



**Multilevel governance European Union, Spain and Portugal:  
How the different multilevel governance models of Spain and Portugal influence the municipal dynamics in  
the International Association of Municipalities: Atlantic Axis of the Northwest Peninsular (AANP)**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This article deals with cross-border cooperation. The approach is materialized in the analysis of the structure of cross-border cooperation: Atlantic Axis of the Northwest Peninsular (AANP) and carried out from the perspective of the participating municipalities. In order to carry out this study, it was considered pertinent to see if the multilevel governance model existing in Spain and Portugal, namely with regard to the existence of regionalization in Spain (Galicia) and its absence in the north of Portugal, influences the dynamics and the participation of municipalities in the International Atlantic Eixo Association as well as in its operation.*

**Key words: Cooperation; Cross border; Municipalities; Networks; motivations;**

**1. Introduction**

This article addresses the theme of cross-border cooperation, particularizing its implementation in cross-border municipal associativism. The approach is materialized in the analysis of a successful structure of cross-border cooperation: the Atlantic Axis of the North-West Peninsular (EANP) and is carried out from the perspective of the participating municipalities.

It is now considered relevant to know what motivations were involved in the decision to create this Association and what are the reasons that led the various municipalities to participate in this organization.

**1.1 Theoretical framework**

The New Public Management as a management model, is difficult to be correctly defined (McLaughlin, 2002: 409). It is essentially a management model that seeks to organize and operationalize, in a different way, the Public Administration and its agents, seeking to: improve the performance of public services; increase efficiency; avoid corruption; guide the Public Administration to the needs of citizens; open the Public Administration to the company; introduce more transparency in the operation of public services; define and identify competencies and responsibilities; avoid waste (Warrington, 1997).

One of the consequences of the New Public Management is the fragmentation of the Public Administration (Hood, 1991; Pollitt, 1996). This has led to the state changing the way it operates, emerging, a new system, governance (or governance), which has given rise to new problems.

The emerging administrative structure highlights the growing number of small structures, acting autonomously or almost autonomously. Fragmentation introduced a new institutional arrangement in which organization and inter-organizational coordination became the central factors. There are a number of interdependent actors, which means a shift in activity across networks, the characterization of which is largely based on trust and mutual adjustment (Rhodes, 1997).



Pierre and Peters (2000) identify within the structural approach of the concept of governance, four distinct conceptualizations: hierarchies, markets, communities and networks. In the case of the conceptualization of governance as networks, the networks of public policies (policy networks) are one of its most common manifestations. In this perspective, a multiplicity of actors interacts and participates in the processes of conception and implementation of public policies (...), with the assumption that the actors now hold a relative autonomy vis-à-vis state authority (Rodrigues, 2010).

Klijn (2008) points out that the concept of governance is essentially confused with that of a governance network, stating that, in the final analysis, governance corresponds to the process that takes place in the respective networks.

Relationships in the network are based on reciprocity and trust-based interdependence. Each actor shares norms and a mutual interest, having advantages in maintaining the network active and not undermining the existing trust between the participants, which would reduce the efficiency of the system. Non-cooperation becomes more burdensome as it results in increased transaction costs (Williamson, 1985). Kickert and Koppenjan (1997) point out that this new form of governance promotes cooperation among participants within the structure of inter-organizational relationships.

When we speak of governance, we refer to self-organized interorganizational networks characterized by interdependence, exchange of resources, rules, and significant state autonomy (Rhodes, 1997: 15); it is a continuous process through which diverse or conflicting interests are accommodated and the co-operative action developed. (Commission on Global Governance, 1995:2). These interactive arrangements, in which public and private actors participate, aim to solve social problems and create social opportunities, taking care of the institutions within which these government actions take place (Kooiman, 1999).

Mattessich et al. (2001), in dealing with the issue of collaboration, presents it as a well-defined relationship with mutual benefit between two or more organizations with the aim of achieving common goals and purposes. According to the authors, the relationship includes a joint commitment to relationships and goals; the joint development of a structure as well as shared responsibility; shared authority and accountability; and still shares resources and rewards. Collaboration brings previously separated organizations to a new structure with full involvement and commitment to a common mission.

