stronger stage of cooperation began. However, this cooperation was mostly between the states' interests and ruled from their respective capitals (Lisbon and Madrid).

This institutional and public cooperation was reinforced by the incorporation of Spain and Portugal (in 1986) into the European Union structures, and also by the influx of European funds into the framework of successive operational and cross-border programs. The creation of the Schengen Space in 1985 meant the effective abolition of customs. In fact, this openness was decisive for development on the border. The appearance of the European single market in 1993 and the single currency in 2002 (Euro) were also essential factors. Likewise, community funds have allowed the co-financing, construction and improvement of the road network and new bridges that have radically changed social mobility in border territories [13,14].

In the case of the Portuguese–Spanish border, the territories benefiting from cross-border cooperation (CBC) obtained ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) co-funded by INTERREG I (1990–1993), INTERREG II (1994–1999), INTERREG III (2000–2006), POCTEP (Cooperation Program Between Spain and Portugal) (2007–2013), and, currently, INTERREG VA (2014–2020) [15]. Over the last three decades, budgets, regulations, administrative procedures, lines of action, territories and programming limits have improved. Generally, their purposes were maintained and reinforced. Thus, the previous INTERREGs gained prominence in each multiannual framework, generating actions to reduce socioeconomic weaknesses and other added obstacles that borders have faced for many decades [16].

Nonetheless, today's programming range is pervasive, expanding little by little in the successive multiannual frameworks. The actual programming range seems to blur and further distort the “real” frontier territory (Figure 1). In many cases, the spaces that have experienced the consequences of being border regions are not the only ones funded by the programming. In fact, they are merged with neighboring spaces. Therefore, they have not always been the real focus of the projects that have benefited from this financing. Moreover, these are currently weak demographic territories, with high rates of aging and low density, typical of rural areas in regression (Figure 2).

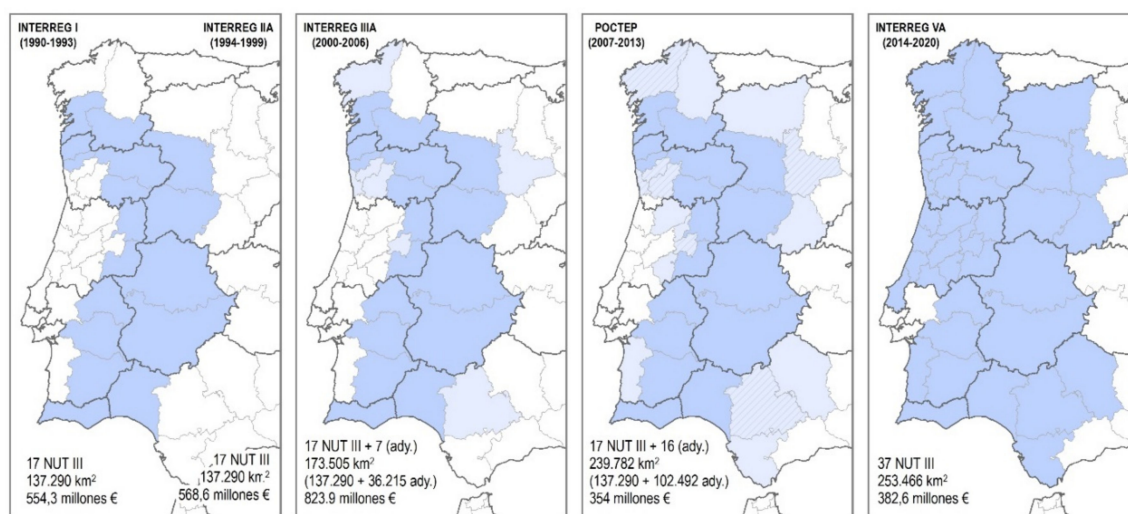


Figure 1. POCTEP delimitations in the different programming periods (Source: [17–19]).

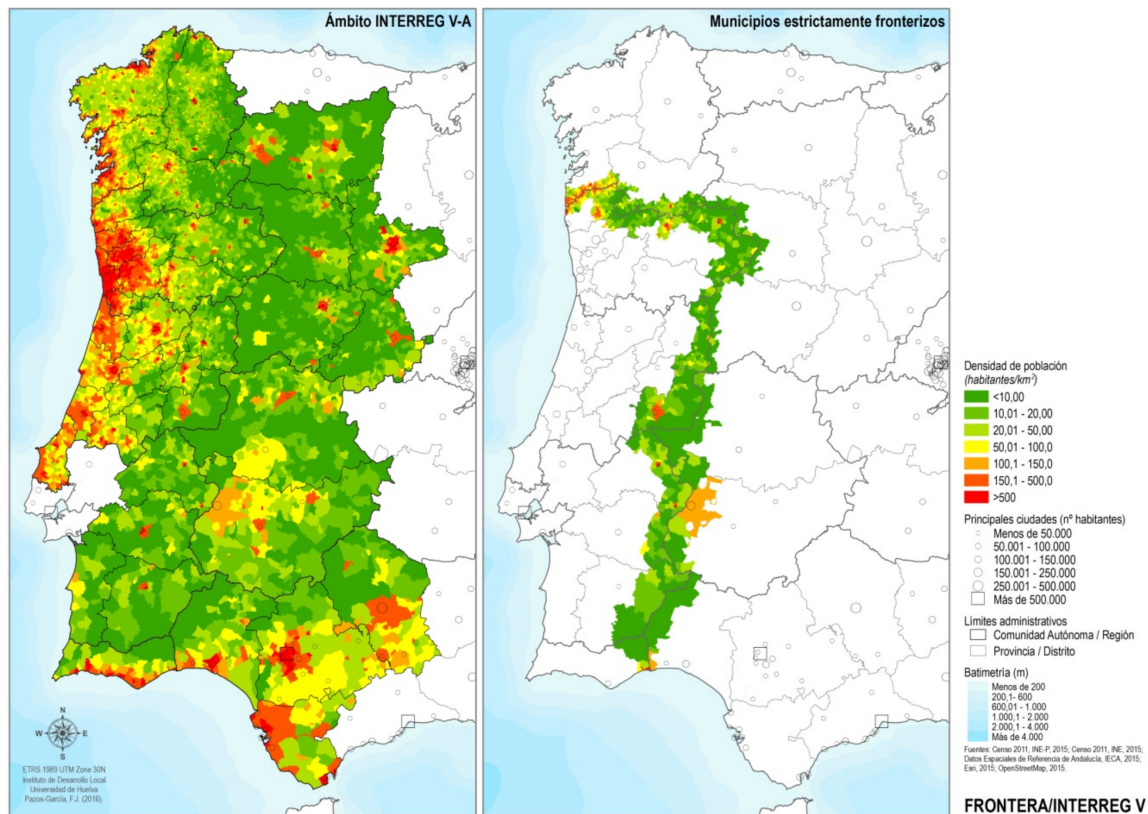


Figure 2. Delimitation by INTERREG VA (2014–2020), strict border municipalities, and population density (Source: [17–19]).

To fully understand the Iberian border’s CBC dynamics, the institutional asymmetry between Portugal and Spain must be taken into account. Both states present a different system of the political-administrative organization [3]. Such an issue implies unequal actions in territorial planning, urban planning, environmental management, and other territorial and sectoral policies that impact the territory, the economy and society.

