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## Chapter 3

# The Social Economy in Borderscapes: The Changing Cross-Border Dynamics of the Social Economy in the Basque Country

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### Introduction

The use of sub-national regions and smaller areas is a useful starting point, and a variation to the customary methodology, for improving our understanding of the dynamics of Europeanization: how territories adapt to the new regulations, trends in public policy, beliefs and norms that are initially determined at the European level (Radaelli, 2003: 30). This sub-state perspective is indispensable to an analysis of the dynamics of cross-border and transnational cooperation, which is one of the most tangible effects of European integration. Although a large number of studies have addressed these relationships from the perspective of inter-institutional relations, only a few (Sanchez-Salgado, 2007) have focused on the role of civil society and the social and solidarity economy (SSE) in configuring and operating these schemes.<sup>1</sup> This viewpoint is even more indispensable in cross-border regions that are characterised by a cultural identity that transcends state frontiers. This cultural variable complicates the nature of cross-border relations and the uses made of EU policy instruments,

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<sup>1</sup> The terms *third sector* and *social economy* refer here to “organizations producing goods and services that are not founded on the principle of maximizing profits” (Laville, 2000: 8).

which consequently cannot be restricted to technical and depoliticized procedures (Malloy, 2010; O’Dowd, McCall, 2008). In this regard the Basque border region, located in both France and Spain, can be considered a “borderscape”, in the sense meant by McCall:

Borderscapes are border landscapes displaying cultural and political complexity, contested discourses and meanings, struggles over inclusion and exclusion, and involve multiple actors (Rajaram, Grundy-Warr, 2008: IX–XL). However, borderscapes are also important landscapes for inter-cultural dialogue that advances conflict amelioration. Borderscapes signify the fact that these multifarious dynamics stray well beyond the borderline. (McCall, 2013: 199)

This complexity comes into full play in the Basque border region. The task here is thus to assess the involvement of the social economy in the emergence of a cross-border “governance network”, a term which refers to “public policy making and implementation through a Web of relationships between government, business and civil society actors” (Klijn, Skelcher, 2007: 587). Such governance networks are intended to go beyond formal state-led models of negotiation, allowing for more flexible and more transparent processes of agenda-setting and of devising and implementing public policies. With this in mind, this chapter addresses three sets of questions. First, how does the participation of SSE actors contribute to the truly cross-border nature of a cooperative endeavour that goes further than direct “one-to-one” and functional forms of cooperation? Does this form of cooperation strengthen national borders or transcend them (O’Dowd, McCall, 2008)? Second, what is the role played by territorial identities, sometimes in mutual conflict, in fostering or impeding the engagement of the SSE in cross-border cooperation (CBC)? Third, what is the role of market constraints in this cross-border activism: are the internal tensions specific to SSEs also visible here?<sup>2</sup> Did the 2008 economic crisis, which was particularly pronounced in Spain, present an opportunity or a constraint for alternative economic spaces such as those promoted by SSE organizations in their cross-border activities?

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<sup>2</sup> For Defourny and Nyssens (2006) there is an initial tension between those SSE companies that put all their production onto the market and organizations whose activities have only a limited economic dimension and which are based on non-market resources. A further tension may emerge between organizations that are intended to satisfy the mutual interests of their members and organizations whose aims address the wider public interest.

In order to address these questions, we draw on evidence from 32 interviews conducted in 2013 within 24 third sector projects involved in CBC in the Basque border region.<sup>3</sup> The projects identified were partly or totally funded by cross-border interregional and EU funds: 17 were funded between 2006 and 2012 by bilateral agreements between Aquitaine and Euskadi, 7 between 2007 and 2012 by the Aquitaine-Navarre fund. 6 of the projects were eligible for POCTEFA funding.<sup>4</sup> All of them involved at least one partner from the third sector and social economy. Interviews were conducted on both sides of the border, but there was a particular focus on French Basque actors in view of the fact that this territory has to date been neglected by the literature on Basque mobilization, albeit with some exceptions (Jacob, 1994; Ahedo, 2008; Bray, 2006; Itçaina, 2017). The cases selected covered diverse sectors: language and culture, minority media, agriculture, health and social issues, job creation, the environment and sustainable development, women's rights, small-scale industry and specialist businesses, and sustainable tourism. Interviews were also conducted with representatives of public institutions involved in CBC: the regional council of Aquitaine, the government of the Basque Autonomous Community or Euskadi (Spain), the government of the Chartered Community of Navarre (Spain), the Aquitaine-Euskadi Euro-region, the inter-municipal federation of Garazi-Baigorri (France), and the municipality of Banca (France).

It is evident that there is no discernible clear and consistent set of principles; the multiform nature of the SSE is apparent, here as elsewhere. It is analysed here from two perspectives. In the section that follows, we examine the relatively recent formation of these cross-border relations: having developed at the edges of dynamic civil societies which broke new ground in this area, they then became linked to a new public policy framework which eventually became favourable to CBC. Subsequently, we examine the current involvement of SSE organizations in cross-border relations under this legacy, with their contrasting forms of operation. In particular, SSE actors involved in CBC need to address four asymmetries in order to establish effective cross-border governance networks: *institutional*

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<sup>3</sup> The interviews were conducted as part of the research programme *Vers une gouvernance transfrontalière en réseau ? Expériences transfrontalières du tiers secteur en France et au Royaume-Uni*, Sciences Po Bordeaux-Région Aquitaine, 2010-2014.

<sup>4</sup> "POCTEFA" refers to the EU programme for cross-border cooperation involving Spain, France and Andorra, financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

asymmetries between contrasting levels of decentralization; *political* asymmetries between functional and politicized conceptions of cooperation; *organizational* asymmetries between different SSEs; and finally *market* asymmetries. An added complication was the risk, increased by the 2008 crisis, that funding bodies would perceive proposed ventures as opportunistic cooperation that was not genuinely integrated.

