CROSS-BORDER NETWORKS IN INFORMAL AND FORMAL COOPERATION IN THE BORDER REGIONS ANDALUSIA-ALGARVE-ALENTESJO AND SOUTH FINLAND-ESTONIA

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URL: http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ceps  Email: juliel.porter@gmail.com
CROSS-BORDER NETWORKS IN INFORMAL AND FORMAL COOPERATION IN THE BORDER REGIONS ANDALUSIA-ALGARVE-ALENTEJO AND SOUTH FINLAND-ESTONIA

ABSTRACT

Fostering border relations among the people in border regions seems a precondition for the future envisagement and success of cross-border regions and European Integration. Related studies to border relations observe the weakness of these informal border contacts and relations. However, weak ties represent an opportunity for interaction, and little has been said about how they might play in the construction and performance of institutional cross-border cooperation. In this work, we examine the nature of personal border networks of professionals working in cross-border cooperation and how they are interconnected with the institutional cross-border cooperation.

This paper is based on a qualitative research of two different border regions: Andalusia, Algarve and Alentejo (AAA), and South Finland and Estonia (SFE). The methodology is multi-method, using semi-structured interviews, with specific questions for applying social network analysis (SNA). A total of 43 interviews were conducted with experts who worked in different institutions involved in cross-border projects. 34 out of 43 also completed a section in the questionnaire to apply SNA. Conclusions point out different patterns of border relations in both border regions. In AAA, most of the cross-border relations are weak and related to their involvement in institutional cross-border cooperation. In SFE, border relations also rely on personal reasons. Nevertheless, they all imply a significant value as opportunities for greater interaction.

Keywords: Border relations, networks, social capital, institutional cooperation, Estonia, Finland, Spain, Portugal.
1. INTRODUCTION

Parallel to the institutional evaluation and reports of the Interreg programme, in recent decades, different scholarly appraisals pay attention to the objectives of cross-border cooperation from different perspectives. In recent years there have been revisionist and evaluative works in order to create a balance of the political cross-border objectives and the reality of programme impacts (Valencia, 2007; Kepka, 2004; Szul, 2006; Thomas, 2006; Yoder, 2003). Within this trend, another research profile aims to offer a complementary analysis. Houtum (2000) refers to the growing interest in integrating a more people-oriented analysis of cross-border cooperation. A people approach inserts the human dimension on the border construction, despite the political and institutional reification of borders. The interest is in the disparity of a political construction and the reality of border areas. Institutional cross-border cooperation needs to be supported in a social background and in line with the border context. The social frame entails a conglomeration of different and relevant aspects like people identity, cultural and educational rapprochement, social border relations and border behaviours to ensure the sustainability of cross-border cooperation projects and the future European integration (Leibenath, 2007; Knippenberg 2004; Kraîke, 1998).

Generally, they remark on the division or gap between the projected scenario for cross-border regions at the political level and the daily reality of the people living in the border (Paasi, 2001, Löfgren, 2008), their relations with the border and border behaviour. In this sense, the cross-border cooperation is performed by “institutional architects” like elite
politicians and other business actors that draw a top-made design of the territorial, political, economic and social margins of border regions. At the grass roots level, there are “border bricklayers”, dwellers, commuters, SMEs (small and medium enterprises), and associations for whom the political map might not fit or correspond with the margins of their social life, border behaviour and informal relationships with neighbours. This mismatch usually takes place between a more regional and national written, planified discourse and a more local, spontaneous narrative. The idea of increasing European social and economic integration through Interreg and cross-border cooperation generally lies very much in Castells’ recurrent ideas of the future network society (1989). Accordingly, the “ever closer union” seems a direct projection of a Europe as a “space of flows”. However, the reality of border territories and border dynamics take a slower path. The social and economic dynamics of border regions seems to be much more heavily based on the territorial proximity of people and institutions; specifically, a border region that remains more in the “space of places”. People’s lives usually do not pass far beyond the territorial proximities (____anom. 2011; Lundén, 2004). The mismatch between the new political regionalization process and the less integrated, daily social life of people from the border regions causes border regions to become “laboratories of European integration” (Knippenberg, 2004). Even in those regions enhanced in political rhetoric as pilot projects or models for cross-border cooperation, there are discrepancies about the expectations of people commuting, mobility and cross-border integration through the new bridges and infrastructures of communication (Löfgren, 2008, Hosper, 2006). Regarding the mosaic of border regions and the experimental character exposed above, European integration seems to be characterized as a faltering process.
Nevertheless, cross-border cooperation programmes are expected to increase the mobility and social integration among people living in the borders and to create “regionauts”. Using the definition of Thomas O’Dell, regionauts are those people who have developed skills of using the world on both sides of the border (O’Dell, 2003, in Löfgren, 2008: 196). The expected emergence of a new prototype of border citizens, “regionauts”, flies over the bridge but has not yet clearly landed. Does institutional cross-border cooperation promote these profiles in citizens from border regions? Going into more detail of an opposite pattern, we can consider that, in border regions, people’s lives and work are attached to the border region as far as their lives are linked to the territorial proximity of the border. Their daily life might be directly affected by the social and economic activity of the border regions, though they are not only passive recipients of projects and programmes’ impacts. Their perception of the border and neighbours, and their personal attachment to the border, might insert a difference in the development of cross-border projects. Additionally, a strong, nationally-oriented infrastructure, mass media, national cultures and identities which are fixed on a daily basis to territorial proximity and border social distance are consistent enough to estimate if we could really use the term of regionauts to people living in the border regions.

Within this people oriented research, there are more cultural or cognitive approaches that focus on the constructions of identities, the influence of culture, and people’s attitudes, perceptions and narratives related to their border living (Paasi, 2001; Berg, 2000; Ehlers and Buursink 2000; Hospers, 2006; Löfgren, 2008). Other types of research could be discerned. A research more oriented to a behavioural and structural approach could focus on people’s border behaviour, their border relations and trends in crossing the border like those based on border commerce or shopping, tourism, or daily commuting. Different studies have
analysed the pattern of cross-border labour mobility in specific border regions (Buch, Dall, Niebuhr, 2009; Van Houtum and Van Der Velde, 2004; Hansen and Nahrstedt, 2000). Their exploratory insights remark that the labour mobility across borders is not as strong as it might be expected after years of programmes performance. Cross-border mobility seems to be more heavily based on exceptional cases and concentrated in specific niches of activities than in an average pattern of labour cross-border mobility. However, studies on labour mobility and commuting seem to answer more to other types of research centred in the study of flows across border in economic terms (Van Houtum, 2000). The European Union has enhanced the free movement of capital, goods, and labour. People mobility across the border are then considered as part of the new dynamic of economic flows provoked by a removal of barriers and economic border flows. Nevertheless, dispersed or weak patterns of border crossing reflect the general lack of social relations between the borders where social distance might be even bigger than territorial distance.

Considering the rich bibliography on institutional cross-border cooperation, there is a lack of focus on how border regions are lived in and constructed through everyday cultural practices (Jukarainen, 2007, in Löfgren, 2008). However, besides the focus on attitudes, values, perceptions, identity processes, and symbolic and cognitive reification of borders, it is necessary to add a social axis where quantity and quality of relations between neighbours take precedence. The approximation to the study of border regions based on cultural capital (Lööfgren, 2008) needs be complemented with a stronger perspective on social capital. This work aims to introduce a different inquiry through the study of social relationships. There is also a significant lack of research on people’s border relations. The nature of these relationships, how these border networks are interconnected to daily life, or how they might
be related to the cognitive aspects like identity and perceptions still comprise a broad field of research to uncover. At the same time, the interest in the people approach has focused on the missing social-cultural dimension in the political construction of border regions and cross-border cooperation. In this respect, it can be interesting to investigate how border relations among people in boundary areas might be related with institutional cooperation. Are these relationships an effect of progressive institutional border infrastructure and institutional cooperation or an inevitable precondition for a better achievement of the objectives of cross-border projects?