Portugal is a centralized state administration with a vast scope, with the central government in Lisbon. On the other hand, the Spanish Constitution (1978) endorses a decentralized state with critically weighted regions or Autonomous Communities [20]. At the same time, Spanish municipalities do not have the Portuguese endowments in terms of self-management. However, the provincial organization (Deputations) completes the sub-regional level, which is reduced in Portugal (Districts).

With the structural funds and cooperation policies, different structures, entities and CBC projects have been developed. In Spain and Portugal, after almost 30 years of CBC, different new institutions and structures of joint work and shared governance have been created, under the shield of European policies and funds.

Here, the formation of the clusters at the regional level should be highlighted [21]. The oldest cluster is the Euroregion Galicia–North Portugal [22] that started as a Working Community (WC) in 1991 and became a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) in October 2008. Similarly, the Euroregions of the rest of the Spanish border communities along with Portuguese NUT II (Nomenclature of Territorial units) regions have been formed—i.e., EUROACE (2009), Euroregion AAA (2010) and the CT Castilla y León / Centro Region (1995).

This Iberian cooperation obtained an essential strength through the formalization of the Valencia Treaty on October 3, 2002, between the Kingdom of Spain and the Portuguese Republic. Its purpose is to promote and regulate CBC between Portuguese territorial authorities and Spanish territorial entities within the scope of their respective competencies. This treaty must also be processed in compliance

with the parties' internal laws, European Community law, and the international commitments assumed by these states.

In 2006, the European Framework Agreement for CBC between communities or territorial authorities, signed in Madrid on May 21, 1980 (Madrid Framework Agreement), was complemented in 2006 with an additional Protocol on Territorial Cooperation. The protocol recognizes the right of local and regional authorities to participate in Territorial Cooperation agreements. In July of 2006, the Regulation 1082/2006 was published, which defines a new tool called the EGTC [23]. EGTCs are established as entities in which the Member States delegate specific territorial cooperation tasks under the premise of multi-level governance, bringing together all the actors involved. An example of its formal relevance is that in the ERDF allocation for European Territorial Cooperation (ETC), approved in 2013, EGTCs were the critical entities in the management and acquisition of the funds [24]. Given the greater possibilities and the legal characteristics of the EGTCs, the previous Work Communities Association opts for this route. Some Euroregions, and also the Eurocities, are doing it as they allow the decentralization of cooperation. In this regard, Figure 3 illustrates the ERDF co-financing of the POCTEP Program (2007–2013), the Alentejo–Algarve–Andalusia Euroregion projects, and also the multi-regional projects. Undoubtedly, there is a direct correlation between demographic density, CBC and the development of these new administrative structures—the Euroregions and the Eurocities. The vertex Galicia–North Portugal responds to these two concepts, and its strength is in its pioneering character and traditional culture of cooperation.

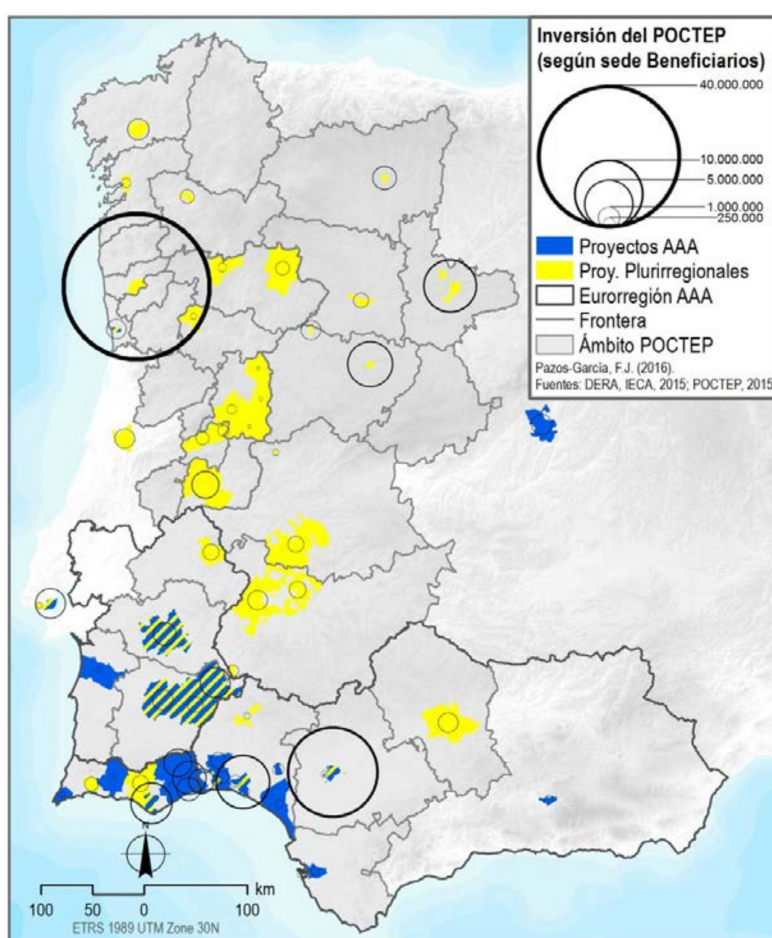


Figure 3. POCTEP investment (2007–2013) according to beneficiary headquarters (Source: [25,26]).

The possibilities of cooperation on the Iberian border have already been consolidated, for example in the fields of geography and economy. In this regard, the studies of Cabero, Campesino and López

Trigal [20], López Trigal et al. [21], Márquez Domínguez [22], López Trigal [23], Cabero Diéguez, [27], Lois and Plaza [28], Medeiros [5,29], Campesino and Jurado [30], Lois, Escolano and Gusman [31] or Castanho et al. [4] are just a few examples.

Regarding the Eurocities, there are also several relevant research works—i.e., in the Eurocities of Chaves–Verín [20,21,32]; Elvas–Badajoz [3,8,21,23], Tui–Valença [20], Bayona–Donostia [20,21], Douro–Duero [21], Cerdanya [20], and in the Lower Guadiana Region [20–23]. Moreover, studies were also conducted analyzing the whole of the Iberian Border [20–24,33].

2. Materials and Methods

Aiming to enable a further understanding regarding the CBC dynamics and processes in the Iberian Peninsula, this research performs an analysis different from other studies and institutions involved in CBC processes. Thus, our study's attention is dedicated solely to the Eurocities. Contextually, the current research has intended to study these new institutional governance structures, their characteristics, their evolutions and their associated challenges.

Consequently, the study hypothesis is that Eurocities have become important structures for CBC. Even if they are recent creations, the Eurocities show ample possibilities in terms of acquiring a more significant role in the integrated management of border territories.

The territorial scope covers the entire Iberian border, although it explicitly focuses on the six Eurocities that have been established so far in this Spanish–Portuguese borderland (Table 1).

Table 1. Eurocities on the Spanish–Portuguese Border.

Designation	Establishment Year	Approx. Population (Inhabitants)	Information Sources
EGTC Eurocity Chaves–Verín	18.12.2007 17.07.2013 in EGTC	55.500	[34,35]
Eurocity Tui–Valença do Minho	10.02.2012	31.000	[36,37]
Eurocity of the Guadiana (Ayamonte–Vila Real de Santo António–Castro Marim)	09.05.2013 07.02.2018 in EGTC	46.000	[38–40]
Eurocity Monção–Salvaterra de Miño	28.03.2015	29.000	[41–43]
Eurocity EUROBEC (Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior)	03.05.2018	190.000	[44,45]
Eurocity Cerveira–Tomiño	04.10.2018	23.000	[46]

The Eurocities of Monção–Salvaterra, Cerveira–Tomiño and Tui–Valença do Minho are included in the EGTC Rio Minho [47]. This EGTC was established in Valença do Minho on 24 February 2018. Their goal is to enhance projects in this border territory. Moreover, there is a 7th Eurocity that is currently forming: the Eurocity of Almeida–Fuentes de Oñoro–Ciudad Rodrigo in the regions of Centro (Portugal) and Castilla y León (Spain).