## **1. A proactive role for the SSE in cross-border relations**

### ***1.1. The SSE and cross-border relations: a role as initiator***

SSE organizations were largely ahead of policy-makers in matters of CBC. This was above all due to their social embeddedness within their respective territories. The importance of the social economy in the Basque Autonomous Community is well known. The Observatorio vasco de economía social (Basque observatory of the social economy) distinguishes between the traditional social economy, consisting of cooperatives (56,231 employees in 2010) and *sociedades laborales* (workforce-owned companies, 9,177 employees), and more recent forms (OVES, 2011: 19-20). The social economy is marked by a strong presence in the industrial sector, although it is increasingly undergoing a process of tertiarization. Much, but not all, of this dominance by industry is due to the Mondragón group of cooperatives (83,859 employees – both within and outside Spain – in 2010, 81,320 in 2014). The Spanish Basque social economy also includes new types of multi-member cooperatives which bring together public, private for-profit and private non-profit partners within the social sector (Enciso Santocildes, 2001).

A comparison is yet to be made between the French Basque Country and Spanish Basque territories, partly because of differences in demography and national history.<sup>5</sup> However, two dynamic forces, one associative and the other cooperative, have also been characteristic of the French Basque Country at the regional level since the 1970s, and have contributed towards the establishment of a specific “territorial regime” for the SSE in this particular area (Itçaina, 2010). The components of this environment include producer cooperatives, micro-finance, fair trade, peasant agriculture, and, since 2013, a local social currency (*euskal moneta*). In 2011 the Basque Country was the leading French area for the

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<sup>5</sup> The population of the French Basque Country is 290.000, as against 2,173,210 in Spain’s Basque Autonomous Community and 640,000 in Navarre, and the processes of state-building and nation-building in France and Spain have been very different.

presence of *Club locaux d'épargne pour les femmes qui entreprennent* (CLEFE –local savings clubs for women entrepreneurs), and the Soule district, specifically, led France in *Comités locaux d'épargne pour les jeunes* (CLEJ –local savings committees for young people) (Brana, Jégourel, 2011). All these ventures were promoted by a local social movement in favour of local economic development, with the significant, but not exclusive, involvement of *abertzale* (Basque nationalist) activists.

However, not all sectors within the SSE are based on this particular territorial regime with its highly politicized features. Initiatives that can be described as “social integration through economic activity”, in particular, are based on distinct developmental practices and governance models. In his comparative study of this sector in the Basque Autonomous Community and French Basque Country, Manterola (2013) has identified two distinct regional models. In the former area, where small social integration enterprises have often come together in larger business units and regulation by the Autonomous Community’s government has been streamlined, the sector is based on competition and exposed to market fluctuations. In the French Basque Country, by contrast, there is decentralization but more regulation by the public authorities, which have higher expectations about engagement with competitive markets. The impact of the market, whether chosen or imposed, threatens the economic viability and social aims of these enterprises.

In the 1970s various SSE actors in the Basque Country began to initiate contacts between operators on both sides of the border. At this point the intention was to avoid depending on public policy, which during this period was ambivalent towards this type of venture, and to transcend the border by constructing a cross-border territory in bottom-up fashion. A shared cultural identity was the essential basis for cross-border initiatives. These dynamics were particularly visible in two sectors: Basque language and culture, and producer cooperatives.

In regard to language and culture, the end of the Franco dictatorship allowed bodies within the Basque movement to take various forms: some were associations, some cooperatives, and some governmental, located within the regional and provincial institutions of the Autonomous Community. On the French side of the border the first *ikastola* (Basque language schools) emerged in 1969, as non-profit organizations. With the Spanish transition to democracy, a large number of joint initiatives were organized on a cross-border basis. However, these ventures very quickly came up against an institutional asymmetry between the two sides of the border, especially following the establishment in 1980 of Autonomous

Communities in Spain, where the Basque language was granted official status both in the Basque autonomous community and in Navarre; by contrast, it still has no official status on the French side. Most importantly, the forms of organization that the cross-border cultural movement adopted during this period were based on values very close to those of the SSE: most *ikastolas* south of the border were set up as cooperatives, and cultural and linguistic associations proliferated.

The cross-border dimension of the SSE has been just as strong in the producer cooperatives sector. The worker cooperative movement that emerged after 1975 in France's Basque Country was directly inspired by the Spanish Basque Mondragón experience. This was more than just a theoretical reference point: several future founders of French worker cooperatives were trained at Mondragón, and with the training came financial and logistical support. For many Spanish Basque nationalists, supporting the French Basque cooperative movement was a way of providing assistance to what they perceived as a politically and economically neglected territory. In 1982 the French Basque movement set up the *Lana* (work) association with the objective of involving cooperatives, on the Mondragón model, in order to industrialize the interior of the region as had been done in the valleys of Guipuzcoa. This cross-border influence was an intrinsic part of this first and predominantly activist-led phase of the cooperative movement in the French Basque Country (Itçaina, 2007).

### ***1.2. The changing political opportunity structure: a favourable new environment for CBC***

In the 1970s initiatives by civil society had been ahead of government-sponsored CBC, which was then in its faltering initial stages. The stabilization of Spain's new democratic regime and its accession to the European Community in 1986 slowly altered this state of affairs. European integration was a factor favouring CBC, which took two contrasting forms in Basque areas during this period (Letamendia, 1997). Firstly, inter-state cooperation over border controls was strengthened by European anti-terrorist and immigration policy. Secondly, European integration helped to establish a framework that encouraged the involvement of regional and local authorities in cooperation, whereas previously this had been the exclusive preserve of states (Harguindéguy, Hayward, 2014).