Analysis of social networks provides a new or refreshed theoretical perspective and methodological potential in the study of people’s border behaviour and cross-border relationships at individual and institutional levels. An exemplary research on the relevance of social relations both at an informal or formal level of cross-border cooperation was initiated by Grix and collaborators (2001, Grix and Houzvicka, 2002; Grix and Knowles, 2003). Cross-border cooperation can be a result of not only formal agreements between institutions at different governmental levels who work through the development of projects and programmes. There are also enterprises, organizations, and other lobbying actors whose active role might determine the development of the border regions. Additionally, the border flows between people might hamper or support the continuity of any formal or informal initiative of cross-border cooperation. This set of border flows represents a diverse and even complex conglomerate of social interactions between different actors. Cross-border cooperation becomes a process where different actors interplay with each other in order to produce certain outcomes or to capitalize on the value of available resources. Traditionally, however, different sections of disciplines interested in the analysis of cross-
border cooperation have tried to describe cross-border cooperation without explaining it as a process of social transactions or relationship-building. The interest in the study of border relations both at an informal or more institutional, formal level means conceiving cross-border cooperation as a process of investment in contacts and relationships that represent opportunities that could promote social and economic integration.

The network analysis relies on the idea that the whole society is a big network (Requena, 2008), which is composed of social actors at many different layers: states, companies, institutions, social groups and individuals. It is possible to represent the social structure where actors appear to be related in one way or another. Networks or relationships are the core of the structural perspective of social capital which consists of the investment in social relations with expected returns (Lin, 2008: 6). Social capital has entailed a complex, analytical delimitation that has led to different conceptual and methodological approaches, such as the distinction between structural and cognitive social capital. The cognitive dimension of social capital centres on the analysis of the role of norms of trust and reciprocity. In structural social capital, the core of analysis is relations, primarily acquaintances in which individuals or institutions invest and through which they gain access to resources (Burt, 1997; Lin, 2008). However, common to the different theoretical and empirical approaches is the idea that social capital implies a social interaction from which is possible to produce economic, social or political outcomes. Despite the difficulties at the methodological level, it is assumed that high levels of social capital positively influence improved economic and/or political developments (Woolcock, 2001). The structural perspective of social capital, through the study of border networks, captures the relational and processual character of cross-border cooperation. It can provide a general approach
applicable to different regions in order to compare the nature of people’s border relations and behaviour. It offers the opportunity to understand the nature of institutional or informal relations across border regions and the whole picture of the structure of these relationships. If we ask which border regions are more socially and culturally integrated, or why some border regions are more successful in cross-border cooperation in governance, the analysis of people’s network and institutional network is necessarily in an analytical fashion. The social network analysis provides a more accurate approximation to the nature of border relations both within the social and informal boundary of people and within their institutional and formal cooperation.

In the literature of cross-border regions, research on people’s border behaviour and border relations has not been frequent. Lundén’s work (1973) on interaction across the boundaries of Norway and Sweden could be considered as an initial step. Data from one week diaries of contacts and activities outside of habitants’ own localities was collected. This diary method has been a classical or standard method of network research, though soon replaced by other, more feasible techniques like the name generators (Lin and Erikson, 2010). In later research, Lundén (2004) has analysed the influence of different factors on people’s boundary behaviour, including the patterns of border-crossing among dwellers from different border cities and border regions. In this respect, the study concludes that the territorial limitation of people’s networks tend to be rather limited including those living in border areas. Recently, a detailed study of social reality in the regions of Alentejo, Algarve and Andalucia describes the patterns of border relations between these regions (anon. 2008). The study accounts for the commercial and labour relations characterized as almost nonexistent such as labour mobility and weak commercial relations with the
territories closest to the border. Regarding the traditionally less targeted cultural and social border relations, the study demonstrates that the informal friendships and personal support networks across the border are very few and weak compared to those relationships from the same region or municipality where individuals live. Finally, it states that a strong endogamy of social and personal relations at local and regional levels exists, contrary to the weak and superficial characteristics of border relations between Portuguese and Spanish people. However, the current pattern of border networks can be a crucial area of political intervention for the progressive social integration and cohesion across the border region. In this work, we consider that those informal and personal relationships of people from border areas might imply significant and valuable relational bridges, not only for informal and social relations, but also for a more formal and institutional cooperation.

2. OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

An interesting target of analysis is those professionals dealing with cross-border projects in their daily work. Do people involved in cross-border cooperation have significant border relations? Or, is their social life much more attached to the territorial local or national proximity? If they have border networks, what kind of relations do these tend to be? Are they related to their work in institutional cooperation? Do these border relations matter for their work in institutional cooperation? The goal of this paper is to analyze the nature of the personal border relations of experts on cross-border cooperation from both border areas. To begin, an analysis is required of the relevance of border relations within their personal networks. Secondly, the target is to know what kind of border relations they maintain and if they are closely related to their work in cross-border cooperation. Findings from both
border regions will help to take the pulse of the social cohesion between border regions. At the same time, this analysis will add a valuable perspective on how experts’ personal, informal networks and formal relations might be intertwined.

This paper is part of a broader research project designed with a multi-method and triangulation criteria between methods. The research was carried out during 2010 and 2011 in two different border regions where the linguistic similarity (Portuguese-Spanish and Finnish-Estonian languages) has been historically a link for social interaction. Both border regions are sub-areas of cooperation within respective Interreg A programmes. The border region integrated by Alentejo, Algarve and Andalusia (AAA) is one of the five areas of cooperation of the POCTEP (CBC Programme Spain-Portugal 2007-2013). The border region between Southern Finland–Estonia (SFE) forms one of the thirds sub-programmes of Central Baltic Interreg IV Programme 2007-2013. Both multi-annual programmes have been preceded by the cross-cooperation with Interreg III A for the period between 2000 and 2006. Results discussed in this work are based on the analysis of qualitative, semi-structured interviews and the quantitative and visual analysis of their personal networks. Interviewees were considered as “experts”, defined as professionals from different institutions who have or have had professional experience in cross-border projects of Interreg A and in cross-border cooperation in general. Most of these experts worked in public institutions which are members or beneficiaries of cross-border projects. A few of them were not directly involved with Interreg projects, though their work was based on the cooperation with the neighbouring country.
The selection process of interviewees encountered the difficulty of contacting professionals of cross-border cooperation. Institutional cross-border cooperation registers or a directory of experts working in CBC does not exist. Accordingly, it was not possible to do a random sample, so a theoretical sample was applied. Although this study does not aim to make inferences about general patterns of border relations in both border regions, the results of our qualitative and quantitative analysis could provide meaningful information to continue in this line in future research with bigger samples. The available data from Interreg Projects provides public contact information of those institutions participating in European projects. This initial contact data, and the help of other informants, was used for applying the snowball technique for selecting experts based on the criteria of having experience in cross-border projects. Experts with long experience in cross-border projects initiatives out of Interreg were also included, as they equally represent part of institutional cross-border cooperation. A total number of 43 semi-structured interviews were done across four different countries. A questionnaire for obtaining personal networks of interviewees was included in interviews and was applied to those who agreed to report relational data. A total of 34 experts participated in reporting their personal networks. Table 1 shows the same distribution of both achieved interviews and personal networks.