Recognizing the scope of this research, it was necessary to use direct and indirect methods. Therefore, it has been helpful to consult laws and regulations from different scales: international (European), national (Spain and Portugal) and regional (Andalucía, Alentejo, Galiza and Centro, among other Iberian border regions). Likewise, it was necessary to carry out site analyses, and visits to the most relevant organizations of geographic and territorial information, to collect several types of data; i.e., bibliographic, statistical or cartographic. It has also been helpful to consult and review the published literature regarding the Spanish–Portuguese border.

Accordingly, the research conducted face-to-face and telephone interviews between 2018 and 2019. The questionnaires were focused on and designed for the technical personnel of the Eurocities. The questions present in the questionnaires cover fields about the functional and budgetary resources of the Eurocities, the Eurocities' conversions into EGTCs, the municipal policies regarding the Eurocities, and the participants' perceptions about the creation of networks and associations in the CBC context.

The questionnaires were formed of 34 questions. Through them, it was possible to obtain a more reliable overview of the Iberian border territories. Moreover, this information was complemented by data from reports and websites produced by the Eurocities associations.

3. Outcomes of the Iberian Eurocities

This section aims to present and discuss the results obtained through the questionnaires. In order to create a better understanding for the reader, this section is divided into several sub-sections. It starts with an overall view of the Eurocities and their associated demographic dynamics, followed by a description of the main features of these Iberian Eurocities.

In the section regarding the Eurocities' features, we divided these features into more specific sub-topics according to the sections of the questionnaire. Thus, we highlighted specific topics like marketing strategies, public participation, citizens' knowledge about the potential of Eurocities, local cooperation policies and strategies, common urban planning in Iberian Eurocities, networking development, and future trends of the analyzed Eurocities.

After, we present a section regarding a summary of the results obtained in the Iberian Eurocities.

Finally, considering all the obtained results, and following discussions, the identified critical factors for the success of the Iberian Eurocities projects will be shown.

3.1. Eurocities and Their Demographic Dynamics

These Iberian Eurocities were developed within the framework of EU funds, cohesion policies and European Territorial Cooperation (ETC). The Eurocities have been designed with different speeds and intensities. At the regional level, Eurocities emerged at the local and municipal levels, which is interesting when compared to other types of cooperation.

This form of CBC that constitutes the Eurocity has increased with some ease in recent years. It is seen as the second generation of CBC models. The Eurocities model intensifies and strengthens cooperation at local and regional levels.

The Eurocity concept is particularly interesting in terms of offering structure and substance to a project that goes far beyond theory and institutional conventionality. It groups together localities that come together to attend to public services at a lower cost, which is difficult to achieve locally or individually. Above all, they also serve as a platform to qualify for assistance from the European Union, as well as other possibilities and funding from the state, regional or provincial administrations. In sum, the Eurocity attempts to form entities with a full capacity to request and develop projects related to CBC. Therefore, most of these Eurocities decide to establish themselves as EGTC (the cases of Chaves–Verín or the Guadiana Eurocity), or even to associate with an EGTC in order to acquire a larger scale; i.e., the Rio Minho EGTC (Southern Galicia–North Portugal).

It is an especially appealing integration process on the Portuguese–Spanish border, where all regions deal with slightly different issues in a similar form. They are intended to generate sufficient demographic and economic growth, as well as to reach common commercial objectives. Therefore, they intended to facilitate application for European, national and regional projects and funds, or to extend the integration of the territory socially and economically, providing shared services. In short, they try to institutionalize and intensify cooperation between border municipalities that, historically, have maintained very notable cultural and socio-economic ties.

However, this Iberian border territory is diverse, and the regions do not always have the geographical requirements to configure themselves into Eurocities. It seems evident that for a Eurocity to emerge, several factors must be brought together, beyond the existence of common interests, to endow themselves with resources or services. Some of these factors include: (i) the spatial proximity of two or more nuclei (geographic location); (ii) good accessibility and connectivity/movement between cities; (iii) medium–high intensity of human and economic flows; and (iv) a sufficient demographic size.

Considering those principles, the Portuguese–Spanish border has a significant disadvantage since it is formed of rural spaces with low demographic density, compared to other more populated European

border territories. Consequently, if we analyze the demographic density, we obtain an unequal profile, in which the only demographic peaks fully coincide with the appearance of the Eurocities. We refer to the Baixo Minho Region (Tui–Valença do Minho, Chaves–Verín, Cerveira–Tomiño and Monção–Salvaterra de Miño), Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior and Guadiana (including the municipalities of Ayamonte, Vila Real de Santo António and Castro Marim) (Figures 3 and 4). To these demographic elements, we should add the notable pre-existing historical relationships. These are cities that historically resisted and fought against each other, where the "border" is part of their economies, heritage and idiosyncrasy. To these six Eurocities, a seventh could be added, which is now in the design process (from December 2019): the Eurocity of Almeida–Fuentes de Oñoro–Ciudad Rodrigo.

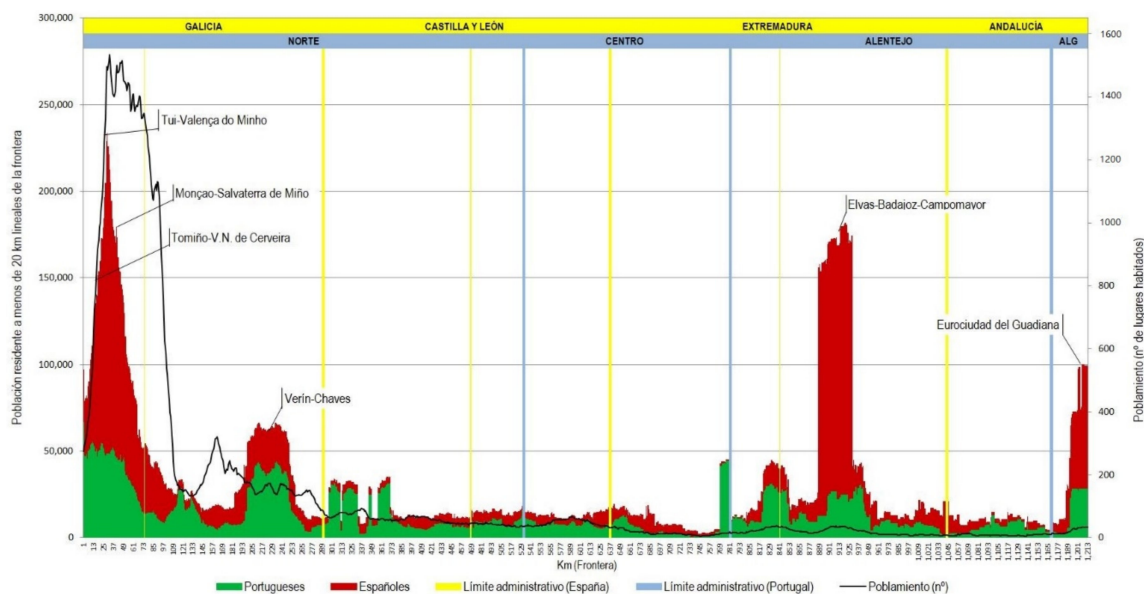


Figure 4. Population entities less than 10 km from the Portuguese–Spanish border. (Source: [17–19]).