In 1983 the French Aquitaine region and Spain's Basque Autonomous Community were among the nine border regions that founded the *Communauté de Travail des Pyrénées* or *Comunidad de Trabajo de los Pirineos* (Employment Community of the Pyrenees). Spain's entry into the Common Market saw a proliferation of cooperation schemes supported at the

different levels of government. Cooperation between the Basque Autonomous Community and Aquitaine developed in the period after 1989, encouraged by the reform of the European Structural Funds and the impetus given to regional policy by the Single European Act. The identity-based cooperation of social networks was now supplemented by formal governmental cooperation, stimulated in particular by funding from the European Territorial Cooperation (INTERREG) programmes from 1990 onwards. In the Basque Country, INTERREG funding took over from the existing collaboration between local authorities. The Basque Autonomous Community and Aquitaine added to the numerous bodies already in existence by setting up a joint body to fund research, development and training initiatives; Navarre joined this in 1992 but withdrew in 2000 because of political tensions with the Basque Autonomous Community government. As a result, Aquitaine maintained separate agreements with Euskadi, Navarre and Aragon until 2015.

Among other developments, creation of the “Basque Eurocity” established cooperation in planning matters between the urban areas of Bayonne and San Sebastián.<sup>6</sup> The Bidasoa-Txingudi “Eurodistrict”, established in 1992, brought together the Spanish towns of Fuenterrabia and Irun with the French Hendaye in one organizational structure, and this was taken a step further with the creation in 1998 of the Bidasoa-Txingudi *consorcio transfronterizo* (cross-border consortium), which became an exemplary success story of Pyrenean cooperation (Harguindéguy, 2007). The Treaty of Bayonne, signed by France and Spain in 1995, strengthened the legal framework for cooperation by giving a freer hand to local authorities. Small-scale experiments in local cooperation between the border municipalities and valleys of Navarre and the French Basque Country flourished (Conseil de développement du Pays Basque, 2003). The Aquitaine-Euskadi “Euroregion”, a “European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation” formally initiated on 12 December 2011 by the regional presidents Alain Rousset and Patxi Lopez (both members of their respective Socialist Parties), represented a new stage in the establishment of a framework for CBC, this time at inter-regional level. Finally, the General Council of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques department and the Regional Government of Navarre renewed their cooperation agreement in April 2012.

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<sup>6</sup> An initial agreement between the *Diputación Foral* of Guipuzcoa and the Bayonne-Anglet-Biarritz conurbation was signed on 18 January 1993. A permanent agency for cross-border cooperation was set up in 1997 as a European Economic Interest Group.



It can thus be seen that the establishment of CBC as a policy issue currently has three distinguishing features. First, far from being the preserve of *abertzale* (Basque nationalist) parties, cross-border policies are promoted by heterogeneous coalitions of actors who may have perceptions of the border that are pragmatic, or identity-related, or both. Second, the formal establishment of the French Basque Country as a “*pays*” (see below) after 1997 has helped to strengthen CBC. Third, the partial Europeanization of public policy (in the sense that the French national and local authorities have made use of European schemes for cooperation) has not necessarily entailed a Europeanization of norms and values, even within the border territory as formally defined (Bray, 2004). The new public policy framework, which encourages cross-border collaboration, has provided the context for the more recent initiatives by SSE actors.

### ***1.3. A potential relationship between CBC and conflict amelioration***

The pragmatic approach that government bodies developed towards CBC needed to address the issue of identity in the Basque border region. With the reduction in political violence after ETA’s definitive ceasefire in 2010, some actors in the political conflict – for the most part from the *abertzale* side – saw cross-border relationships as having the potential to contribute to conflict transformation. The promotion by *abertzale* activists, from both sides of the border, of new peace forums on the French side such as Bake bidean (On the road to peace) illustrates this wish. From the *abertzale* perspective, the involvement of socio-economic actors in CBC was seen as a contribution to conflict amelioration by engaging grass-roots civil organizations, rather than political parties and movements, in peace-building.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In addition to “conflict resolution” and “conflict transformation”, McCall proposes “conflict amelioration” as an intermediate concept: “it is now generally accepted by peace-building theorists that the engagement of the ‘grassroots’ is an essential component of a peace-building endeavour. This is particularly the case in border conflicts where borderlanders are, more often than not, on the periphery of the state and geopolitically remote from the central government. Accordingly, conflict amelioration, as used here, attempts to capture a peace-building effort wherein political violence has largely abated, competing ethno-nationalist political elites have entered into an agreement on governance and, crucially, local borderland “grassroots” communities have been engaged in an on-going peace-building effort” (2013: 206).

Outside the peace movements themselves, Northern (French) and Southern (Spanish) Basque third sector actors were clearly constantly engaged in CBC in their respective sectors without aiming to contribute directly to the peace process. Some pursued functional outcomes of economic cooperation, while action by others had a more political orientation. For *abertzale* activists, however, strengthening cross-border relationships represented a further step towards the unity of the Basque people. Small projects, even if their applications to the various official cross-border funding schemes were depoliticized, were seen as contributions to *eraikuntza nazionala* (the nation-building process). Irrespective of these contrasting interpretations, the increase in CBC from the 1990s onwards, in particular through the processes and mechanisms of knowledge diffusion and shared learning (Radaelli, 1999), assisted the normalization of cross-border relations: institutional asymmetries were by-passed, and a positive contribution was thus made to conflict amelioration. In this respect, we would agree with Bray and Keating's cautious conclusion on the potential for interactions between the peace process and cross-border relations: "As the peace process evolves, the projection of the Basque community across the border could be one element that will reconcile the conflicting French/Spanish and Basque nationalist conceptions of political community. The Basque community, however, will remain a work in progress, interpreted differently by various actors on either side of the border" (Bray, Keating, 2013: 151).