**Table 1**

Experts were asked to report up to 25 people with whom they usually related, independently of the method of contact, kind of relations or origin of contacts. Certain attributes of these relations were also collected: origin of the people, intensity of relations, kind of support received from the contact, and type of relation (if the contact comes from...
friendships, family, work, etc.). Experts’ network data was analysed from Social Network perspectives using specific software (Freeman, 2004; Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002). The interviews were processed with Atlas.ti for content analysis in order to classify the information for the interpretation of data, and a list of codes was created considering the following criteria:

- The relation and attachment of the expert to the border region, reasons for going to the neighbouring country and the most known area
- Relations with people who are from the neighbouring country
- If experts have lived or live in the neighbouring country

The discussion of results in the following sections is based on the triangulation of content analysis from interviews and quantitative analysis of personal networks. To contribute to the analytical discussion of experts’ networks, some interview quotes from experts are included. These quotes appear with some data of the experts’ profile in order to understand the relation between experts’ profiles and the content of the quotes, though preserving the experts’ anonymity.

3. TYPES OF EXPERTS’ NETWORKS

Examining the experts’ networks in both border regions, we have extracted a synthetic typology of personal networks applicable to both border areas considering the following indicators: total number of people reported in the personal network; number of people in their personal network from the same country as the expert; number of people from the neighbouring country; number of people from third countries; number of people from the same city as the expert; number of people from other localities and counties; number of
people within the same region of experts (Algarve, Alentejo, Andalusia, South Finland and Harju county in Estonia); people from other cities of the country. Accordingly, eight different types of identified experts’ networks represent the 34 networks collected across the four countries. Principally, these types of networks have been categorized into those without border contacts and those that have border contacts and/or some other contacts from third countries, independently of how many. Among those experts who did not report any contact from the neighbouring country, we can differentiate between those whose network is more locally oriented and those more locally-regionally oriented. The rest of the networks have the indicator of border relations in fewer or greater number which is concomitant with the local and regional relations. However, it is also interesting that other types of networks introduce an additional indicator of international relationships. This tends to occur more frequently among experts from South-Finland. At the same time, considering the people quoted from a border neighbouring country, we have discerned three types of personal-informal relations coming from family, personal friendship reasons, and working reasons. The following description presents the type of experts’ personal networks that were found in the two border regions, showing some examples:

1. Local: This network structure means that experts usually relate with people very close to the territory where he/she lives. It is a network limited to spatial proximity where the majority of contacts are from the same municipality of the experts. This kind of network was found mostly on the Spanish side. Figure 1 belongs to a Spanish expert from a local municipality of the border area. Despite being close to the border and participating in CBC, this expert is representative of the stronger endogamy of national networks among Spanish Experts. The network also shows the high density of the expert’s family and work relations,
with a second group of work ties. This type of structure was also found in the rest of the countries.

**Figure 1**

2. **Local/Regional:** The majority of people reported belonging to either the same municipality where the experts live or to other close localities generally within the same county (in the case of Finland and Estonia), province (in the Andalusia region) or conselho (within the Algarve or Alentejo regions). This kind of network occurs mostly with experts who live and work in a different place from where they come from.

**Figure 2**

3. **Local/Regional/Cross-Border:** This type of network practically corresponds to the former with additional border relations. Though experts’ networks are based in local and regional relations, there are some relations from the most proximal area in the neighbouring country to the border. Most of the networks of this type were found in the Portugal side of the border region AAA.

4. **Local/Regional/Binational:** This type is also very similar to the precedent. Although the expert listed people from the neighbouring country, these relations were not from the border area. In the case of the AAA border region, these relations came from important cities of Spain and Portugal. In addition, in the case of the SFE border region, people cited were from places further from the border area, such as south Estonia or northern counties of Finland, for example. The professional trajectory and mobility explain why certain experts relate more with people from the neighbouring country who are not located in the border area. The Personal Network of Figure 2 shows a Portuguese expert’s network characterized by a great density and the predominance of work relations. Some of them are border relations from the bigger cities of Spain. This expert works at the regional level in CBC and
has work relations mostly with people who live in Seville and Madrid, where regional and national institutions involved in CBC are located.

5. Cross-border: This type of network corresponds with experts that report people from the border area of the neighbouring country in the same or greater number to those from the same country. Indeed, this kind of network was reported only by one expert from Portugal out of 34 experts that answered this part of the questionnaire. And it is explained especially by the expert’s specific, personal links to the neighbouring country, whose life is related to Spain both for working and personal reasons. This kind of network might fit well with the idea of regionauts discussed above.

6. Local/Regional/International: Expanding on the Type 2 ‘Local/regional network’, this type is practically the same, with the exception that it incorporates some people from other countries. The majority of people listed by experts are from the same locality or region. They did not report any relations from the neighbouring country. However, they cited some people (friends and family) who live in other, third countries.

7. Cross-border/International: This type is similar to type five with the international dimension added on expert relational structure. It corresponds with those experts whose network included a similar or greater number of people from the neighbouring country and third countries to the number of people from the same country as the expert. It is reasonable that this kind of network appeared in those experts who have been living or live in the neighbouring country or in other third countries. Experts from Estonia showed more of this pattern. Figure 3 depicts a particular network of an Estonian expert that has had high professional international mobility and works in CBC with Finland. The network is rather open, with an important number of relations with Finnish contacts both for personal and working reasons.
8. Local/Regional/Cross-Border/International: We could term this last type as the most complete and integrative type of network that was found. It is like an accumulative type of the previous ones. The majority of relations reported by the experts pertain to the same country distributed between the same localities as other places. At the same time, approximately one third of experts’ relations are both from a border area of the neighbouring country and from some other country. As it was advanced, this kind of network was more common among Finnish experts. All these experts with this type of network had significant border links to Estonia, as they have work links or have lived in Estonia. As an example, Figure 4 shows a network of a Finnish expert who has lived for several years in Estonia due to work-related reasons, and currently works in CBC. The network is also dispersed and though there are border relations, all of them come from work.

3. THE INFORMAL AND FORMAL SIDE OF NETWORKS AND COOPERATION

The sample size of experts’ networks was not large enough or statistically representative to make quantitative inferences. However, it is interesting to note that more than half of experts in the border region of South-Finland and Estonia reported border relations in their personal networks. In the border region AAA, the majority of Portuguese experts (seven out of nine experts’ networks) reported border relations, while only three out of nine Spanish experts listed border relations. This difference between Spanish and Portuguese is supported by previous research on border relations between Portuguese and Spanish
people within the same border region AAA. There is a remarkable asymmetry of border relations reported by Portuguese and Spanish in their personal networks. Andalusians reported in the personal network of support only an average of 0.6 people from some Portuguese locality. In contrast, among Portuguese people, those from the Algarve region had an average of 9.4 people from Andalucia in their personal networks (____, 2008: 186).

Table 2 represents the average number of relations reported by experts in the four countries. Results, though not statistically representative, are very significant and encourage further research with bigger samples of respondents. Generally, there is a strong, understandable endogamy of experts’ personal networks. The majority of people reported in experts’ personal networks are from the same country. However, there are interesting differences between countries and both border regions. It is noticeable that, in the border region SFE, there are more border relations; and, while Spanish relational rapprochement is minimal, Portuguese experts declare more relations with Spanish neighbours.

Table 2

How conclusive can the results of Table 2 be coming from social network analysis? One of the criticisms that SNA receives is regarding the high subjectivity involved when the individual reports people with whom he/she relates. It might happen that the individual does not exactly recall the reality of his/her personal network when they cite them in the context of an interview. Regardless, it is a reflection of an individual’s awareness of personal relations at a certain moment. At the same time, the semi-structured interview demonstrated that all the interviewees had personal relations with neighbours (at least as
experts in CBC). The difference is that those border relations obtained through the application of a SNA methodology were reported according to the criteria “most usual relationships” in the personal network. From qualitative interviews, all experts mentioned having acquaintances in the neighbouring country, but through personal network analysis only some of these border relations become or are part of their most usual, relational structure. Therefore, though all experts reported acquaintances from the neighbouring country, having border relations as part of usual or daily networks was more normalized in Portuguese, Finnish and Estonian experts than in Spanish ones.