Even though these groups host the most populated areas of this border, their demographic dynamics are still insufficient (Figure 4). So, in March 2017, they agreed to work on creating the Iberian Network of Eurocities, to intensify exchanges and promote the transfer of knowledge acquired by these territorial cooperation structures [20]. However, the four Galician–North Portuguese Eurocities did work in better coordination. That is to say, more consistently with the higher level of integration characteristic of this and other types of territorial cooperation structures (Figure 5). Their relative geographical proximity also influences them. It should be highlighted that these four Galician–North Portuguese Eurocities contain eight cities, and four of those cities are located in the same political and administrative framework.

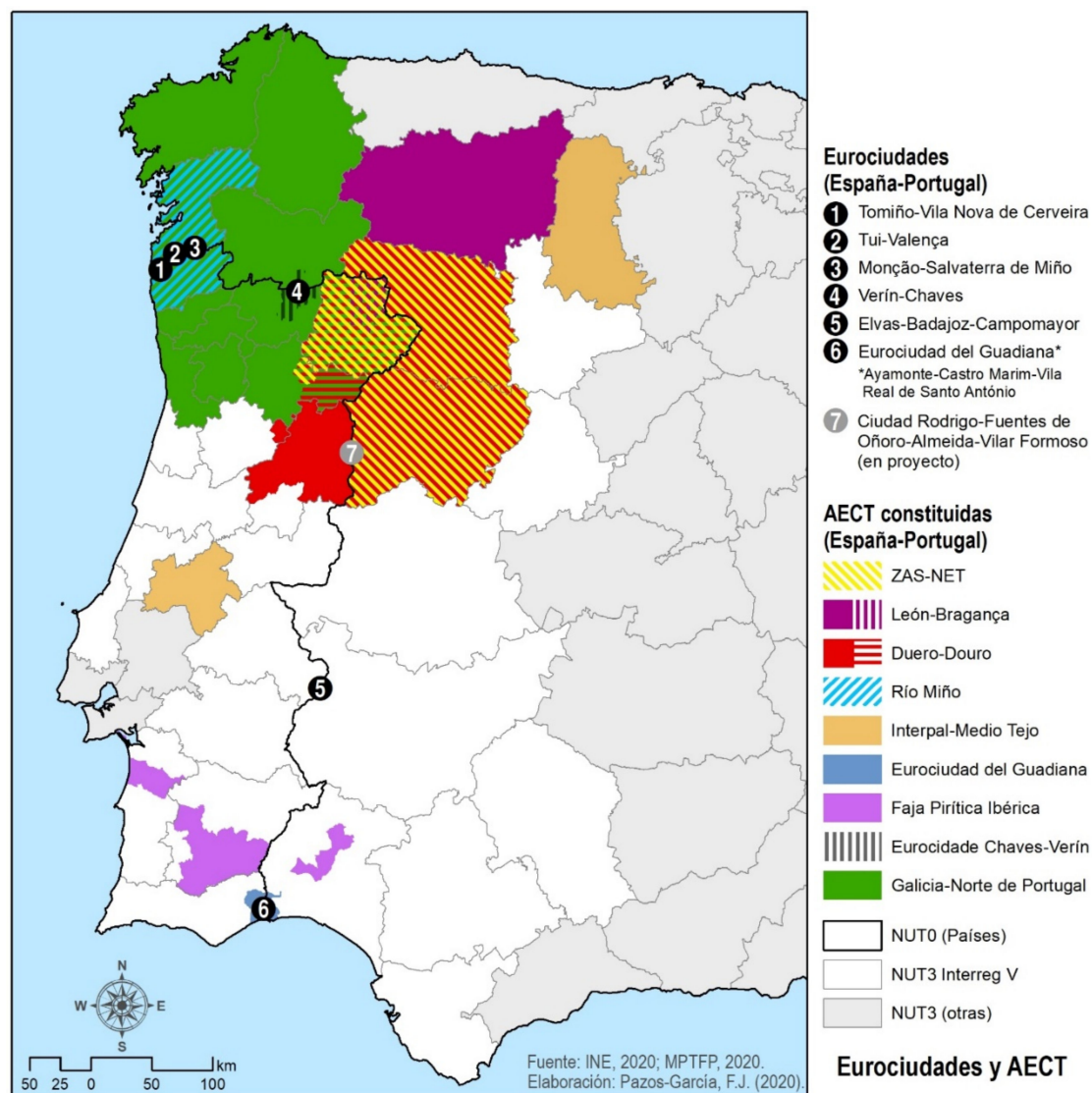


Figure 5. Eurocities and European Groups of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) of the Iberian border.

3.2. Features of the Iberian Eurocities

In this sub-section, we will highlight problems based on the questionnaires (34 questions distributed in seven blocks), complemented with interviews and site analysis.

3.2.1. Overall Features and Marketing Strategies

Regarding its historical origin (Table 1), the first analysis starts with the Eurocity Chaves–Verín, established in December 2007. In fact, this Eurocity was also the first to become an EGTC (2013). The Eurocity of Tui–Valença dates from 2012. Geographically close to those two Eurocities are Monção–Salvaterra (2015) and Cerveira–Tomiño (2018). After this, the Guadiana Eurocity was created in June 2013. Finally, the Eurocity Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior was established in May 2018.

Even if the initiatives were municipal, they were encouraged by other regional organizations, for example Xunta de Galicia, the Euroregion Alentejo–Algarve–Andalucía or the Commission for the Coordination and Regional Development (CCDR). These Eurocity projects were born through Friendship Agreements, which later became Cooperation Protocols and, in some cases, EGTCs [20].

Focusing on professional and budgetary issues, only the Eurocities of Chaves–Verín and Monção–Salvaterra have their own office and staff dedicated to Eurocity issues. The rest use the dependencies of their municipalities. Likewise, only Chaves–Verín has its budget proposed by the

director of the Eurocity. The other Eurocities either do not have budgets, or depend on funds they receive for other projects for all the city administration. All of the studied Eurocities have their personnel assigned to municipal areas, with delegated workers to whom they commit the tasks of the Eurocity. Likewise, Chaves–Verín, Monção–Salvaterra and Cerveira–Tomiño have websites. The other Eurocities do not have specific websites, although a section on the municipal website is dedicated to their respective Eurocities.

Regarding marketing and advertisement, not all the analyzed Eurocities have their own logos and slogans. However, some Eurocities are already working on their marketing and advertisement strategies [33]. For example, the Eurocity Chaves–Verín has its own logo and flag. Besides, this Eurocity has seven slogans in different languages for different purposes. The marketing in the Eurocities of the region of Galicia (Spain) and North Portugal (Portugal) is very much focused on the water resources shared at the Border; i.e., the Minho River, where the Eurocities are located. In the case of Chaves–Verín, their commitment to tourism is also evident. This region presents excellent potential in the tourism sector.

In all cases, the intention to establish an EGTC seems to be clear, which would go beyond what the initial cooperation agreements and protocols have settled. By now, only Chaves–Verín (2013) and Guadiana (2018) have reached that goal and become an EGTC. In Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior, the process has not started, but the intention exists. Furthermore, the other Eurocities of the Minho Region have been integrated into the Rio Minho EGTC.