We need to view the potential relationship between bilateral or EU-sponsored CBC and conflict amelioration with this degree of caution. In an instructive comparison between the role of the EU in conflict resolution in Cyprus, Northern Ireland and the Basque Country, Bourne relates CBC to the third of four possible ways in which the EU may encourage the resolution of conflicts, "subversion",<sup>8</sup> which is the most relevant to the focus of this chapter and to the "conflict amelioration" perspective:

In a process that mirrors the classic 'community method' of EU co-operation, parties to a conflict may be encouraged to co-operate with each other or make conciliatory moves as part of their compliance with the technical requirements of EU membership or as a consequence of *functional objectives* [our emphasis] otherwise unrelated to the politics of conflict. (2003: 400)

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<sup>8</sup> The four ways that the EU may stimulate conflict resolution, as described by Bourne (2003), are the "sticks" of exerting pressure on the parties in conflict to pursue compromise, the "carrots" whereby the parties are encouraged rather than pressurised, "subversion", described here, and the "post-modernist" strategy, described later.

In the Basque case, European integration encouraged conciliatory moves by the Spanish and French central governments that partially satisfied certain Basque cultural and political aspirations. Given the emphasis on the removal of physical borders between member states within the single market programme, “French and Spanish governments overcame some of their reluctance to support more extensive cross-border collaboration” (*ibid.*: 402). EU funds supported various programmes, including some with a clear cultural content such as Basque language projects. Bourne goes on to say that “[p]erhaps more importantly, market integration in the EU has helped justify the need for more permanent institutionalised co-operation among these authorities” (*ibid.*: 403). The progressive consolidation of a framework of cooperation between sub-national authorities since the 1980s illustrates this trend.

As mentioned earlier, the progressive construction of this framework of cooperation had contrasting effects on conflict amelioration. Facilitating CBC “provide[d] some important symbolic and material gains for Basque nationalists” (Bourne, 2003: 403) by bringing the seven provinces together.<sup>9</sup> The Spanish government reinforced this politicized interpretation when it initiated legal action against the Basque Autonomous Community government over the latter’s legal authority in CBC after the Treaty of Bayonne (*ibid.*: 404). As Letamendia (1997) observed, promotion of the Southern model of political autonomy as a by-product of the development of CBC put additional pressure on the French authorities to grant some degree of self-government to the French Basque Country.

In other words, “subversion”, Bourne’s third way in which the EU can stimulate conflict resolution, was probably the most developed effect of European influence on the Basque conflict. In addition, differences can be seen between the initial aims of EU-driven policy and its effects, as there were shifts in meaning, if not a change in the policy paradigm, during the phase of implementation. Bray and Keating (2013: 144-45) shed light on the multiple understandings of the EU CBC policy in the Basque case. There was a disparity between the initial aims of CBC as promoted by a European Commission stressing economic and functional considerations, thus downplaying the cultural and political elements, and its implementation by Basque activists whose intention was to consolidate their pre-existing Basque Country networks. Bray and Keating note that “the idea that European subsidiarity provides minorities in control of their own regions with new opportunities to explore

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<sup>9</sup> Historically, the Basque Country encompasses seven provinces, three in France (Labourd, Lower Navarre and Soule) and four in Spain (Biscay, Guipuzcoa, Alava and Navarre).

constituting cross-border political communities with their co-nationals needs to be qualified, since power relations are conditioned by state controls to varying extents (2013: 145).

However, it was also the case that some local actors used EU CBC schemes in a functional way, and not in relation to nationalist aims. Localized engagement in individual projects was effective in the practical creation of CBC networks: “Practical work at the very local level on specific projects also follows the logic of localism, of personal and partisan networks, and of micro-politics rather than grand visions of nation building. This is because on this level actors can manage to achieve concrete results. (Bray, Keating, 2013: 147)”.

Bourne describes a fourth way in which the EU may stimulate conflict resolution: “European integration, as a manifestation of broader processes of globalisation, may transform and ‘moderate’ national identities”; according to post-modernists, she says, “the reconfiguration of borders and other key features of ‘modern’ political order as part of the processes of European integration and globalisation opens up new possibilities for less antagonistic forms of identification” (2003: 405). The Ibarretxe plan, put forward in 2002 by the president of the Basque Autonomous Community, proposed a “model of co-sovereignty, freely and voluntarily shared” (2003: 408), and included a reference to the strengthening of CBC.<sup>10</sup> However, this “post-modernist” approach did not help to eliminate or de-emphasize differences and thereby reduce the grounds for conflict. The Ibarretxe plan drew particular criticism for its aspirations to full Basque sovereignty.

Bourne’s overall conclusion is that although the EU has become part of the landscape of conflict in the Basque Country, Northern Ireland and Cyprus, there is very little clear evidence that it has had a significant role in the resolution of conflict in these regions. Discussing the Irish and other European contexts, McCall has observed that there is “some disjuncture between the theoretical advocacy of ‘peace-building from below’ and difficulties in developing practical ways of engaging people at the grassroots in conflict amelioration activities” (2013: 206); this is also the case in the Basque Country, and perhaps even more so here because of the absence of a political agreement involving the state authorities.

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<sup>10</sup> The Ibarretxe plan proposed alteration of the Basque Autonomous Community’s constitution to allow for an open political partnership between the Basque Country and Spain, instead of a mere devolution of power from the centre to the regional authorities. The plan was approved by the Basque parliament on 30 December 2004, and rejected by the Spanish parliament on 1 February 2005.

The role of the third sector can be assessed in relation to the emergence of cross-border governance networks that may have an indirect impact on conflict amelioration. We need to understand how the participation of SSE actors contributes to the truly cross-border nature of a collaborative effort that goes beyond pragmatic cooperation, and what role territorial identity plays in this process. In the section that follows, we address these questions by means of our case study.

## **2. Pragmatic or identity-based cooperation? The social economy, cross-border cooperation and conflict amelioration**

In this section we give some empirical substance to the earlier discussion by analyzing the main results of the qualitative survey that we conducted with third sector organizations and with other actors and political institutions involved in CBC.

### ***2.1. Persistent asymmetries as potential obstacles to CBC***

In a previous survey undertaken in the early years of the adoption of CBC by different tiers of government (Itçaina et al., 1997), it was observed that CBC in the Basque country had to overcome the political and institutional asymmetries that still existed between the regions north and south of the state border. More recent observations (Itçaina, Manterola, 2014) and the series of interviews we draw on in this chapter confirm that, more than 15 years later, these asymmetries are still present, despite the development of a governmental framework that is more favourable to CBC.