Examining the type of relations (from family, friendship or labour) in the border region SFE, the border relations of experts were based proportionally on working and personal reasons. Border relations of Portuguese and Spanish experts with their respective neighbours are more based on working relations. Qualitative analysis from interviews supports this trend. Although all of them have work acquaintances and friendships from their work, in SFE nine experts out of seventeen also mentioned having different personal links with the neighbouring country, independently of those working border relations. A total of eight experts have lived or live in the neighbouring country due to personal family reasons (mixed marriages and being a descendent of a mixed marriage) or working reasons. This border experience is very significant for starting border networks. A different pattern of border relations appears in the border region AAA. When experts commented about their border relationships, all of them affirmed having several acquaintances from their professional work through their participation in cross-border projects. Only a few cases tend to become personal with good friendships developing over time. Two Portuguese experts reported some Spanish friendships that developed from work relations. Comparing the cross-border
living experiences between Finnish and Estonians, only one Spanish expert interviewed had lived in Portugal due to family-personal reasons.

Summarizing border relationships are not only a more daily trend among Finnish and Estonians experts, but they are also based both on informal relations due to family or personal friends, and on formal relations derived from their work in cross-border cooperation. From interviews, several experts remarked that the institutional cross-border cooperation between both countries is very much based on previous, informal contacts. Especially in Estonia, where in the period of Soviet Union decadence and after independence, having Finnish contacts was very common for Estonians. This relational activity was very representatively highlighted by an Estonian expert in a common saying: “Igal perekond peab olema oma kodustatud Soomlased” - Every family should have a domestic Finnish - (E2, Estonia, Manager, Public Institution, 2010). “This also tended to change... but it was very popular... families in the northern part of Estonia them we use to have friends in Finland” (E15, Estonia, Manager, Public Institution, 2011). Although in modern days this tendency might have changed, it shows how experts from border region SFE usually describe the institutional cross-border cooperation, supported in previous informal contacts between Finnish and Estonians, “The contacts at the other side make the cooperation much more easy to be started” (E6, Finland, Manager, Development Agency, 2010). “This cooperation is grounded on the intense informal relations between Estonia and Finland” (E17, Estonia, Manager, Private Company, 2011). In contrast, the Portuguese-Spanish border relational activities tend to be more dominated by their formal participation in cross-border European projects. Could this difference be interpreted as a stronger informal relation between Finnish and Estonians, and more social integration between these
neighbours than in the border region AAA, where border relations tend to be reserved for professional and formal exchange opportunities? This question definitely urges further research to be conducted on the role of informal border relations on institutional, cross-border cooperation.

Both informal border relations at the margin of working in CBC and formal relations originating in offices and meetings seem to be intrinsically imbricated. On one hand, informal relations create a breeding ground of experiences that might be potential resources for institutional cross-border cooperation. In this sense, these informal contacts are bridges and opportunities that facilitate access to resources (other contacts, actors, etc.) located in the neighbouring country. The value of these kinds of relations corresponds with the bridging dimension of social networks and social capital (Burt, 2008). All experts reported having acquaintances from work, some of them developing into friendships. These acquaintances are weak ties that might become bridges to other relations and resources; their strength lies in their capacity to connect different systems, societies or groups (Granovetter, 1983). They are not likely to provide strong cohesion like family relations, but become an important source for acquiring resources, which is a foundation of social capital and fundamental for cross-border cooperation. On the other hand, these more formal relations from work acquire a more informal component over time; these are most of the acquaintances and friends from work reported by experts. Those especially from the AAA border region commented that those formal contacts from work that become friends soften the institutional cross-border cooperation. The working process tends to be easier and more fluent. “They are working mates that I can consider as friends too. We go out together, we eat together and even we dance... when there is opportunity for that. Thus, it is a dual
relationship that makes easier the work. Sometimes it makes easier to solve difficult problems” (E21, Portugal, Manager, Public Administration, 2011).

For experts, border relations—both from working and more informal reasons—implied resources or access to resources. They all imply the existence of investment sources to use in order to capitalize on the existing resources. They constitute sources of social capital. On one hand, formal border relations created common experiences and opportunities for information to flow. To have and to maintain these formal relations firstly implies better knowledge of the border area and its needs for development. Secondly, it implies that they can generate better knowledge in management of cross-border cooperation (administrative procedures, institutional expertise). On the other hand, informal border relations more significantly influence the knowledge of the neighbouring country (culture, language, national legislation, etc.) and in the information or knowledge of contacts, and contacts’ resources. It is assumed that the increasing social and economic integration of border regions needs to be supported by the existence of different types of border flows, social interactions and cross-border relations between people of border regions. If potentialities commented on by experts are related to this social and economic integration, then it is necessary to accomplish different empirical works on border regions. To identify the possible border relations, their patterns and their possible implication in cross-border cooperation development, it is a most promising research line.

4. CONCLUSIONS
This paper has used social network analysis and social capital perspective regarding border relations. It proposes that the study of social integration and cohesion between border regions can be based not only on cultural perspectives focused on bottom approach to identity development and perception of border regions. Results from interviews and personal networks that were analysed demonstrate the patterns of border network among those people who are directly involved in cross-border cooperation. In the border region SFE, interviewees had more border ties based both on personal or informal reasons, like family ties and friendships, and on more formal reasons that emerged from work relations. In the border region AAA, experts’ border relations were less frequent and more dependent on working experience in CBC, as most of their border relations are from work. It was interesting to note the significant asymmetry between Portuguese experts’ border relations with Spanish neighbours with respect to Spanish experts’ border relations with Portuguese people. Although in the border region AAA, empirical research by _____ (2008) focused on general population, their results support our conclusions. According to the triangulation of content analysis and network analysis, we have found that the results show a great coherence.

However, the question is not if border regions should have more border relations among their inhabitants. The relevance in the study of border relations comes from their use value; namely, in the role played by these border relations in social integration and cross-border cooperation. It could be interesting and innovative to inquire if border regions with more border networks (among citizens or institutional actors) show greater social integration and even better management of cross-border cooperation projects and programmes. Experts highlighted the relevance of their border acquaintances as resources in a learning process of
cross-border cooperation management or for better knowledge of border needs. Their acquaintances implied opportunities of development, as they were represented like small pseudo-ambassadors toward the neighbouring country. Following Grix (2001), we assume that border relations and their use value are key cornerstones to understand the functioning of cross-border cooperation and its improvement. In turn, that would imply an operative and contextualised research exercise of social capital in cross-border regions.

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1 The territorial reference of regions is based on Interreg Programmes NUTS III that correspond with the delimitation of Alentejo, Algarve and Andalusia, administrative regions in Portugal and Spain. In the case of Finland and Estonia, Interreg territorial delimitation use Estonia and South Finland that comprises different counties in the south of Finland (see [http://www.centralbaltic.eu/](http://www.centralbaltic.eu/)). However, most of all interviewees belong to the programme areas. In this research a difference between the northern part of Estonia based on Harju county and the rest of the country was considered useful, as most of the experts and population in Estonia are concentrated in this county.
CROSS-BORDER NETWORKS IN INFORMAL AND FORMAL COOPERATION IN THE BORDER REGIONS ANDALUSIA-ALGARVE-ALENTEJO AND SOUTH FINLAND-ESTONIA

Teresa González-Gómez (1), Estrella Gualda (2)

(1) PhD. Applicant and Lecturer. Department of Sociology and Social Work, University of Huelva, Avda. Tres de Marzo s/n, 21071-Huelva, Spain. teresa.gonzalez@dstso.uhu.es.

(2) Director of the Research Center "Social Studies and Social Intervention”, University of Huelva & Researcher of the CIEO – Centre for Spatial and Organizational Dynamics – University of Algarve. Correspondence to: University of Huelva, Avda. Tres de Marzo s/n, 21071-Huelva, Spain. estrella@uhu.es.