3.2.2. Public Participation and the Eurocity

One of the sections of the questionnaire refers to Public Participation and the Eurocity. The establishment of the Eurocitizenship card has been critical for success in the opinion of the participants. These findings are in line with previous research regarding similar issues, such as the work conducted by Castanho et al. [4], where critical factors for territorial success in CBC environments have been identified. In the case of Badajoz–Elvas–Campo Maior, the process of the Eurocitizenship card has not started yet; however, the main actors of this Eurocity are planning to create it. In Tui–Valença, Cerveira–Tomiño and Monção–Salvaterra, the process is about to start, according to the local authorities. As an example, in the Eurocity of the Guadiana, the card will give access to discounts on some municipal services, and private health and leisure activities/services. However, it is still little developed. In the case of Chaves–Verín, the development has not achieved its peak yet. Nonetheless, it has shown more significant legal development and has been broadly announced. Once more, Chaves–Verín is the Eurocity that has been more explicit and has more development. These Eurocity projects offer a series of advantages related to the Eurocitizenship card, which are: access to the services of the municipal libraries of the Eurocity; discounts on the use of municipal facilities; free entry to museums; discounts on cultural events; discounts on therapeutic services and thermal wellness treatments; access to training promoted by the Eurocity; access to participation in cultural, sports and recreational activities; participation in competitions organized by the Eurocity; discounts for trades, services and restaurants located in the Eurocity area; and subscription to the newsletter of the Eurocity.

3.2.3. Citizens Knowledge about Eurocities Potential

Regarding the question about the citizens' perceptions of the advantages offered by the Eurocity, in all cases, the respondents showed very positive feedback concerning the opportunities enabled by the CBC projects. In fact, these outcomes are the opposite of previous research in some of these territories [3,4,48]. In the case of the Eurocity Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior, the authors believe that such results could be explained partly by the pre-existing relationship between the cities of Elvas and Badajoz, rather than by the creation of the Eurocity itself. Moreover, the outcomes show that citizens may have little knowledge about the services, and also about their implications. This time, they corroborated the research conducted by Castanho et al. [48], where the perceptions of the residents of the Eurocity Elvas–Badajoz were analyzed.

In Chaves–Verín, where the level of development of the Eurocity is higher, it was expected that we would find a vast knowledge of this CBC project in the locals. However, the residents do not have so much information on what the Eurocity can offer them; i.e., which services and advantages it entails. So, we can understand that the marketing, advertisement and information related to this CBC project should be emphasized.

Also, in Tui–Valença and Monção–Salvaterra, we verify a similar scenario. The strong pre-existing relationship overweighs the administrative reality that has been generated around the establishment of the Eurocity. Although most of the Eurocity residents are aware of its existence, only those who work more closely with the administrations know the real potential of this CBC project. In Cerveira–Tomiño, there is a very vast knowledge and valuation of this CBC project by its population. Moreover, the Eurocity authorities have even carried out their own satisfaction surveys [20]. In the Guadiana Eurocity, we verified that there was little knowledge had by the citizens regarding this CBC project.

In Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior, we verified that there were not many dissemination campaigns related to Eurocitizenship and the Eurocity project itself. Curiously, in Chaves–Verín, the Eurocitizenship card is held by 18% of the citizens, and no specific campaigns have been conducted beyond the press releases. In Cerveira–Tomiño and Monção–Salvaterra, there have been campaigns to promote CBC benefits and Eurocitizenship. In Tui–Valença, campaigns have been carried out, but on tourism and sports events mainly. The Eurocity of Guadiana does not have specific campaigns, but it does have a high presence in the news.

Considering the business sector's involvement, a lack of involvement of the business community in Badajoz–Elvas–Campo Maior is visible, once more corroborating previous research [3,10,49]. On the contrary, Chaves–Verín has broad collaborative business development, with representations in both chambers of commerce, an Iberian International Laboratory of Nanotechnology and European Associations of Economic Interest. In total, Chaves–Verín has a business list with more than 1000 registered companies, with particular emphasis on tourism and commerce. This Eurocity also participates in investment and internationalization projects. However, despite the development shown by this Eurocity project, some participants' answers in the questionnaire state that "there is much work to be done." Therefore, in the short term, it is proposed to expand the benefits of the Eurocitizenship card into the commercial and services sector.

In Tui–Valença, the participants' answers indicate that there is "little involvement" and also a lack of technical competence in the field of common planning at a municipal level. So, in Tui–Valença, this role is primarily assumed by the Euroregion. In Cerveira–Tomiño and Monção–Salvaterra, the respondents declare that there is good participation in the initiatives to stimulate the local economy in the tourist and agricultural sectors. Finally, in the Eurocity of Guadiana, the results show significant involvement in the business sector. In fact, business associations on both sides of the border have participated actively in the project's design. However, this has not yet been reflected in the existence of bilateral business entities, although there are specific collaboration initiatives, without stable structures.

3.2.4. The Local Cooperation Policies and Strategies

Local cooperation policies is another sub-section of the questionnaire. In all cases, we verify that the participants agree that the policies more involved are those concerning governance and citizen participation, shared public services and facilities, and economic development. The main measures include cross-border governance, based on joint technical and political work, and a closer focus on social and economic conditions, based on the creation of new business and employment opportunities.

Regarding the main achievements made so far, most of the Eurocities agree that the municipal areas with the most significant involvement are culture, tourism and sport. In Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior, joint projects have already been established; i.e., school exchange, cultural and socio-economic conferences, seminars and meetings, applications for European funds, infrastructural exchanges and sporting events. In Tui–Valença, the level of development at this point is similar, with particular emphasis on sports activities, and a significant presence of support from the associated Euroregion.

In Cerveira–Tomiño, joint work has been promoted between dozens of associations from both countries; besides, the municipalities plan to extend sports and music services to both shores of the transboundary river. The Eurocity Cerveira–Tomiño was awarded, in 2019, with 13th place in the list of Best Practices in Citizen Participation Distinction of the International Observatory of Participatory Democracy.

The synergy between Chaves–Verín was, once more, the one with the most dynamic scope of work. There have been several bilateral work commissions, with the presence of technicians from both sides of the border working in the specific fields of tourism, culture, sports and education, transport, waste management, employment and communication. Besides, more sporadically, there have been projects focusing on the youth population, the environment, land use, civil protection, commerce, markets, social action and agriculture. With all this, we can verify that there have been projects and works covering practically the entire Eurocity area. Thus, even before becoming an EGTC in 2013, seven POCTEP projects were in operation in the Chaves–Verín Eurocity. Since its establishment, two other Interreg VA projects have already been approved; one related to nature-based tourism, the development of the "border" tourist destination, and another approaching the citizens' 2020 European objectives. As the main achievements of this Eurocity project, they indicate the creation of an agenda for the Eurocity, published in August 2008. The agenda aims to improve the website and Chaves–Verín as a tourist destination, with its network of tourist information offices. Besides, they expect to invest more in the development of thermal and water routes, the improvement of routes, mountain bike routes, environmental centers of various kinds, commercial directories, and all kinds of events and fairs, among several other things.

Only the Eurocities located in the region of Galicia and North Portugal have some common publication typology related to their Eurocity. In the cases of Tui–Valença, Cerveira–Tomiño and Moncão–Salvaterra, they declare that they have published guides for tourism promotion. In Chaves–Verín, there are several publications, including two agendas published by the EGTC. Furthermore, a technical report of good practices was published by the two municipalities entitled "*The Atlantic Axis*", and there are even six guides and technical documents for tourism [34]. In the Eurocity of the Guadiana, there are tourist publications derived from different projects, including one published between the three municipalities as part of the project "*A line in the water*."