*Institutional* asymmetries are still reflected in disparities in financial resources between the Aquitaine Region and its southern counterparts the Basque Autonomous Community and the Chartered Community of Navarre: in 1997, Aquitaine's budget was only a tenth of that of the Basque Autonomous Community, for example (Letamendia, 1997: 37). However, these disparities did not prevent any of the regions from investing equivalent sums in their bilateral agreements. A more significant problem was caused by differences in the fiscal powers of the Basque Autonomous Community and Navarre and their provincial Deputations, which were extensive in comparison to those of the French regions and departmental General Councils. Finally, the central role of the Prefect as the representative of the French state had no real equivalent on the Spanish Basque side of the border.

The way that political elites on either side of the border have perceived cross-border cooperation has often been indicated by the different approaches they have taken. Since 1986

the Aquitaine region has been governed by administrations on both the right and left that have had a functional perception of cooperation, relating this to collaboration on transport, infrastructure and the economy, rather than an identity-based one. South of the border, the Basque Autonomous Community was governed from 1980 to 2009 by the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), either on its own or in coalition; during this period the PNV saw cross-border cooperation, like the Basque diaspora (Totoricagüena, 2005), as an opportunity to strengthen ties between Basques while sidelining the role of the central state (Ithurralde, 2002; Bourne, 2008). A third entity, the government of Navarre, has had conservative or socialist majorities that have favoured a functional approach to cooperation, carefully distancing themselves from the discourse of the Euskadi government. As a consequence of the Lizarra-Garazi Accord and the pursuit of greater sovereignty that followed the ceasefire by ETA in 1998-9, Navarre withdrew in 2000 from the trilateral cooperation agreement with Euskadi and Aquitaine, but continued to maintain bilateral agreements with the latter. In the same vein, Navarre did not initially participate in the Aquitaine-Euskadi Euroregion established in 2011. In 2015, however, Navarre's new government announced its intention to join this.<sup>11</sup>

This characterisation of contrasting positions, which held sway during the 1990s, needs to be modified for the period after 2010. The “Euro-enthusiasm” of the Basque government, as of other minority nationalist parties in Europe (Elias, 2008), has gradually given way – starting before the change of government in 2009 – to a form of “Euro-pragmatism”, in response to the lack of positive movement towards creation of a genuine “Europe of the Regions”. The long-standing PNV strategy had been to use the EU to make the role of nation-states redundant (Letamendia, 1997: 37). However, nationalists quickly realized that the EU could be used, in particular by the Spanish state and other Autonomous Communities, for diametrically opposed strategic aims: disputes about the Basque tax regime, for example, could be shifted to the European level (Bourne, 2008).

Prior to the mid-1990s, the lack of proper governmental bodies for the French Basque Country acted as a brake on the development of cross-border cooperation at the level of the Basque Country as a whole. This situation changed with the establishment, on the French

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<sup>11</sup> “La Navarre prête à intégrer l’Eurorégion Aquitaine-Euskadi”, *Sud Ouest*, 30 October 2015. After the Autonomous community elections of 24 May 2015, a new majority arising from a coalition of left-wing and Basque nationalist parties replaced the conservatives in the regional government of Navarre.

side, of the Conseil de développement du Pays Basque (Basque Country Development Council), the Conseil des élus du Pays basque (Council of elected representatives for the Basque Country), and the Institut culturel basque (Basque cultural institute). In 1997 the French Basque Country was recognized as a *pays*, in the sense determined by the law of 1995.<sup>12</sup> The new institutions are seen as compromises between nationalists, civil society and the state, partly intended to compensate for the latter's refusal to create a new *département* (Letamendia, 1997). Within France the Basque experience was seen as a commendable example of coherent local development and was one of the inspirations behind the wider implementation of policy for local areas (the "*pays*"). The joint expertise of the Basque Country Development Council and the Council of Elected Representatives informed the content of two contracts between local and regional authorities and the state, covering all sectors (economic development, social welfare, language and education, and planning for balanced land use). Cross-border cooperation was one of the three broad aims announced by the Development Council in the "Pays Basque 2020" consultation exercise launched in 2005, along with the equitable distribution of resources (between the coastal zone and the interior) and sustainable development.

Our research interviews revealed that actors within the social economy had to overcome two other asymmetries, one structural and one cyclical, alongside the general institutional and political asymmetries discussed above. The first of these was an *organizational* asymmetry between the northern and southern social economies. The *Réseau transfrontalier de l'économie sociale et solidaire* project (Social and solidarity economy cross-border network), funded by the POCTEFA programme, published an analysis that revealed the very different nature of the social economies in the three regions: while a culture of industrial cooperatives remained strong in Euskadi, agrarian cooperatives were prevalent in Navarre, and in the French Basque country, and Aquitaine as a whole, the focus of the social economy was more on services and on small and medium-sized enterprises. The small-scale cooperatives of the French Basque Country, and of Aquitaine as a whole, could not really be

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<sup>12</sup> Neither an administrative unit nor a local authority, the *pays* (as defined by the 1995 *Loi d'Orientation pour l'aménagement et le développement du territoire* or "Pasqua law", amended by the 1999 *Loi d'Orientation de l'aménagement durable du territoire* or "Voynet" law) is an area that has a geographical, cultural and economic coherence, within which municipalities work on a shared development plan. The *pays* can generate development agreements with the state, the region, and other sub-state authorities.