On cross-border cooperation structures, Perkman (2008) points out that particular emphasis should be placed on the political-administrative context in which Euro regions are developed, with proposals being developed taking account of context conditions.

The same author (Perkmann, 2008) postulates that the background of the multi-level governance system in the EU provides opportunities for new types of political actors to take ownership of policy and resource skills. Perkman (2008) further assumes that Cross-Border Associations to have impact as independent actors require an organizational basis, complemented by the capacity to mobilize resources to fuel their strategies and interventions.

### ***1.2 The Atlantic Axis of the North-West***

The Atlantic Axis of the Northwest Peninsular (AANP or AA) is a Cross-Border Association of Municipalities (AM) of Galicia (Autonomous Community of Spain) and Northern Portugal that has a privileged position in the context of the Galician-Portuguese "Euro region".

Since its creation in 1992 the Axis has undergone a complex evolution influenced by the community context to a greater extent and by the state and regional constraints of the states in which they are inserted (Domínguez, 2004: 37).



We start with the institutional evolution of AA since its foundation and following Domínguez (2008) (but also others like Cancela, 2008: 162-167; Domínguez, 2004: 3-51):

According to Domínguez (2010), Galicia and the North of Portugal were already at the forefront of the process of European integration, as in October 1991 the Galician-Northern Portugal Work Community was born, the first of the Luso-Spanish frontier and in April 1992, the Atlantic Axis of the Northwest Peninsular (AANP) was born, an association of urban municipalities.

In the Founding Declaration of the Axis, it is stated that 'it is indispensable to overcome physical barriers by means of public infrastructures that allow a single cross-border market to be established'. In order to make the necessary infrastructures a reality, it was pointed to the Community support provided for in the Delors II package and the claim was clear.

Twelve cities, Ourense, Ferrol, A Coruña, Santiago, Pontevedra, Vigo, Porto, Braga, Bragança, Chaves, Viana and Vila Real - Lugo would still arrive in time to be a founding city in the approval of the Statutes - they subscribed this foundational Declaration.

The Axis has gone a long way that according to Domínguez (2008) can be structured in three stages: The founding stage (1992-1999): "takes place with the presidencies of the two cities that began the constitution of the Axis: Porto and Vigo. In 1995 the Galician cities of Vilagarcía de Arousa and Monforte de Lemos were incorporated and, in 1997, three Portuguese cities of Vila Nova de Gaia, Guimarães and Peso da Régua.

In the context of the main achievements of this stage, it is worth mentioning, firstly, the elaboration of the I Strategic Study of the Atlantic Axis. Secondly, the Axis bet on a series of actions that made it visible to the society of the euroregion (the Atlantic Axis Games, the Atlantic Axis Regatta, and the Atlantic Axis Painting Biennial, among others). Finally, in the light of the Oporto Declaration, the EANP began to submit competitive applications to Community programs to support cross-border cooperation (Domínguez, 2008).

The Consolidation stage (2000-2006): In 2002 the statutes are amended. A new body is included: the General Secretariat, with management, representation and signature of contracts and agreements with third parties (among others).

From the operative point of view, one of the great stakes was the Euro-regional integration. In 2000, the agreement for the integration of the Axis in the structure of the Galician-Northern Portugal Work Community was signed as the Special Commission.

The second of the stakes made by the Axis at this stage was that of the knowledge society. In 2000, the Galicia - Norte de Portugal Euroregion Infrastructure Map was approved and published; secondly, the claim of a high - speed rail corridor Porto - A Coruña, within the priorities of the major trans-European networks (Domínguez, 2008).