As for the joint attendance at competitions and external exhibitions, Chaves–Verín is the Eurocity that has been representing both municipalities in tourism since 2008. Tui–Valença, Cerveira–Tomiño and Moncão–Salvaterra declare that they attend together the *Xunta* and *Turismo de Portugal* meetings. The Eurocity of the Guadiana has made joint presentations at the Lisbon Tourism Exchange event. Finally, Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior has not done anything related to this so far.

Concerning the most relevant public subsidies collected, most of them come from the European Union; more precisely from the POCTEP programs [26]. On the other hand, it seems clear that being structured as an EGTC is a critical factor in obtaining higher financing and capacities. In this regard, Chaves–Verín has a long history of attracting public resources, with 10 projects with European funding via ERDF, 8 from POCTEP, one from RISC and one from URBACT. They have also obtained provincial funds through the Instituto Ourenán de Desenvolvemento Económico (INORDE). Tui–Valença, Cerveira–Tomiño and Moncão–Salvaterra benefit from grants under the Rio Minho EGTC. In the Eurocity of Guadiana, it is pointed out that the lack of a legal structure is seen as a barrier to competing for subsidies. Therefore, local entities have to go as their own representation. Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior declared that they have had no subsidies yet.

Regarding the main goals for this last 2014–2020 timeframe, Chaves–Verín stands out once more with its "2020 Strategy" [50]. Here, we should highlight the smart, sustainable, competitive and inclusive objectives this Eurocity defined. Tui–Valença and Moncão–Salvaterra are working, especially on tourism and sports. The Cerveira–Tomiño Eurocity is committed to promoting the Minho River as a shared resource, cross-border mobility, sustainable territorial development, shared management of public services and facilities, and an economic development based on cooperation. For Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior and the Eurocity of Guadiana, the main goal is to make the Eurocity

official. To these, the Eurocity of Guadiana adds the approval of strategic plans, essential to planning the sustained growth of the Eurocity.

In line with the above-mentioned, it is of interest whether or not these Eurocities can develop common strategic plans [51]. In this regard, Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior is contemplating how to carry out these in the short-term. Chaves–Verín has an approved plan, and the renewal of its strategic agenda is being processed [52]. Tui–Valença and Cerveira–Tomiño already have one. The Eurocity of Guadiana has this objective, and also the Euroguadian Urban Agenda is currently underway in this Eurocity project [53].

3.2.5. Iberian Eurocities and the Common Urban Planning

The questionnaires also focused on the actions related to the common urban planning of those Eurocities. Thus, in Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior, Cerveira–Tomiño and Moncão–Salvaterra, this common planning has not been considered yet. In Tui–Valença, it has not been raised specifically, but in parallel areas such as road transport, it is already happening. The Eurocity of the Guadiana refers to the future European Urban Agenda, a programmatic document in which these new possibilities could be included.

Chaves–Verín is already working on this field, although it is more focused on creating a green corridor connecting the two cities along the Tamega River, and therefore not so much on the strictly urban planning fields. Nevertheless, this is consistent with the difficulties involved at the political and administrative level, and the lack of municipal powers, especially on the Spanish side. In fact, Art. 148 and Art. 149 of the Spanish Constitution clarifies that land use, urban planning and housing are exclusive legislative powers of the Autonomous Communities. Consequently, although they depend on competent administration to define the objectives of their urban planning policy, they are subject to approval by the autonomous communities in Spain. Moreover, their active control is limited in practice, while they have greater autonomy in the management and execution of urbanization and building, urban discipline, sanctions and licensing.

3.2.6. Iberian Eurocities and Networking

In the closing section of the questionnaire, the creation of networks by these Iberian Eurocities was assessed.

Regarding the question about the contact that cities have between them, Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior indicates that they have not worked on it yet. Chaves–Verín refers to contacts with other European Eurocities, mainly from the Atlantic Area (Basque Eurocity Bayona–Donostia, Bidasoa–Txingudi Cross-border Consortium and the Newry–Dundalk Twin City). Tui–Valença, Cerveira–Tomiño and Moncão–Salvaterra recognize contacts, especially with Chaves–Verín, through the Atlantic Axis [54]. The Eurocity of the Guadiana also alludes to the Iberian Eurocities Network within the RIET (Iberian Network of Transboundary Entities) [55], and other contacts with the Basque Eurocity.

As regards networking performance, Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior responded that they have not worked on it. However, Chaves–Verín did refer to the existence of developments in this idea. Nevertheless, Chaves–Verín has been involved in some events, such as the I Technical Conference on Iberian Eurocities in Chaves–Verín, held in 2015, or the II Technical Conference on the Guadiana Eurocity in March 2017. A Eurocities working group has also been established within the RIET. The Eurocity of Guadiana referred to a Network of Iberian Eurocities founded by the Galicia and North Regions Eurocities.

Questions have been asked about the advantages that Eurocities have over other entities (Euroregions or other EGTC) in European CBC. In this regard, Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior proposed it as a model of territorial integration suitable for border territories, given their distance from the major decision-making centers.

Chaves–Verín, as an EGTC that has a legal character, refers to its potential to communally manage projects and programs, to carry out public works and to communally manage equipment and

infrastructure. Furthermore, they affirm that the Eurocities “by acting close to the citizen through the services of the municipalities achieve practical effects in the day-to-day life of their inhabitants, which EGTCs at the regional level hardly achieve”.

Tui–Valença and Moncão–Salvaterra refer to the better proximity of these entities with the citizens, and their potential for accessing European funding. The Eurocity of the Guadiana affirms the structure’s pioneering character, and refers to it as “cooperation laboratories.” Furthermore, they claim that its character as a “second-generation cooperation model” allows the real development of a “new model of European citizenship”. Among its benefits, common and shared services, the proximity to citizens and the possibility for joint efforts to access funding also stand out. Specific mention is also made to the potential of the network of Eurocities in the area of knowledge transfer, which does not have to rely on higher-level entities. Finally, Cerveira–Tomiño states that the advantages are different according to the areas of action, and each one has its particular objectives and effectiveness. Overall, the possibility of providing common services and closeness to the citizen is unequivocally shown as the main strength of this type of CBC structure.

As for the weaknesses related to the further development of the Eurocities, Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior points to the legal and fiscal frameworks between them. Similar obstacles are pointed out by Chaves–Verín. In the Eurocities of Tui–Valença and Moncão–Salvaterra, we also found a reference to low financing. Cerveira–Tomiño highlights the differences in the administrative organization and the competences of the countries and municipalities, the different time frames, and the limitations of financial resources as main obstacles. The Eurocity of the Guadiana refers to other factors specific to the Iberian border, such as its low demographic density, aging, and the talent loss related to the difficulty of retaining young and talented people.

3.2.7. Envisioning the Iberian Eurocities Future

In the closing section, the questionnaires also aimed to identify whether the ultimate goal of the Eurocity project was to create singular administrative management. That is to say, whether or creating a single “city” is credible. Moreover, how is it proposed as a future objective?

In this regard, Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior and Tui–Valença did not respond. The Eurocities of Guadiana, Cerveira–Tomiño and Moncão–Salvaterra de Miño do not consider it.