ABSTRACT

Fostering border relations among the people in border regions seems a precondition for the future envisagement and success of cross-border regions and European Integration. Related studies to border relations observe the weakness of these informal border contacts and relations. However, weak ties represent an opportunity for interaction, and little has been said about how they might play in the construction and performance of institutional cross-border cooperation. In this work, we examine the nature of personal border networks of professionals working in cross-border cooperation and how they are interconnected with the institutional cross-border cooperation.

This paper is based on a qualitative research of two different border regions: Andalusia, Algarve and Alentejo (AAA), and South Finland and Estonia (SFE). The methodology is multi-
method, using semi-structured interviews, with specific questions for applying social network analysis (SNA). A total of 43 interviews were conducted with experts who worked in different institutions involved in cross-border projects. 34 out of 43 also completed a section in the questionnaire to apply SNA. Conclusions point out different patterns of border relations in both border regions. In AAA, most of the cross-border relations are weak and related to their involvement in institutional cross-border cooperation. In SFE, border relations also rely on personal reasons. Nevertheless, they all imply a significant value as opportunities for greater interaction.

**Keywords**: Border relations, networks, social capital, institutional cooperation, Estonia, Finland, Spain, Portugal.

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Parallel to the institutional evaluation and reports of the Interreg programme, in recent decades, different scholarly appraisals pay attention to the objectives of cross-border cooperation from different perspectives. In recent years there have been revisionist and evaluative works in order to create a balance of the political cross-border objectives and the reality of programme impacts (Valencia, 2007; Kepka, 2004; Szul, 2006; Thomas, 2006; Yoder, 2003). Within this trend, another research profile aims to offer a complementary analysis. Houtum (2000) refers to the growing interest in integrating a more people-oriented analysis of cross-border cooperation. A people approach inserts the human dimension on the border construction, despite the political and institutional reification of borders. The interest is in the disparity of a political construction and the reality of border
areas. Institutional cross-border cooperation needs to be supported in a social background and in line with the border context. The social frame entails a conglomeration of different and relevant aspects like people identity, cultural and educational rapprochement, social border relations and border behaviours to ensure the sustainability of cross-border cooperation projects and the future European integration (Leibenth, 2007; Knippenberg 2004; Kraike, 1998).

Generally, they remark on the division or gap between the projected scenario for cross-border regions at the political level and the daily reality of the people living in the border (Paasi, 2001, Löfgren, 2008), their relations with the border and border behaviour. In this sense, the cross-border cooperation is performed by “institutional architects” like elite politicians and other business actors that draw a top-made design of the territorial, political, economic and social margins of border regions. At the grass roots level, there are “border bricklayers”, dwellers, commuters, SMEs (small and medium enterprises), and associations for whom the political map might not fit or correspond with the margins of their social life, border behaviour and informal relationships with neighbours. This mismatch usually takes place between a more regional and national written, planified discourse and a more local, spontaneous narrative. The idea of increasing European social and economic integration through Interreg and cross-border cooperation generally lies very much in Castells’ recurrent ideas of the future network society (1989). Accordingly, the “ever closer union” seems a direct projection of a Europe as a “space of flows”. However, the reality of border territories and border dynamics take a slower path. The social and economic dynamics of border regions seems to be much more heavily based on the territorial proximity of people and institutions; specifically, a border region that remains more in the “space of places”.
People’s lives usually do not pass far beyond the territorial proximities (Fragoso et al. 2011; Lundén, 2004). The mismatch between the new political regionalization process and the less integrated, daily social life of people from the border regions causes border regions to become “laboratories of European integration” (Knippenberg, 2004). Even in those regions enhanced in political rhetoric as pilot projects or models for cross-border cooperation, there are discrepancies about the expectations of people commuting, mobility and cross-border integration through the new bridges and infrastructures of communication (Löfgren, 2008, Hosper, 2006). Regarding the mosaic of border regions and the experimental character exposed above, European integration seems to be characterized as a faltering process.

Nevertheless, cross-border cooperation programmes are expected to increase the mobility and social integration among people living in the borders and to create “regionauts”. Using the definition of Thomas O’Dell, regionauts are those people who have developed skills of using the world on both sides of the border (O’Dell, 2003, in Löfgren, 2008: 196). The expected emergence of a new prototype of border citizens, “regionauts”, flies over the bridge but has not yet clearly landed. Does institutional cross-border cooperation promote these profiles in citizens from border regions? Going into more detail of an opposite pattern, we can consider that, in border regions, people’s lives and work are attached to the border region as far as their lives are linked to the territorial proximity of the border. Their daily life might be directly affected by the social and economic activity of the border regions, though they are not only passive recipients of projects and programmes’ impacts. Their perception of the border and neighbours, and their personal attachment to the border, might insert a difference in the development of cross-border projects. Additionally, a strong, nationally-oriented infrastructure, mass media, national cultures and identities which are fixed on a
daily basis to territorial proximity and border social distance are consistent enough to estimate if we could really use the term of regionauts to people living in the border regions.

Within this people oriented research, there are more cultural or cognitive approaches that focus on the constructions of identities, the influence of culture, and people’s attitudes, perceptions and narratives related to their border living (Paasi, 2001; Berg, 2000; Ehlers and Buursink 2000; Hoppers, 2006; Löfgren, 2008). Other types of research could be discerned. A research more oriented to a behavioural and structural approach could focus on people’s border behaviour, their border relations and trends in crossing the border like those based on border commerce or shopping, tourism, or daily commuting. Different studies have analysed the pattern of cross-border labour mobility in specific border regions (Buch, Dall, Niebuhr, 2009; Van Houtum and Van Der Velde, 2004; Hansen and Nahrstedt, 2000). Their exploratory insights remark that the labour mobility across borders is not as strong as it might be expected after years of programmes performance. Cross-border mobility seems to be more heavily based on exceptional cases and concentrated in specific niches of activities than in an average pattern of labour cross-border mobility. However, studies on labour mobility and commuting seem to answer more to other types of research centred in the study of flows across border in economic terms (Van Houtum, 2000). The European Union has enhanced the free movement of capital, goods, and labour. People mobility across the border are then considered as part of the new dynamic of economic flows provoked by a removal of barriers and economic border flows. Nevertheless, dispersed or weak patterns of border crossing reflect the general lack of social relations between the borders where social distance might be even bigger than territorial distance.
Considering the rich bibliography on institutional cross-border cooperation, there is a lack of focus on how border regions are lived in and constructed through everyday cultural practices (Jukarainen, 2007, in Löfgren, 2008). However, besides the focus on attitudes, values, perceptions, identity processes, and symbolic and cognitive reification of borders, it is necessary to add a social axis where quantity and quality of relations between neighbours take precedence. The approximation to the study of border regions based on cultural capital (Löofgren, 2008) needs be complemented with a stronger perspective on social capital. This work aims to introduce a different inquiry through the study of social relationships. There is also a significant lack of research on people’s border relations. The nature of these relationships, how these border networks are interconnected to daily life, or how they might be related to the cognitive aspects like identity and perceptions still comprise a broad field of research to uncover. At the same time, the interest in the people approach has focused on the missing social-cultural dimension in the political construction of border regions and cross-border cooperation. In this respect, it can be interesting to investigate how border relations among people in boundary areas might be related with institutional cooperation. Are these relationships an effect of progressive institutional border infrastructure and institutional cooperation or an inevitable precondition for a better achievement of the objectives of cross-border projects?

Analysis of social networks provides a new or refreshed theoretical perspective and methodological potential in the study of people’s border behaviour and cross-border relationships at individual and institutional levels. An exemplary research on the relevance of social relations both at an informal or formal level of cross-border cooperation was initiated by Grix and collaborators (2001, Grix and Houzvicka, 2002; Grix and Knowles,
Cross-border cooperation can be a result of not only formal agreements between institutions at different governmental levels who work through the development of projects and programmes. There are also enterprises, organizations, and other lobbying actors whose active role might determine the development of the border regions. Additionally, the border flows between people might hamper or support the continuity of any formal or informal initiative of cross-border cooperation. This set of border flows represents a diverse and even complex conglomerate of social interactions between different actors. Cross-border cooperation becomes a process where different actors interplay with each other in order to produce certain outcomes or to capitalize on the value of available resources.