The consolidation of the Axis also resulted in the submission of approved applications to European programs. The International Projection stage (2007-2010): Operated the substantial expansion of the member cities, from 18 to 28, in 2007, with the incorporation of the Portuguese cities Barcelos, Mirandela, Famalicão, Vila do Conde and Matosinhos and ViveiroGalicians, The Boat of Valdeorras, Lalín, Verín and Carballo. In 2008, they went from 28 to 34, with the entrance on one side of Lamego, Penafiel and Macedo dos Cavaleiros and on the other of Ribeira, Sarria and O Carballiño.

The Atlantic Axis Strategic Agenda provided a number of key ideas, including: the need to foster governance and partnership; the promotion of a balanced territorial model, and cities with greater centrality.



### 3. Research Questions and Objectives

#### *In this investigation we tried to realize:*

If the existing multilevel governance model in Spain and Portugal, in particular as regards the existence of regionalization in Spain (Galicia) and its lack of existence in Northern Portugal, affects the dynamics and participation of municipalities in the Atlantic Axis as well as functioning of the network;

In order to assess the corroborability of this hypothesis, a set of questions was given, and the following were considered to be more pertinent to the study in question:

- Dynamics / participation of the Spanish and Portuguese municipalities in AM;
- The existence of a supramunicipal / regional structure in Galicia and the lack of a similar structure in the north of Portugal influence the participation dynamics of the Spanish and Portuguese municipalities in the Association.

#### *In order to complete the investigation, two variables were defined:*

- Nationality of the participating municipalities (Portugal/Spain).
- Date of adhesion to the structure, essentially dividing the municipalities into two groups of actors: the 18 pioneer municipalities (between founders and first enlargements) and the remaining 16 participating municipalities, namely those integrated after the 2007 and 2008 enlargements.

It should be noted that within this variable (date of accession to the structure) it is possible to identify other elements that can be considered as important explanations, as far as the results obtained, if not the pioneer municipalities in the structure (founders and first enlargements-until 1997 ) are those municipalities that have a "greater weight" in each of the regional contexts (Galicia and Northern Portugal) and the most representative of the "Euro region". This reality is recognized by demographic, economic, geographic and political factors

The following table shows the location, as well as the number of inhabitants of the founding municipalities along with those who joined the EANP during the 1990s.

**Table 1: Municipalities composing the AANP up to 1998**

Municipality	Country	LocationCoast (near) / Inland	Population (2008)	AANP Membership	Budget (2010) in €
A Coruña	Spain	Coast	250.000	Founder	210.700.000
Braga	Portugal	Coast	176.154	Founder	107.500.000
Bragança	Portugal	Inland	34.375	Founder	40.369.000
Chaves	Portugal	Inland	45.000	Founder	63.250.768
Ferrol	Spain	Coast	80.000	Founder	53.600.000
Guimarães	Portugal	Coast	162.636	1997	163.618.804
Lugo	Spain	Inland	90.000	Founder	92.348.388



Monf. <sup>te</sup> Lemos	Spain	Inland	20.000	1995	12.174.027
Ourense	Spain	Inland	109475	Founder	111.721.477
Peso da Régua	Portugal	Inland	20.000	1997	40.161.209
Pontevedra	Spain	Coast	80.000	Founder	63.796.100
Porto	Portugal	Coast	216.080	Founder	228.000.000
Santiago de C.	Spain	Coast	92.365	Founder	114.886.000
Viana Castelo	Portugal	Coast	91.362	Founder	76.700.550
Vigo	Spain	Coast	300.000	Founder	257.637.086
V. N. de Gaia	Portugal	Coast	312.742	1997	287.907.940
Vila Real	Portugal	Inland	50.131	Founder	53.200.000
Vilagarcía Ar. <sup>sa</sup>	Spain	Coast	35.000	1995	26.813.952

*Elaboration by the author of the article; Source data: AANP; Xunta de Galicia and CCDR-Norte*

In this way, this group of municipalities will form a relatively homogeneous group of members (despite differences), who have at least about 14 years of mutual knowledge and working together. For the sake of clarity, this subset of the AA represents about 2 235 840 inhabitants (an average of about 125 thousand inhabitants per unit). In the second group are the 16 municipalities that joined the AA in 2007 and 2008.