compared with the cooperative giant of Mondragón in the south, supplemented by those cooperatives that were outside the Mondragón federation.<sup>13</sup> Legislation and fiscal conditions also generated differences: similar activity could be undertaken by a cooperative in the South and an *association* (non-profit organization) in the North.<sup>14</sup> In specific areas such as fishing, the Spanish Basque *cofradía*, an association like a medieval guild that governed the economic and social aspects of the sector (Hess, 2009), had no real counterpart on the French Basque side. Within France, the legal and tax system was more favourable than its southern counterpart towards features of the small-scale social economy such as micro-finance (for example CLEFE, CLEJ and Herrikoa)<sup>15</sup> or the small worker cooperative. In the cultural sector, French government policy created the category of publicly-funded *intermittents du spectacle* (casual employees in the performing arts), which had no equivalent in Spain. Generally speaking, however, social economy actors on both sides of the border consistently shared a perception of the asymmetry in size between third sector organizations in the different countries, as expressed by this French Basque activist working on a cross-border cooperative project for job creation by women:

We took part in meetings with southern women, aged between 55 and 60. They all said that this was impossible. A worker cooperative has to be constituted by 50 people. Not by two. It's something collective. And we told them that a cooperative can be founded by two people. Here [in France], it's possible. Values are important. Numbers

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<sup>13</sup> The Mondragón cooperative federation, on its own, included 289 businesses and cooperatives, and collectively had 81,320 employees in 2014, both in the Basque Country and abroad <<http://www.mondragon-corporation.com/fr/>>, consulted on 4 June, 2014. In Aquitaine, the federation of worker cooperatives (URSCOP) accounted for 134 cooperatives with 1,900 employees in 2014 <<http://www.scop-aquitaine.coop/sites/fr/unions-regionales/les-scop-aquitaine/qui-sommes-nous/Missions.html>>, consulted on 4 June, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> The status of an *association* is defined by a French law of 1901.

<sup>15</sup> Herrikoa is a venture capital company, set up in 1980, which takes deposits of savings from the general public in order to support the creation of small businesses in the French Basque area.



do not matter. Of course, it's better to be many. But you can start with two people, and then you see what happens.<sup>16</sup>

A fourth sort of asymmetry, a *cyclical* one, emerged with the global crisis of 2008, which hit Spain particularly badly. This initiated an unexpected market asymmetry between the north and south of the Basque Country. While Euskadi was far less badly affected by the crisis than any other Spanish region, the consequences were still more damaging there than in Aquitaine. In 2012, unemployment was as high as 14.9 per cent in Euskadi (25 per cent in Spain), against 10 per cent in Aquitaine (10.3 per cent in France) (Bihartean-Eurorégion, 2014: 7). The crisis created new fragilities in the South both for the most market-oriented sectors, illustrated by the bankruptcy of the Basque industrial cooperative Fagor and its European subsidiaries (Errasti et al., 2016), and for sectors dependent on public resources. In 2013 the government of Navarre decided not to fund the cross-border cooperation scheme with Aquitaine, due to the depletion of its resources.<sup>17</sup> The crisis had the knock-on effect of undermining the public institutions themselves, thus downgrading CBC as a policy priority. The scarcity of resources had two contrasting effects. On the one hand the crisis stimulated the development of many third sector organizations, which had to look inward and secure their own survival before launching new partnerships. On the other, the crisis prompted some southern actors to turn to cross-border projects with the precise intention of gaining access to bilateral or European funds that would compensate for the decline in their own resources. Northern actors saw southern actors coming to them in order to build some sort of advantageous partnership. This was the case for a local television station in the Basse-Navarre, a cooperative, which had originally been approached by television stations from Guipuzcoa with a view to developing a joint audiovisual project based on their shared Basque culture and common use of *euskera* (Basque language). Subsequently, with the Spanish economic crisis, the nature and balance of the motivation shifted. As one of the French Basque cooperative members observed: "Now they don't have enough money to work.

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<sup>16</sup> Interview, Andere Nahia (French Basque women's organization), 2013, translated from French.

<sup>17</sup> The Aquitaine region, however, chose to continue to support the project partners from Aquitaine in order to maintain a minimum level of cooperation, thus relying on the self-financing capacity of the partners from Navarre (interview, Aquitaine Region, Bordeaux, 2013).

As a result, they approach us because they see that there are resources in France and in Europe. So now they are approaching us, but it's because they need it.”<sup>18</sup>

In this case, a cross-border project that had initially been motivated by shared cultural aims was transformed into a functional and pragmatic partnership whose primary objective was the capture of CBC funding. It also gave more leverage to the northern actor, unlike in the more usual situation where the French Basque partner would have been the weak link in the partnership.

## ***2.2. The silent politicization of the social economy: contrasting styles of implementing CBC***

Despite these persistent asymmetries, there were steady advances in the process whereby CBC by SSE actors became incorporated into governmental strategy and action moved steadily forward, with at least three distinct types of motivation and styles of implementation.

*CBC as an instrument for nation-building.* In this first situation, funding from public CBC programmes (whether interregional or EU) came to strengthen and supplement pre-existing CBC networks. This was particularly the case for networks that were clearly oriented towards a Basque nation-building process. As discussed earlier, CBC with a nation-building orientation had established cross-border networks in various sectors from the 1970s onwards, prior to the state-sponsored cooperation schemes. Over the years, these civil society networks developed the ability to use the new schemes in order to consolidate their partnerships. The federation of French and Spanish *ikastola* (schools using the Basque language) set up a European Cooperative Society in 2009 with this in mind. The Society for Basque Studies (*Eusko Ikaskuntza*), which was structured on a cross-border basis but had a different legal status on each side (a public interest body in the South and an *association* in the North), also regularly used CBC funding schemes to develop cross-border cultural projects. Basque-speaking non-profit radio stations in Navarre and the French Basque Country also used this funding, as did the cross-border radio station *Antxeta irratia* in the Txingudi border area.

All these initiatives oriented towards nation-building had to overcome two sorts of difficulties. The first was the recurrent problem of institutional equivalence. In the late 2000s

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<sup>18</sup> Interview, SCIC (local television station), French Basque Country, 2013, translated from Basque.