Traditionally, however, different sections of disciplines interested in the analysis of cross-border cooperation have tried to describe cross-border cooperation without explaining it as a process of social transactions or relationship-buildings. The interest in the study of border relations both at an informal or more institutional, formal level means conceiving cross-border cooperation as a process of investment in contacts and relationships that represent opportunities that could promote social and economic integration.

The network analysis relies on the idea that the whole society is a big network (Requena, 2008), which is composed of social actors at many different layers: states, companies, institutions, social groups and individuals. It is possible to represent the social structure where actors appear to be related in one way or another. Networks or relationships are the core of the structural perspective of social capital which consists of the investment in social relations with expected returns (Lin, 2008: 6). Social capital has entailed a complex, analytical delimitation that has led to different conceptual and methodological approaches, such as the distinction between structural and cognitive social capital. The cognitive
dimension of social capital centres on the analysis of the role of norms of trust and reciprocity. In structural social capital, the core of analysis is relations, primarily acquaintances in which individuals or institutions invest and through which they gain access to resources (Burt, 1997; Lin, 2008). However, common to the different theoretical and empirical approaches is the idea that social capital implies a social interaction from which is possible to produce economic, social or political outcomes. Despite the difficulties at the methodological level, it is assumed that high levels of social capital positively influence improved economic and/or political developments (Woolcock, 2001). The structural perspective of social capital, through the study of border networks, captures the relational and processual character of cross-border cooperation. It can provide a general approach applicable to different regions in order to compare the nature of people’s border relations and behaviour. It offers the opportunity to understand the nature of institutional or informal relations across border regions and the whole picture of the structure of these relationships. If we ask which border regions are more socially and culturally integrated, or why some border regions are more successful in cross-border cooperation in governance, the analysis of people’s network and institutional network is necessarily in an analytical fashion. The social network analysis provides a more accurate approximation to the nature of border relations both within the social and informal boundary of people and within their institutional and formal cooperation.

In the literature of cross-border regions, research on people’s border behaviour and border relations has not been frequent. Lundén’s work (1973) on interaction across the boundaries of Norway and Sweden could be considered as an initial step. Data from one week diaries of contacts and activities outside of habitants’ own localities was collected. This diary method
has been a classical or standard method of network research, though soon replaced by other, more feasible techniques like the name generators (Lin and Erikson, 2010). In later research, Lundén (2004) has analysed the influence of different factors on people’s boundary behaviour, including the patterns of border-crossing among dwellers from different border cities and border regions. In this respect, the study concludes that the territorial limitation of people’s networks tend to be rather limited including those living in border areas. Recently, a detailed study of social reality in the regions of Alentejo, Algarve and Andalucia describes the patterns of border relations between these regions (Gualda, et al. 2008). The study accounts for the commercial and labour relations characterized as almost nonexistent such as labour mobility and weak commercial relations with the territories closest to the border. Regarding the traditionally less targeted cultural and social border relations, the study demonstrates that the informal friendships and personal support networks across the border are very few and weak compared to those relationships from the same region or municipality where individuals live. Finally, it states that a strong endogamy of social and personal relations at local and regional levels exists, contrary to the weak and superficial characteristics of border relations between Portuguese and Spanish people. However, the current pattern of border networks can be a crucial area of political intervention for the progressive social integration and cohesion across the border region. In this work, we consider that those informal and personal relationships of people from border areas might imply significant and valuable relational bridges, not only for informal and social relations, but also for a more formal and institutional cooperation.

2. OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY
An interesting target of analysis is those professionals dealing with cross-border projects in their daily work. Do people involved in cross-border cooperation have significant border relations? Or, is their social life much more attached to the territorial local or national proximity? If they have border networks, what kind of relations do these tend to be? Are they related to their work in institutional cooperation? Do these border relations matter for their work in institutional cooperation? The goal of this paper is to analyze the nature of the personal border relations of experts on cross-border cooperation from both border areas.

To begin, an analysis is required of the relevance of border relations within their personal networks. Secondly, the target is to know what kind of border relations they maintain and if they are closely related to their work in cross-border cooperation. Findings from both border regions will help to take the pulse of the social cohesion between border regions. At the same time, this analysis will add a valuable perspective on how experts’ personal, informal networks and formal relations might be intertwined.

This paper is part of a broader research project designed with a multi-method and triangulation criteria between methods. The research was carried out during 2010 and 2011 in two different border regions where the linguistic similarity (Portuguese-Spanish and Finnish-Estonian languages) has been historically a link for social interaction. Both border regions are sub-areas of cooperation within respective Interreg A programmes. The border region integrated by Alentejo, Algarve and Andalusia (AAA) is one of the five areas of cooperation of the POCTEP (CBC Programme Spain-Portugal 2007-2013). The border region between Southern Finland–Estonia (SFE) forms one of the thirds sub-programmes of Central Baltic Interreg IV Programme 2007-2013. Both multi-annual programmes have been preceded by the cross-cooperation with Interreg III A for the period between 2000 and
2006. Results discussed in this work are based on the analysis of qualitative, semi-structured interviews and the quantitative and visual analysis of their personal networks. Interviewees were considered as “experts”, defined as professionals from different institutions who have or have had professional experience in cross-border projects of Interreg A and in cross-border cooperation in general. Most of these experts worked in public institutions which are members or beneficiaries of cross-border projects. A few of them were not directly involved with Interreg projects, though their work was based on the cooperation with the neighbouring country.

The selection process of interviewees encountered the difficulty of contacting professionals of cross-border cooperation. Institutional cross-border cooperation registers or a directory of experts working in CBC does not exist. Accordingly, it was not possible to do a random sample, so a theoretical sample was applied. Although this study does not aim to make inferences about general patterns of border relations in both border regions, the results of our qualitative and quantitative analysis could provide meaningful information to continue in this line in future research with bigger samples. The available data from Interreg Projects provides public contact information of those institutions participating in European projects. This initial contact data, and the help of other informants, was used for applying the snowball technique for selecting experts based on the criteria of having experience in cross-border projects. Experts with long experience in cross-border projects initiatives out of Interreg were also included, as they equally represent part of institutional cross-border cooperation. A total number of 43 semi-structured interviews were done across four different countries. A questionnaire for obtaining personal networks of interviewees was included in interviews and was applied to those who agreed to report relational data. A total
of 34 experts participated in reporting their personal networks. Table 1 shows the same
distribution of both achieved interviews and personal networks.