**Table 2: Municipalities that joined the AANP in 2007 and 2008**

Municipality	Country	Location Coast (near); inland; or, Transition (between coast andinland).	Population (2008)	AANP Membership	Budget (2010) em €
Barcelos	Portugal	Coast	124.555	2007	72.001.422
O Carballiño	Spain	Inland	14.125	2008	9.820.853



Carballo	Spain	Coast	30.078	2007	22.801.709
Lalín	Spain	Transition	21.231	2007	17.000.000
Lamego	Spain	Inland	25.863	2008	52.920.000
Macedo Cavaleiros	Portugal	Inland	16.766	2008	27.681.951
Matosinhos	Portugal	Coast	169.261	2007	182.801.780
Mirandela	Portugal	Inland	25.458	2007	49.993.950
O Barco Valdeorras	Spain	Inland	13.943	2007	8.543.776
Penafiel	Portugal	Transition	71.841	2008	87.865.000
Ribeira	Spain	Coast	27.472	2008	21.301.382
Sarria	Spain	Inland	13.582	2008	10.000.000
Verín	Spain	Inland	13.991	2007	10.440.173
Vila do Conde	Portugal	Coast	77.320	2007	77.000.000
V. N. Famalicão	Portugal	Coast	134.969	2007	94.291.010
Viveiro	Spain	Coast	15.706	2007	13.500.000

Elaboration by the author of the article; Source data: AANP; Xunta de Galicia and CCDR-Norte

In terms of population this group has 820 964 inhabitants, which corresponds to an average of about 50 thousand inhabitants per unit (municipality).

The methodology used in the elaboration of this work was quantitative and qualitative, seeking to assess the opinion of the municipalities-actors participating in the Trans boundary Association of Municipalities "Atlantic Axis of the Northwest Peninsular" (AANP).

In this way, the questions and variables were operationalize, and questionnaires sent (in 2010) to all municipalities belonging to the Atlantic Northwest of the Peninsular (34 municipalities) were used, with a response rate of over 97% (only one municipality-Viveiro-did not answer);

Interviews were also carried out (year 2011). The interviewees were representatives of 10 municipalities members of the AANP selected according to the country of origin: Spain / Portugal), of the geographic location: Near the coast/inland and the time of belonging to the structure: until 1997 after 2007.

The interviewees were representatives of the following municipalities: Lugo, Ourense, Verín, Carballiño, Santiago de Compostela; Guimarães, Porto, Matosinhos, Vila do Conde, Viana do Castelo.



#### 4. Empirical elements

##### *The AANP and Multilevel Governance models in Portugal and Spain*

As Perkmann (2008) postulates, the background of the EU Multilevel Governance system provides opportunities for new types of political actors to take ownership of policy and resource competencies. That author (Perkman, 2008) assumes that cross-border associations to have impact as independent actors need an organizational basis, complemented by the ability to mobilize resources to fuel their strategies and interventions.

European cross-border regions represent mainly cases of local cross-border integration on a policy-driven basis rather than market-driven integration. These networks often arise in response to failures of central authorities, with local and regional actors exploring the opportunity to create new structures derived from the new regionalization and globalization (Scott, 1999).

This research therefore examines the differences in existing multilevel governance structures in Portugal and Spain and their possible repercussions on the functioning of the AANP. The following research question was therefore raised:

**Regionalization:** The multilevel governance model in Spain and Portugal, namely, with regard to the existence of regionalization in Spain (Galicia) and its absence in Northern Portugal, influences the dynamics and participation of municipalities in the Atlantic Axis as well as network operation;

From the elements collected through the questionnaires (table below), the majority of the participants consider that the dynamics / participation of the Spanish and Portuguese municipalities in AANP is similar between the two countries (68.8% and  $n = 22$ ). However, the equivalent of 35.3% ( $n = 6$ ) of the Portuguese participants considers that the participation is greater by the Spanish municipalities. Paradoxically, among the Spanish municipalities, the value of 26.7% ( $n = 4$ ) attributed greater participation to the Portuguese municipalities.