On the one hand, we believe these results are due to the citizens’ resistance to some possible loss of their sense of belonging, if, in the long-term, the Eurocities become one single city. Besides, there is also the administrative constraints to this possibility of a single city. However, Chaves–Verín does have it on its horizon, although they are realistic. Moreover, they state that “there will continue to be barriers, derived from the administrative operation of each country”. However, they see it as feasible in terms of specific issues of joint management; i.e., civil protection, logistics, transportation, tourism, equipment management, waste, culture, sports, youth and the environment.

3.3. Summary

This section aims to provide a synthesis of the questionnaire outcomes. Therefore, we observe the uneven development of these six analyzed Eurocities. On the other hand, the Eurocities in the Galicia–North Portugal Regions have strengthened the CBC more than the other two Eurocities of Badajoz–Elvas–Campo Maior and Guadiana. Contextually, in the following is presented a summary of each of the six analyzed Iberian Eurocities.

3.3.1. Eurocity Cerveira–Tomiño

This Eurocity project is the most recent, as its creation was in October 2018. It encompasses 23,000 inhabitants. Although its creation was recent, it has its own website with relevant documentation of its activities and resources to be publicly consulted. They have approved an Agenda of CBC with Cerveira–Tomiño, the main objective of which is the endeavor of sustainable growth. This Eurocity strategy is based on the collaboration and revaluation of the Minho River’s potential, preserving and

promoting its values and natural resources, both cultural and ethnographic, and also on sharing and optimizing public facilities and services.

Furthermore, there are some shared programs and services; i.e., the "Sport for all people" program, the municipal swimming pool (located in Cerveira) and the Municipal School of Music in Goián (located in Tomiño). Work has also been done on the "Rotas Minho / Roteiros Miño" program, and a common guide promoting tourism was recently published [56].

3.3.2. Eurocity Tui–Valença Do Minho

This Eurocity has a total of 31,500 inhabitants (17,000 in Tui and 14,500 in Valença do Minho). These are two municipalities with an old and intense shared past of transfer of people and goods, to which their cultural and language similarities were critical for some of the success. The creation of the Eurocity dates back to February 2012. Its objectives are very similar to the ones established by the Chaves–Verín Eurocity.

Apart from the Eurocitizenship card, its projects are sports-, culture-, tourism- and employment-related. Work is also being conducted to ensure that waste management and fire-fighter services are shared. In the tourism field, they promote their extensive heritage resources at different exhibitions in Spain and Portugal. As a result, we find ample documentation on the cultural heritage of both municipalities [57].

3.3.3. Eurocity Moncão–Salvaterra

Based on the experiences of the previously established Portuguese–Galician Eurocities, this new city-to-city cooperation project was created in March 2015. It encompasses a population of almost 30,000 inhabitants. The main objective is to combine efforts and resources to improve citizens' quality of life, especially in terms of the economy, culture, leisure, tourism, commerce and employment. This is supported by its Creation Protocol, which had the support of the EGTC of Galicia–North Portugal [58]. Despite its recent creation, this Eurocity has had its own website and headquarters since May 2017. Its cooperation objectives and activities are very similar to the objectives established by the Eurocities from this region.

3.3.4. Chaves–Verín, the Water Eurocity

This Eurocity was the first to be established on the Portuguese–Spanish border. Thus, it has assisted as a model for the other Iberian Eurocities Projects. It also should be highlighted that this city-to-city cooperation project was the first to establish itself as an EGTC, in July 2013.

Chaves–Verín has a total of 55,000 inhabitants. The distance between these two cities is about 22 km. Apart from this proximity, the cities have strong cultural ties and a vast history of cooperation. For example, they share the water of their aquifers and the Tâmega river as a common resource element. Specifically, they want to promote thermal tourism as one of the main tourist attractions of the region. Unsurprisingly, they have almost 3000 hotel beds. Like the Chaves–Verín tourism brand but as a unique destination, they have created the Thermal and Water Route as a star product, part of a European cultural itinerary. Besides, this Eurocity has started using the Eurocitizenship card for the obtaining of multiple other public services discounts for the residents.

3.3.5. Eurocity Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior

In 2006, a period of institutional rapprochement started between these Portuguese and Spanish municipalities. This Eurocity was created in May 2018, when the Cooperation Protocol was signed. This Eurocity became the major urban agglomeration in the central and southern regions of Portugal, with almost 200,000 inhabitants (150,000 inhabitants in Badajoz, 23,000 in Elvas and 9,000 in Campo Maior). Such results were officially published a year later, with the aim of attracting European funds and promoting common collaboration in matters of employment, tourism and trade. Likewise, another

objective of this Eurocity is for the municipalities to share services that their inhabitants could access on equal terms; i.e., transport, health, education, equipment and diverse infrastructures [59].

Tourism has also become an area of priority in this cooperation. In this regard, the "Baluartes" project was launched, consisting of the renovation of the two cities' fortifications. Another significant project is the developing of an innovative cross-border digital space entitled "Smart Destination," which will be a vital geographic information tool used for decision-making by both the public and private entities of these cities. Furthermore, work is being done on the future integration of the Spanish municipality of Olivenza.

3.3.6. Eurocity of the Guadiana

This Eurocity was officially established in January 2013. In the beginning, it was between Vila Real de San António and Ayamonte, and later Castro Marim joined this common urban agglomeration. With the "Collaboration Protocol for the creation of the Eurocity," they gave an official character to the concept of cooperation and common work that surmounts the official and administrative difficulties [38]. In February 2018, it was designated as an EGTC [60]. It is the first Eurocity within the Alentejo–Algarve–Andalusia Euroregion.

Those three municipalities, with a population of nearly 50,000 inhabitants, occupy a territory dominated by such activities as agriculture, fishing, tourism and commercial development. In total, this Eurocity project offers more than 10,000 hotel beds, six golf courses, three leisure ports and two commercial ports.

This Eurocity was formed mainly for the management and acquiring of shared services, such as civil protection or the common health care card. Under the current framework program for European financing 2014–2020, the Eurocity's main agenda is the creation and expansion of a cross-border urban project [61].

Despite the progress, this Eurocity still has a common working office shared by the institutions that compose it. It presents a shortage of budget and a clear organization plan. If this Eurocity becomes an EGTC, new financing possibilities are expected.

3.4. Critical Factors

Based on the results above described, and considering the 14 critical factors for success in CBC projects previously identified by Castanho et al. [4], the present study enables us to identify 8 factors for the success of the Iberian Eurocities.

Thus, it is possible to say that for this type of CBC project (Eurocity), at least in the Iberian Borderland, eight factors should be considered.

From the eight factors, common equipment and services, the offer of Eurocitizenship, enhancing access to European funds, and the marketing and advertising of the Eurocity were identified in all Iberian Eurocity CBC projects. Public participation, the development of strategies to avoid duplications of infrastructure and the promotion of a strong territorial strategy were identified as critical in four of these CBC projects.

The factors related to *Connectivity—Movement between cities* and to the *Promotion of strategies to retain young and talented people* were only identified in one Eurocity project each (Eurocity of the Guadiana and Tui–Valença do Minho, respectively).

As such, we created a summary table (Table 2) with the identified factors for success in each Iberian Eurocity, based on the developed questionnaires.

Table 2. Identified factors for CBC projects success in the Iberian Eurocities.