*Hemen* (“Here”), the French Basque association for local development, wanted to launch a cross-border job-finding scheme but was turned away by the Spanish state employment service, which only wanted to work with its French state counterpart and not with an organization with no official status. The second difficulty, which was seldom publicly expressed even within the *abertzale* milieu, related to the risk of a Basque type of centralizing Jacobinism, whereby CBC decision-making was located and concentrated in the Spanish Basque Country to the detriment of the French partners.

*Sector-based CBC, with a reference to shared Basque identity.* For a second category of CBC projects it was a shared Basque *cultural* and *territorial* identity, rather than Basque *national* identity, which was part of the motivation for cooperation, although sector-based goals were the essential element. This was especially the case for the CBC projects that related to social movements, such as women’s organizations, small farmer associations and environmental groups, whose aim was to build or strengthen cross-border networks on specific issues. For these projects a shared Basque identity overlapped with sector-based interests; an example of this is EHKOLEktiboa (EHKO), the cross-border association of organic farmers from the French Basque Country, Euskadi and Navarre that was founded in 2014. Its aim is to create a cross-border system of organic certification, intended to be “private, but collective”. For *Biharko lurraren elkartea* (Association for the land of tomorrow), the French Basque association promoting the project:

The members are the farmers. Farmers from the whole Basque Country. But our goal is not the Basque Country as a *herri* (people),<sup>19</sup> it’s not the Basque Country for the Basque Country. There is, also, a national vision. But our philosophy consists of saying that most of the people are positive about identifying themselves with, or subscribing to, a name that would cover the whole Basque Country. I identify with this. This *lurralde* (territory) has a cultural reality, and they all agree on this.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, the French Basque women’s association *Emazteek diote* (Women’s voice) began its relationship with its southern counterparts in 1998-1999, during the period of the Lizarra-Garazi Accord, when the ceasefire declared by ETA created an environment that encouraged cross-border projects aimed at strengthening all kinds of links between the

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<sup>19</sup> The Basque *herri*, like the Spanish *pueblo*, has many meanings, and depending on the context can be translated as “people”, “country”, “village”, or “nation”.

<sup>20</sup> Interview, *Biharko lurraren elkartea*, 2013, translated from Basque.

two territories. Although it was focused on women's issues rather than motivated by Basque identity, this feminist CBC project benefited from the climate that was directly related to the political process.

*Functional and non-identity-based CBC.* For a third category, CBC was based on new partnerships between actors who did not necessarily know each other before a project was set up, nor base their cooperation on reference to a shared Basque identity. This absence of identity-based common ground did not prevent these projects from achieving positive results in terms of network governance. This is illustrated by two specific projects in the field of cultural and industrial heritage: one, on the iron mines of Banca, brought municipalities and valleys from the Basse-Navarre (in France) and Navarre into partnership; the other, on maritime heritage, linked together associations from both the French Basque coastal area of Labourd and Guipuzcoa. This category of projects also includes some with more functional aims. A CBC project regarding migrant integration was promoted by AIFRISS, a French organization whose officer described himself as being “*très jacobin*” (very French centralist) and suspicious of Spain's devolution of power to its autonomous communities. This attitude did not prevent AIFRISS from developing substantial skills in acquiring European funds for cross-border and transnational projects. However, cases also emerged of opportunistic and unintegrated cooperation that had generated unwarranted windfalls for enterprising applicants, an effect feared by the governmental promoters of CBC. Finally, in some specific sectors of the social economy, such as “social integration through economic activity”, CBC has to date remained weak due to the very different institutional arrangements on the French and Spanish sides of the border (Itçaina, Manterola, 2014; Manterola, 2013).

### ***2.3. Politicizing against depoliticizing CBC: conforming to institutional expectations***

Assessment of the “success” or “failure” of CBC must relate to its initial stated objectives. In reference to the Basque case, Bray and Keating make the following observation:

Cross-border cooperation has, then, been successful in some ways but not in others. The verdict depends on what we are talking about: the romantic unification of people without frontiers, the unification of the ‘Basques’, institutional unification, or the pragmatic solving of social and health services, transport infrastructure, or taxation. However, it can well be argued that one cannot be effectively carried out without the other. (Bray, Keating 2013: 48)

Our fieldwork fully confirms this variety of interpretation. There can be a disparity between the declared objectives of some cross-border cultural movements, such as to contribute to Basque nation-building, and the declared policy objectives of CBC, for example to increase functional cooperation in pursuit of socio-economic aims. This variety is even more apparent when it comes to the impact of CBC on conflict amelioration. We can hypothesize that policy-makers, although they may not make it explicit, also see CBC as contributing to a general process of social reconciliation in the Basque country by disconnecting cooperation from the promotion of cultural and political identities. It can be argued that policy-makers have been attempting to depoliticize CBC and promote functional objectives, in the manner described by Jullien and Smith: “[o]ften also called ‘technicization’, depoliticization is a type of political work which downplays values in favour of arguments based upon ‘expertise’ and ‘efficiency’” (2008: 21).<sup>21</sup>

However, it would be an oversimplification to contrast a depoliticized CBC led by policy-makers with a politicized use of CBC by social movements. The formal adoption of CBC by the various levels of government affected the behaviour of identity-related social movements: in order to take advantage of these new opportunities, they had to depoliticize and “technicize” their discourse in order to make it acceptable within the official process. More precisely, they had to adjust their discourse to fit the priorities determined by the Euroregion, which conformed to EU priorities: social and territorial cohesion, structural change in energy systems, educational attendance, social and labour mobility. The discourse also had to be consistent with the Euroregion’s overall goal, which was to rise above being just a financial resource for cross-border projects: “the Euroregion has not been established to manage the Aquitaine-Euskadi call for projects. It was created in order to develop a strategy of mobilization, of ‘capture’ as the Spaniards say, of European funds.”<sup>22</sup>

Both Aquitaine and Euskadi clearly wanted to avoid the phenomenon of projects repeating their applications to the bilateral CBC schemes on an annual basis, and encouraged them to develop their approach and apply to other sources such as, in particular, the European Regional Development Fund. This generated particular difficulties for fragile small third

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<sup>21</sup> By contrast, “politicization occurs when actors explicitly employ values either to transform the meaning of an issue or in order to transfer its treatment to another site of negotiation” (Jullien, Smith, 2008: 21).