**Table 1**

Experts were asked to report up to 25 people with whom they usually related,
independently of the method of contact, kind of relations or origin of contacts. Certain
attributes of these relations were also collected: origin of the people, intensity of relations,
kind of support received from the contact, and type of relation (if the contact comes from
friendships, family, work, etc.). Experts’ network data was analysed from Social Network
perspectives using specific software (Freeman, 2004; Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002).
The interviews were processed with Atlas.ti for content analysis in order to classify the
information for the interpretation of data, and a list of codes was created considering the
following criteria:

- The relation and attachment of the expert to the border region, reasons for going to
  the neighbouring country and the most known area
- Relations with people who are from the neighbouring country
- If experts have lived or live in the neighbouring country

The discussion of results in the following sections is based on the triangulation of content
analysis from interviews and quantitative analysis of personal networks. To contribute to
the analytical discussion of experts’ networks, some interview quotes from experts are
included. These quotes appear with some data of the experts’ profile in order to understand
the relation between experts’ profiles and the content of the quotes, though preserving the
experts’ anonymity.
3. TYPES OF EXPERTS’ NETWORKS

Examining the experts’ networks in both border regions, we have extracted a synthetic typology of personal networks applicable to both border areas considering the following indicators: total number of people reported in the personal network; number of people in their personal network from the same country as the expert; number of people from the neighbouring country; number of people from third countries; number of people from the same city as the expert; number of people from other localities and counties; number of people within the same region of experts (Algarve, Alentejo, Andalusia, South Finland and Harju county in Estonia); people from other cities of the country. Accordingly, eight different types of identified experts’ networks represent the 34 networks collected across the four countries. Principally, these types of networks have been categorized into those without border contacts and those that have border contacts and/or some other contacts from third countries, independently of how many. Among those experts who did not report any contact from the neighbouring country, we can differentiate between those whose network is more locally oriented and those more locally-regionally oriented. The rest of the networks have the indicator of border relations in fewer or greater number which is concomitant with the local and regional relations. However, it is also interesting that other types of networks introduce an additional indicator of international relationships. This tends to occur more frequently among experts from South-Finland. At the same time, considering the people quoted from a border neighbouring country, we have discerned three types of personal-informal relations coming from family, personal friendship reasons, and working
reasons. The following description presents the type of experts’ personal networks that were found in the two border regions, showing some examples:

1. **Local**: This network structure means that experts usually relate with people very close to the territory where he/she lives. It is a network limited to spatial proximity where the majority of contacts are from the same municipality of the experts. This kind of network was found mostly on the Spanish side. Figure 1 belongs to a Spanish expert from a local municipality of the border area. Despite being close to the border and participating in CBC, this expert is representative of the stronger endogamy of national networks among Spanish Experts. The network also shows the high density of the expert’s family and work relations, with a second group of work ties. This type of structure was also found in the rest of the countries.

**Figure 1**

2. **Local/Regional**: The majority of people reported belonging to either the same municipality where the experts live or to other close localities generally within the same county (in the case of Finland and Estonia), province (in the Andalusia region) or conselho (within the Algarve or Alentejo regions). This kind of network occurs mostly with experts who live and work in a different place from where they come from.

**Figure 2**

3. **Local/Regional/Cross-Border**: This type of network practically corresponds to the former with additional border relations. Though experts’ networks are based in local and regional relations, there are some relations from the most proximal area in the neighbouring country to the border. Most of the networks of this type were found in the Portugal side of the border region AAA.
4. *Local/Regional/Binational*: This type is also very similar to the precedent. Although the expert listed people from the neighbouring country, these relations were not from the border area. In the case of the AAA border region, these relations came from important cities of Spain and Portugal. In addition, in the case of the SFE border region, people cited were from places further from the border area, such as south Estonia or northern counties of Finland, for example. The professional trajectory and mobility explain why certain experts relate more with people from the neighbouring country who are not located in the border area. The Personal Network of Figure 2 shows a Portuguese expert’s network characterized by a great density and the predominance of work relations. Some of them are border relations from the bigger cities of Spain. This expert works at the regional level in CBC and has work relations mostly with people who live in Seville and Madrid, where regional and national institutions involved in CBC are located.

5. *Cross-border*: This type of network corresponds with experts that report people from the border area of the neighbouring country in the same or greater number to those from the same country. Indeed, this kind of network was reported only by one expert from Portugal out of 34 experts that answered this part of the questionnaire. And it is explained especially by the expert’s specific, personal links to the neighbouring country, whose life is related to Spain both for working and personal reasons. This kind of network might fit well with the idea of regionauts discussed above.

6. *Local/Regional/International*: Expanding on the Type 2 ‘Local/regional network’, this type is practically the same, with the exception that it incorporates some people from other countries. The majority of people listed by experts are from the same locality or region. They did not report any relations from the neighbouring country. However, they cited some people (friends and family) who live in other, third countries.
7. Cross-border/International: This type is similar to type five with the international dimension added on expert relational structure. It corresponds with those experts whose network included a similar or greater number of people from the neighbouring country and third countries to the number of people from the same country as the expert. It is reasonable that this kind of network appeared in those experts who have been living or live in the neighbouring country or in other third countries. Experts from Estonia showed more of this pattern. Figure 3 depicts a particular network of an Estonian expert that has had high professional international mobility and works in CBC with Finland. The network is rather open, with an important number of relations with Finnish contacts both for personal and working reasons.

Figure 3

8. Local/Regional/Border/International: We could term this last type as the most complete and integrative type of network that was found. It is like an accumulative type of the previous ones. The majority of relations reported by the experts pertain to the same country distributed between the same localities as other places. At the same time, approximately one third of experts’ relations are both from a border area of the neighbouring country and from some other country. As it was advanced, this kind of network was more common among Finnish experts. All these experts with this type of network had significant border links to Estonia, as they have work links or have lived in Estonia. As an example, Figure 4 shows a network of a Finnish expert who has lived for several years in Estonia due to work-related reasons, and currently works in CBC. The network is also dispersed and though there are border relations, all of them come from work.

Figure 4
3. THE INFORMAL AND FORMAL SIDE OF NETWORKS AND COOPERATION

The sample size of experts’ networks was not large enough or statistically representative to make quantitative inferences. However, it is interesting to note that more than half of experts in the border region of South-Finland and Estonia reported border relations in their personal networks. In the border region AAA, the majority of Portuguese experts (seven out of nine experts’ networks) reported border relations, while only three out of nine Spanish experts listed border relations. This difference between Spanish and Portuguese is supported by previous research on border relations between Portuguese and Spanish people within the same border region AAA. There is a remarkable asymmetry of border relations reported by Portuguese and Spanish in their personal networks. Andalusians reported in the personal network of support only an average of 0.6 people from some Portuguese locality. In contrast, among Portuguese people, those from the Algarve region had an average of 9.4 people from Andalucia in their personal networks (Gualda and Maya, 2008: 186).

Table 2 represents the average number of relations reported by experts in the four countries. Results, though not statistically representative, are very significant and encourage further research with bigger samples of respondents. Generally, there is a strong, understandable endogamy of experts’ personal networks. The majority of people reported in experts’ personal networks are from the same country. However, there are interesting differences between countries and both border regions. It is noticeable that, in the border
region SFE, there are more border relations; and, while Spanish relational rapprochement is minimal, Portuguese experts declare more relations with Spanish neighbours.

Table 2

How conclusive can the results of Table 2 be coming from social network analysis? One of the criticisms that SNA receives is regarding the high subjectivity involved when the individual reports people with whom he/she relates. It might happen that the individual does not exactly recall the reality of his/her personal network when they cite them in the context of an interview. Regardless, it is a reflection of an individual’s awareness of personal relations at a certain moment. At the same time, the semi-structured interview demonstrated that all the interviewees had personal relations with neighbours (at least as experts in CBC). The difference is that those border relations obtained through the application of a SNA methodology were reported according to the criteria “most usual relationships” in the personal network. From qualitative interviews, all experts mentioned having acquaintances in the neighbouring country, but through personal network analysis only some of these border relations become or are part of their most usual, relational structure. Therefore, though all experts reported acquaintances from the neighbouring country, having border relations as part of usual or daily networks was more normalized in Portuguese, Finnish and Estonian experts than in Spanish ones.

Examining the type of relations (from family, friendship or labour) in the border region SFE, the border relations of experts were based proportionally on working and personal reasons. Border relations of Portuguese and Spanish experts with their respective neighbours are
more based on working relations. Qualitative analysis from interviews supports this trend. Although all of them have work acquaintances and friendships from their work, in SFE nine experts out of seventeen also mentioned having different personal links with the neighbouring country, independently of those working border relations. A total of eight experts have lived or live in the neighbouring country due to personal family reasons (mixed marriages and being a descendent of a mixed marriage) or working reasons. This border experience is very significant for starting border networks. A different pattern of border relations appears in the border region AAA. When experts commented about their border relationships, all of them affirmed having several acquaintances from their professional work through their participation in cross-border projects. Only a few cases tend to become personal with good friendships developing over time. Two Portuguese experts reported some Spanish friendships that developed from work relations. Comparing the cross-border living experiences between Finnish and Estonians, only one Spanish expert interviewed had lived in Portugal due to family-personal reasons.