**Table 3-Dynamics/Participation of Spanish and Portuguese Municipalities in ATM**

		Portugal		Spain		total	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
The participation / interest of the municipalities is:	> Inportuguesemunicip.	0	0%	4	26,7%	4	12,5%
	> In spanishmunicipalit.	6	35,3%	0	0%	6	18,8%
	Similar	11	64,7%	11	73,3%	22	68,8%
<b>Total</b>		<b>17</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100,0%</b>
Does the difference in dynamics influence the Association?	Yes	4	80,0%	2	50,0%	6	66,7%
	No	1	20,0%	2	50,0%	3	33,3%
<b>Total</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100,0%</b>
The difference in dynamics is:	Beneficial	1	25,0%	0	0%	1	16,7%
	Harmful	3	75,0%	2	100%	5	83,3%
<b>Total</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100,0%</b>



In the interviews the question of asymmetry of participation is clarified and based on the lack of regionalization in mainland Portugal.

Interview Question: From your experience as a member of the structure do you consider that there are differences in the dynamics between the municipalities of Spain (Galegos) and municipalities from (the North of) Portugal?

**Answers from the Municipalities of Northern Portugal:**

In Spain there is regionalization. There is common regional planning for all municipalities, which means that they have a shared and coherent strategy. (27/06/2011)

There is a smaller disparity between the Spanish municipalities (than among the Portuguese). The Spaniards are more combative, more pragmatic, more attentive and more objective. (06/13/2011)

The Galician municipalities have taken greater advantage of the dynamics of project implementation. (24/06/2011)

There are distinct dynamics on both sides of the border. In Portugal the municipalities act at different speeds. It is rarely possible for a global strategy to overlap with that of each municipality. The Spanish side gives more importance to the organization (AANP) than the Portuguese side. The territorial organization of each country is different which leads to different dynamics. The Spanish administrative structure allows greater speed, partly because they are regionalized. There are regional decisions that can be developed at the regional level. In the Portuguese case the understanding is much more difficult. Several municipalities are from the Metropolitan Area of Porto, while others belong to other structures / associations of different municipalities. The way the Transborder Association of Municipalities operates does not take into account the differences in dynamics between the two sides of the border. They perceive the Spanish side better than Portuguese because the Spanish organization is more efficient. (07/06/2011)

Portugal is not decentralized. On the one hand, it has the advantage that the chambers have a significant political dimension, which is very important. The negative aspect is the lack of regionalization. In Portugal the relationship is between two levels (Municipalities and Central Administration) in Spain, the Galician municipality is related to the Xunta de Galicia. In Portugal the municipalities have greater autonomy but more difficulty in the lobbying. Vigo and Porto have more or less the same number of inhabitants. However, Porto is more important in Portugal than Vigo in Spain. However, most of the decisions are taken in Galicia (...) Galicia solves all the problems in Santiago. The councils and the Xunta [of Galicia] have the same mission: To promote Galicia. On the Portuguese side, the North Regional Coordination and Development Commission (CCDR-N), has no powers. The Lisbon and Madrid objectives are different from those of the AANP. But in Galicia to solve the problems is not necessary to go to Madrid, as they are settled in Santiago. On the contrary, what happens in Portugal where, it is necessary to go to Lisbon. Everything else is secondary. Portugal has no regionalization which is bad and harmful. (06/15/2011)

From the point of view of difficulties in AANP there is another problem [...]: The absence of regionalization in Portugal. Example of the railway: The Galician government interlocutor with decision-making capacity. The North of Portugal is represented by the Regional Coordination and Development Commission of the North, where there is an interlocutor who is the Portuguese government where decisions are actually taken. There is a different scale. The relationship with Galicia is very close to the Portuguese Government. Many opportunities are missed. Lack of parity / regionalization between the two regions. In Portugal the decision process is very slow. (06/13/2011)



The interviewees believe that the lack of regionalization in Portugal affects the participation of municipalities and, consequently, the activity of EANP. They have the perception that the Galician municipalities have a closer proximity to a center of real political decision to the Xunta de Galicia (which provides a concerted strategy for the NUT II) unlike the Portuguese whose center of decision is only in Lisbon, since the CCDR -Norte is a decentralized actor of the Central Administration whose political capacity is very scarce. Therefore, they consider that for this reason the participation of the municipalities Galegos and the North of Portugal in the AANP is asymmetric.