Critical Factors	Chaves–Verín	Tui–Valença do Minho	Eurocity of the Guadiana *	Monção–Salvaterra de Miño	EUROBEC **	Cerveira–Tomiño
Improved connectivity—Movement between cities			x			
Promotion of a strong territorial strategy	x	x	x			x
Development of strategies to avoid duplication of infrastructure	x	x		x		x
Common equipment/services, offer of Eurocitizenship	x	x	x	x	x	x
Enhancing access to European funds	x	x	x	x	x	x
Promotion of strategies to retain young and talented people		x				
Public participation	x		x	x		x
Marketing and advertising of the Eurocity	x	x	x	x	x	x

* Ayamonte–Vila Real de Santo António–Castro Marim. ** Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior.

4. Conclusions

The inclusion of Spain and Portugal into the European Community in 1986 triggered a period of transformation in the Iberian border territories, driving towards a deactivation of the border and the end of traditional economic methods and social exchanges.

The attraction of community public funds has generated the creation of new governance structures in this border territory. Thus, due to the eliciting of those INTERREG funds, many projects and actions have been carried out. However, many of them end up weakening due to the extensive program areas, without benefiting the Iberian Border's most affected areas [62].

Additionally, this is a territory whose demographic and economic indexes show a severely compromised social and economic profile. Besides, this borderland is characterized by uncompetitive productive economies and weakened demographics. Nevertheless, they are based on some environmentally rich territories—the large protected surface in the Portuguese–Spanish cross-border area is an example of this environmental richness. This borderland has a rich historical heritage, which has become one of its principal catalysts for development.

To obtain the community funds directly and apply them in the Iberian border territories, new cross-border groups have been created, including the Eurocities. The Eurocities enable responses at the local and municipal scales.

In the case of the Iberian Border, up to a total of six Eurocities have been established in a few years, four of them in the North Portugal and Galicia Regions (Tui–Valença do Minho, Chaves–Verín, Monção–Salvaterra and Cerveira–Tomiño), a fifth in Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior and a last one in the South of the Peninsula, in the lower Guadiana River region. It is expected that some more Eurocities could be created in the coming years, as is the case with Almeida–Fuente de Oñoro–Ciudad Rodrigo. However, the aging demographic and a vulnerable urban system in the Iberian border territories could be a significant obstacle to the new Eurocities' establishment. Specifically, the existent Eurocities are located in the centers of the demographic density of this transboundary territory. Therefore, these issues started a consideration of how to adapt to the current structures, or even the envisioning and generation of a new CBC tool. As such, they are capable of bringing together and better benefiting the most rural and aging territories; after all, these border territories are the ones that have suffered the most from the so-called "border effect", and are the least prepared to raise funds in a highly competitive context.

On the other hand, this sparsely populated territory is also of great interest for several activities; i.e., changing from energy production to sustainable livestock and agriculture, forestry and ecotourism. In this regard, it would be desirable that the Eurocities be supported by their local populations so as to avoid the question of exogenous development that ends up benefiting other territories outside the cross-border area. Therefore, uniting populations around institutions such as Eurocities can be an instrument of great value, for the benefit of environmental, social and economic sustainability, which will hold back the vicious cycle of underdevelopment.

As verified through this study, the sustained evolution of these Eurocities has been somewhat uneven. The Eurocity of Chaves–Verín stands out for its development. Since its establishment in 2008, its actions and projects have set the standards for the rest of the Eurocities. Therefore, it will represent the 2014–2020 Interreg Spain–Portugal CBC Program (POCTEP) at the 30th anniversary of the Interreg initiative [63].

Similarly, the other North Portuguese–Galician Eurocities also stand out. Undoubtedly, the existence of an "almost" common language or dialect (Portuguese–Galician), significant cultural similarities, and the notable demographic density have favored this Eurocity project's integration and acceptance by its population. However, integration into the Guadiana Eurocity is moderate, and in the case of the Eurocity Elvas–Badajoz–Campo Maior, it is developing. In any case, it seems that the "time since the Eurocity's creation" factor is relevant. We will have to see how the most recent Iberian Eurocities evolve. Here, we reveal the importance of the monitoring process in these types of CBC projects.

Contextually, we consider that these Iberian Eurocities have several strengths, such as:

- They have become outstanding, autonomous and sufficient CBC entities.
- They are entities that are benefitting and working for sustainable territorial development, which is, in fact, the basis of the cooperation along with the shared management of public services and facilities. The Eurocities' strategic plans confirm the desire to achieve sustainability and sustainable development.
- They have created and fostered common public services in cross-border areas: "one city as the ultimate objective."
- They intend to be territorial lobbies, creating task forces that are more immediate than those of higher administrative entities, mainly community, state and regional.
- They become structures or pressure groups within other cross-border institutions (Euroregions) for the obtaining of funding for projects.

Some of these Eurocities have gone one step further, becoming an EGTC (Chaves–Marín and Guadiana Eurocity), or integrating into a higher regional level (Minho River EGTC). These have become an exciting format, which have been around since 2006, since they are endowed with a high management capacity. However, they also require the ability to handle work volumes that are not easily assumable if they do not have a significant demographic and administrative size.

As for weaknesses of the Iberian Eurocities and some EGTCs, it is possible to highlight the following:

- The existence of quite low demographic thresholds (less than 100,000 inhabitants), in most cases, makes it difficult to obtain more community funds.
- The legal and administrative limitations still exist, and their resolution does not depend on the Eurocity but instead on regional and national state structures.
- The high dependence on European funds for their development implies a high uncertainty regarding their viability if those funds were to be reduced. In many cases, when this occurs, the Eurocity's priorities change.
- The preservation of national sovereignties within the European Union means that in certain circumstances, the internal borders may "rise" again to separate territories [4,64,65]. Besides, the current crisis caused by the COVID19 pandemic [66] shows that prohibitions and authorizations originate outside the Eurocities, mainly in the state capitals, without taking into account their particular needs and demands. Any other similar episode could erase decades of integration and free internal mobility.
- In the development strategies, a clear commitment to activity niches based on environmental and historical heritage has become evident, as the Eurocities try to take advantage of their productive potentials while preserving and enhancing them through specific or more comprehensive projects. Many of them have required the support of European and national financing, which requires an influence that they would not have separately.

The Eurocities present a unique formula of empowerment, cooperation and governance that is very interesting for the future of border territories. Sharing public resources, creating synergies and being visible in the administrative sphere is the common denominator of the Eurocities created in the Iberian Border. In the analyzed Eurocity projects, all the involved cities have taken a significant step towards the future. Besides, a seventh Eurocity project is in the design phase: Almeida–Fuentes de Oñoro–Ciudad Rodrigo. In fact, Almeida–Fuentes de Oñoro–Ciudad Rodrigo is working on a Manifesto [67], initialed in May 2020, which is strongly committed to CBC. Further, the status of "Eurocity" is recognized in both states to define a protocol for action in crises, such as that experienced by the COVID19 pandemic. In this crisis, many border territories have experienced a border closing that has impeded cross-border mobility. Thus, these border cities claim that the specificity of their regions should be considered in the face of new upcoming crises.

Moreover, a large part of the territorial cooperation and cohesion policies of the next multiannual framework (2021–2027) will come cover to these Eurocities and EGTCs, as well as other institutions such as Euroregions. They will be the promoters of a significant part of the projects that arise in the border territories.

Even if some impressive results are already verified, there is still a long way to go for these new geographical structures in the new governance era of these border territories.

Contextually, the authors believe that further research should focus in more detail on the eight identified factors for CBC success in the Iberian Eurocities, and also provide outcomes from the monitoring processes of these factors through time.

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