Summarizing border relationships are not only a more daily trend among Finnish and Estonians experts, but they are also based both on informal relations due to family or personal friends, and on formal relations derived from their work in cross-border cooperation. From interviews, several experts remarked that the institutional cross-border cooperation between both countries is very much based on previous, informal contacts. Especially in Estonia, where in the period of Soviet Union decadence and after independence, having Finnish contacts was very common for Estonians. This relational activity was very representatively highlighted by an Estonian expert in a common saying: “Igal perekond peab olema oma kodustatud Soomlased” – Every family should have a
domestic Finnish - (E2, Estonia, Manager, Public Institution, 2010). “This also tended to change... but it was very popular... families in the northern part of Estonia them we use to have friends in Finland” (E15, Estonia, Manager, Public Institution, 2011). Although in modern days this tendency might have changed, it shows how experts from border region SFE usually describe the institutional cross-border cooperation, supported in previous informal contacts between Finnish and Estonians, “The contacts at the other side make the cooperation much more easy to be started” (E6, Finland, Manager, Development Agency, 2010). “This cooperation is grounded on the intense informal relations between Estonia and Finland” (E17, Estonia, Manager, Private Company, 2011). In contrast, the Portuguese-Spanish border relational activities tend to be more dominated by their formal participation in cross-border European projects. Could this difference be interpreted as a stronger informal relation between Finnish and Estonians, and more social integration between these neighbours than in the border region AAA, where border relations tend to be reserved for professional and formal exchange opportunities? This question definitely urges further research to be conducted on the role of informal border relations on institutional, cross-border cooperation.

Both informal border relations at the margin of working in CBC and formal relations originating in offices and meetings seem to be intrinsically imbricated. On one hand, informal relations create a breeding ground of experiences that might be potential resources for institutional cross-border cooperation. In this sense, these informal contacts are bridges and opportunities that facilitate access to resources (other contacts, actors, etc.) located in the neighbouring country. The value of these kinds of relations corresponds with the bridging dimension of social networks and social capital (Burt, 2008). All experts
reported having acquaintances from work, some of them developing into friendships. These acquaintances are weak ties that might become bridges to other relations and resources; their strength lies in their capacity to connect different systems, societies or groups (Granovetter, 1983). They are not likely to provide strong cohesion like family relations, but become an important source for acquiring resources, which is a foundation of social capital and fundamental for cross-border cooperation. On the other hand, these more formal relations from work acquire a more informal component over time; these are most of the acquaintances and friends from work reported by experts. Those especially from the AAA border region commented that those formal contacts from work that become friends soften the institutional cross-border cooperation. The working process tends to be easier and more fluent. “They are working mates that I can consider as friends too. We go out together, we eat together and even we dance... when there is opportunity for that. Thus, it is a dual relationship that makes easier the work. Sometimes it makes easier to solve difficult problems” (E21, Portugal, Manager, Public Administration, 2011).

For experts, border relations—both from working and more informal reasons—implied resources or access to resources. They all imply the existence of investment sources to use in order to capitalize on the existing resources. They constitute sources of social capital. On one hand, formal border relations created common experiences and opportunities for information to flow. To have and to maintain these formal relations firstly implies better knowledge of the border area and its needs for development. Secondly, it implies that they can generate better knowledge in management of cross-border cooperation (administrative procedures, institutional expertise). On the other hand, informal border relations more significantly influence the knowledge of the neighbouring country (culture, language,
national legislation, etc.) and in the information or knowledge of contacts, and contacts’ resources. It is assumed that the increasing social and economic integration of border regions needs to be supported by the existence of different types of border flows, social interactions and cross-border relations between people of border regions. If potentialities commented on by experts are related to this social and economic integration, then it is necessary to accomplish different empirical works on border regions. To identify the possible border relations, their patterns and their possible implication in cross-border cooperation development, it is a most promising research line.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has used social network analysis and social capital perspective regarding border relations. It proposes that the study of social integration and cohesion between border regions can be based not only on cultural perspectives focused on bottom approach to identity development and perception of border regions. Results from interviews and personal networks that were analysed demonstrate the patterns of border network among those people who are directly involved in cross-border cooperation. In the border region SFE, interviewees had more border ties based both on personal or informal reasons, like family ties and friendships, and on more formal reasons that emerged from work relations. In the border region AAA, experts’ border relations were less frequent and more dependent on working experience in CBC, as most of their border relations are from work. It was interesting to note the significant asymmetry between Portuguese experts’ border relations with Spanish neighbours with respect to Spanish experts’ border relations with Portuguese people. Although in the border region AAA, empirical research by Gualda et al. (2008)}
focused on general population, their results support our conclusions. According to the triangulation of content analysis and network analysis, we have found that the results show a great coherence.

However, the question is not if border regions should have more border relations among their inhabitants. The relevance in the study of border relations comes from their use value; namely, in the role played by these border relations in social integration and cross-border cooperation. It could be interesting and innovative to inquire if border regions with more border networks (among citizens or institutional actors) show greater social integration and even better management of cross-border cooperation projects and programmes. Experts highlighted the relevance of their border acquaintances as resources in a learning process of cross-border cooperation management or for better knowledge of border needs. Their acquaintances implied opportunities of development, as they were represented like small pseudo-ambassadors toward the neighbouring country. Following Grix (2001), we assume that border relations and their use value are key cornerstones to understand the functioning of cross-border cooperation and its improvement. In turn, that would imply an operative and contextualised research exercise of social capital in cross-border regions.

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REFERENCES


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1 The territorial reference of regions is based on Interreg Programmes NUTS III that correspond with the delimitation of Alentejo, Algarve and Andalusia, administrative regions in Portugal and Spain. In the case of Finland and Estonia, Interreg territorial delimitation use Estonia and South Finland that comprises different counties in the south of Finland (see [http://www.centralbaltic.eu/](http://www.centralbaltic.eu/)). However, most of all interviewees belong to the programme areas. In this research a difference between the northern part of Estonia based on Harju county and the rest of the country was considered useful, as most of the experts and population in Estonia are concentrated in this county.
TABLES

Table 1- Sample distribution in border regions AAA and SFE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>Border region Alentejo-Algarve-Andalusia (AAA)</th>
<th>Border region South Finland-Estonia (SFE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Techniques</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Networks</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 – Experts Networks’ Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Estonia</th>
<th>Finland</th>
<th>Portugal</th>
<th>Spain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of people listed in network (0-25)</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of people from the same country</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of people from the neighbouring country (border relations)</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of border relations for personal reasons</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of border relations for working reasons</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of people from other countries</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURES

Figure 1 – Local (E14, Spain, Manager, Public institution, 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Networks</th>
<th>Type of Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same Country (Square)</td>
<td>Friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbour Country (Circle)</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networks</td>
<td>Type of Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same Country (Square)</td>
<td>Friendship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbour Country (Circle)</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Country (Triangle)</td>
<td>Labour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2** – Local/Regional (E17, Portugal, Manager, Public Institution, 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Networks</th>
<th>Type of Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neighbour Country (Circle)</td>
<td>Personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Country (Triangle)</td>
<td>Personal and Labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3** – Cross-border International (E2, Estonia, Manager, Public Institution, 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Networks</th>
<th>Type of Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same Country (Square)</td>
<td>Friendship and Labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbour Country (Circle)</td>
<td>Labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Country (Triangle)</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4** – Local/Regional/Cross-Border/International (E21, Finland, Professor, University, 2011)

**URL:** http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ceps  Email: juliel.porter@gmail.com