<sup>22</sup> Interview, Eurorégion Aquitaine–Euskadi, Hendaye, 2013, translated from French.

sector organizations that lacked organizational and financial capacity, for example over their cash flow and coordination of different funding streams. Some former beneficiaries of these bilateral schemes felt that there was a contradiction between the authorities' hope for enduring strong cross-border partnerships and the cessation of bilateral funding after a few years in order to prioritize newcomers to CBC.

For their part, the third sector organizations that were based on Basque identity and the Basque nation-building process frequently applied double standards. They attempted to conform to the formal requirements in order to gain access to government-led CBC schemes, but if these attempts failed they could still activate the alternative CBC network that related to Basque social movements. This was the case in 2005 when the French Basque ELB farmers' union decided to found Euskal Herriko Laborantza Ganbara (EHLG), an alternative Chamber of agriculture for the Basque Country. This met hostility, and when EHLG faced legal action from the state and the main French farmers' union (Itçaina, 2011) it had no choice but to turn to Basque cross-border social movements in order to secure alternative resources. Support from the Manu Robles Arangiz Foundation, connected to the southern Basque nationalist trade union ELA, was decisive in acquiring office facilities for EHLG, and it also received support from the Udalbiltza cross-border association of local councillors. In 2006 EHLG also signed an agreement with Itsasmendikoia, a public agency for rural development linked to the Basque Autonomous Community government. Similarly, but in a less public manner, EHKO (the cross-border association of organic farmers mentioned earlier) applied to the bilateral interregional funding scheme, but this turned them down giving the reason that the Aquitaine region was implementing its own labelling for organic food. The EHKO organizers then turned to Udalbiltza. Local actors demonstrated that they had both the strategic ability and the ideological flexibility needed for dealing with both governmental and alternative resources in order to move their projects forward.

Finally, we should mention an unforeseen by-product of the adoption of CBC by governmental bodies: the generation of new competition *between* third sector organizations struggling to gain access to public resources. This was the case when French and Spanish Basque associations competed for public funding in regard to commemoration of the history of Basque whaling in Newfoundland. This type of competition could be based on both economic and ideological motivation. In the educational field, the three French Basque networks for the teaching of *euskera* (the *ikastola*, mentioned earlier, the *Ikas-bi/Bigai bai*, public bilingual schools, and the *Euskal haziak*, private bilingual Catholic schools) cooperated

in their demand for more official recognition from the French state, but competed with each other to gain access funding available from the South, and especially from the Basque Autonomous Community government (Harguindéguy, Itçaina, 2015). In this regard, the initial steps taken to establish a Basque language policy in the French Basque Country had an unexpected effect. The Office public de la langue Basque or Euskararen erakunde publikoa (Public office for the Basque language), created in 2005, included representatives from the Spanish Basque Autonomous Community government on its board alongside representatives of the French state and local authorities, and was intended to channel, rationalize and, in the state's interests, keep a check on the resources coming from the South. This led to a dispute over the redistribution of these monies between the three educational networks, which had until then maintained bilateral access to the southern institutions. These controversies provide an indirect illustration of the effectiveness of the initial steps to give the French Basque Country a more formal status that would mean more than just a “cosmetic decentralization” (Mansvelt Beck, 2005).

## **Conclusion**

The involvement of Basque SSE actors in CBC has followed two tracks: an official governmental track that has attempted to establish a stable framework for functional and sector-based CBC, and an alternative track that has reinforced the Basque nation-building process by means of cross-border social movements. In our analysis of third sector organizations involved in CBC we found that both these tracks were used as alternatives, or even simultaneously, by various civil society organizations; this related to ideological factors, but also to more contingent and pragmatic considerations. SSE organizations developed new skills in order to consolidate their own resources and to overcome the four asymmetries we have identified (institutional, political, organizational, and market) between the two sides of the border. Although cross-border relations may not have had a direct impact on the peace process itself, their intensification led to improved mutual understanding, a reduced recourse to stereotypes, and a focus on shared practical issues. The increase in CBC certainly made an indirect contribution to the normalization of cross-border relations and, as a consequence, to a silent and sustainable process of conflict amelioration.

This case study was intended to emphasize the contribution of political sociology to the study of the territorial dynamics of the SSE. Far from being limited to uncomplicated socio-economic exchanges, cross-border SSE flows mirror the institutional, political and

cultural issues peculiar to this territory. Beyond the Basque case, future research should scrutinize the political work undertaken by SSE actors at multiple governmental scales (local, regional, state, supra-state) in order to take their claims forward. Research should be particularly sensitive to the way SSE operators capture European policy instruments for CBC (Cross-Border Cooperation). The uses made of these instruments may be limited to their functional dimension. In contrast, their implementation may support political and/or cultural readings of the border. In this respect and as already suggested in this chapter, comparing the Basque case with the Irish border region would be particularly fruitful. Unlike in the Basque case, the EU became directly involved in the peace process in Northern Ireland. This involvement led, among other things, to support for cross-border relations between third sector organizations. Irish third sector organizations used EU Peace Programmes to take their projects forward, albeit with mixed results, while, in the Basque case, a number of SSE actors tried to “translate” into identity-related terms EU and regional CBC programmes which initially were totally disconnected from the Basque political question (McCall, Itçaina, 2017). As a result, a sort of secondary foreign policy that does not speak its name emerged in the Basque Country, led by an organized civil society aiming to build a shared territory. Beyond its singularity, the Basque case lends itself to comparisons between different territorial mobilizations around SSE, which are undeniably political in nature.

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