As we have seen earlier, the background to the EU Multi-level Governance system provides opportunities for new types of policy actors to take ownership of policy and resource competencies in a business way. It assumes that for the Trans boundary Regions to have an impact as independent actors, they need an organizational basis, complemented by the capacity to mobilize resources to feed their strategies and interventions (Perkmann, 2008), but often the multilevel governance system in each member state can induce - to the municipalities of a given country - difficulties or in coordination when seeking cross-border cooperation. This seems to be the "sense" of the municipalities of northern Portugal belonging to the Atlantic Axis

#### ***Responses of the Municipalities of Galicia:***

Participation in the structure is sometimes greater on the part of the Portuguese members: they have decided more quickly the option to join the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC); I believe there is a greater Portuguese participation in the meetings; and because in the Portuguese municipalities there is not as much political/historical rivalry as there are among the Spanish municipalities. (05/13/2011)

We cannot see the difference between Portuguese and Spanish municipalities in the Atlantic Axis. (05/14/2011)

The Lisbon and Madrid objectives are different from those of the AANP. (11/05/2011)

This difference influences the functioning and is detrimental to the AANP because (...) all common objectives are more difficult to achieve and there is a different intervention statute, which should seek the commitment and participation of all. (05/14/2011)

The importance of regionalization as a proxy and a facilitator of a common and coherent development strategy is recognized. Curiously an actor considers the Portuguese municipalities more participatory, seeing as justification a less rivalry between them. It is concluded that there is in fact a different intervention status in AANP due to differences in multilevel governance between Portugal (non-regionalized state, excluding the archipelagos) and Spain (a state made up of seventeen Autonomous Communities).

#### **Conclusions**

We verified that most of the participants consider in the questionnaires that the dynamics / participation of the Spanish and Portuguese municipalities in the AANP is similar between the actors of the two countries, however, and expressively, more than 1/3 of the Portuguese participants consider that the mentioned participation is greater and more achieved by the Spanish municipalities, due to the fact that Spain is a regionalized state and the Spanish municipalities of the AANP are in a multilevel governance structure, where there is a regional government: the Xunta de Galicia. The alleged asymmetry of AANP participation between the municipalities of the two countries was clarified and based on the lack of regionalization in mainland Portugal.

In fact, AANP members believe that the lack of regionalization in Portugal influences the participation of Portuguese municipalities and, consequently, the activity of the association of municipalities. There is a perception in the AANP that Galician municipalities have a greater proximity to a center of real political decision to the Xunta de Galicia (which provides a concerted strategy for NUT II - Galicia) unlike the Portuguese, whose true center of



decision is only in the Central Administration, since the CCDR-Norte is (as seen) a decentralized actor of Central Administration whose political capacity is very scarce.

Perkman (2008) points out that particular emphasis must be placed on the political-administrative context in which Euro regions develop, with proposals being developed according to context conditions. As we have seen, in the case of AANP, the empirical evidence suggests that the existence of regionalization in Portugal and, in particular, the establishment of an administrative region in Northern Portugal could facilitate the activity of Portuguese municipalities (in particular, by providing a context and induction of a common strategy) and consequently would enhance the association's action.

Other issues related to this article that can be studied and developed are those related to the autonomy of the Atlantic Axis in relation to the central administrations (in Spain and Portugal) where the question of the multilevel governance model can influence, as well as the question of the extent of the Association's autonomy vis-à-vis the European Union.

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