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## **Metropolitan and Post-national Urbanity Beyond (Pluri)nation(al)-states in the EU: Benchmarking Scotland, Catalonia and the Basque Country**

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### **Abstract**

This article compares the cases of the three small, stateless, city-regional nations of Scotland, Catalonia, and the Basque Country in the period after September 2014. Since the referendum on Scottish independence, these nations have, depending on their unique contexts, engaged differently in democratic and deliberative experimentation on the “right to decide” their futures beyond being referential (pluri)nation(al)-states in the UK or Spain. Most recently, the Brexit referendum has triggered a deeper debate on how regional and political demands by these nations could rescale the fixed (pluri)nation(al)-states’ structures while even directly advocating for some sort of “Europeanization”. Based on a broader research programme on comparing city-regional cases titled ‘Benchmarking City-Regions’ ([www.cityregions.org](http://www.cityregions.org)), this paper argues that the differences in each of these three cases are noteworthy. Yet, even more substantial are their diverse means of accommodating smart devolutionary strategic pathways of self-determination through political innovation processes among pervasive metropolitanization responses to a growing “post-national urbanity” pattern in the European Union. Ultimately, this paper aims to benchmark how Scotland, Catalonia, and the Basque Country are strategically moving forward beyond their referential (pluri)nation(al)-states in such a new European geopolitical pattern that can be called “post-national urbanity” by formulating devolution, and even independence, in unique metropolitan terms.

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Nowadays, city-regions (Harrison, 2010; Paasi and Metzger, 2017) are neither static territorial entities nor isolated geographical areas inside (pluri)nation(al)-states, such as the United Kingdom and Spain, among others, in Europe. Nation-states—either actively or passively, voluntarily or involuntarily, sceptically or acceptingly, alone or with others—end up playing the game of interdependence and entering into agreements on common goods. Therefore, in this era of politics beyond nation-states’ borders and given the intimate relations between the nation-states and city-regions in recent years (Calzada, 2015a), the hegemonic idea that predominantly considers city-regions as sub-national entities nestled within singular nation-states (Agnew, 2015: 120) has been superseded in some small stateless city-regional nations such as Scotland, Catalonia (Colomb *et al.*, 2014), and the Basque Country (Calzada and Bildarratz, 2015). Some could argue that this change is caused by a new political equilibrium regarding regional identity confrontations as an evolutionary step toward rescaling some specific nation-states. As such, two main hypotheses could be presented in this article:

- 1) A new political pattern of regionalism characterized by “smart devolution” (Calzada, 2016; Calzada, 2017c; Calzada and Bildarratz, 2015; Goodwin *et al.*, 2012; Khanna, 2016) and self-determination claims (Guibernau, 2013) expressed and embodied through geo-democratic practices such as the “right to decide” (Barceló *et al.*, 2015; Cagliaio y Conde and Ferraiuolo, 2016) is emerging in these cases.
- 2) Factors driving the changes in these cases could stem from a “post-national urbanity” insofar as these small, stateless nations are driven by metropolitan values and therefore advocate a new, socially progressive political agenda around “civic nationalism” appealing to universal values, such as freedom and equality, in contrast to “ethnic nationalism”, which is zero-sum, aggressive, and draws on race or history to set the nation apart (Economist, 2016; Harari, 2017).

The year 2014 will be remembered as the time when two (pluri)nation(al)-states unevenly faced debates that were similar turning points in their relationships with their

small, stateless, city-regional nations (Cagliaio y Conde, 2016; Friend, 2012). This is the case for the United Kingdom and Spain, but in rather different ways. While the UK witnessed an agreed upon referendum between Prime Minister David Cameron and former Scottish First Minister Alex Salmond, Spain, by permanently pointing out the territorial unity of the Spanish nation-state, refused any expression of self-determination (Guibernau, 2013), as was demanded by a considerable population in Catalonia (Cramer, 2015a). Also, Spain's political history over the last 40 years (BBC Radio, 2015) presents another feature of the Basque Country: the city-region attempts to overcome and move past the political violence that has dramatically dominated Spain's political scene. In this direction, there is an awakening towards, or at least an interest in, making progress and leveraging the Basque Country's self-government, as it could be a procedure in which the "right to decide" could be implemented (Barceló *et al.*, 2015; Calzada, 2014).

Nevertheless, Scotland, Catalonia, and the Basque Country cases could be depicted in rather different ways. This is the point of departure for this article, which aims to address the trending, rapidly changing balances between the small nations (Kay, 2009) and their referential (pluri)nation(al)-states (Hennig and Calzada, 2015). The political history of each small nation and previously achieved political statuses through negotiations with their (pluri)nation(al)-states will be shown, which helps the power relationships stand out and establishes the preconditions for future negotiations of the devolution of powers between the regional and state levels.

Although this article will focus solely on the comparativeness of the three cases, this section will show the eight cases that have been studied in the research programme "Benchmarking City-Regions" (Calzada, 2018). This project was funded by Ikerbasque (Basque Science Foundation) and the RSA (Regional Studies Association). Specifically, this comparative study consists of eight city-region cases<sup>1</sup> in reference to their nation-states as follows: Catalonia (Spain), the Basque Country (Spain and France), Scotland (UK), Reykjavik (Iceland), Oresund (Sweden and Denmark), Dublin (Ireland), Portland (Oregon, USA), and Liverpool and Manchester (UK) (Calzada, 2015b).

In particular, to focus on the essence of this paper, we require not only explicit new geopolitical readings of the nation-states (Keating, 2017a; Park, 2017), but also analytical evidence for the fuzzy interpretation (Morgan, 2014) of the city-region concept as a concept itself. As such, in this article, the concept of the pluri-national state (Requejo, 2015) will be deconstructed from the metropolitan perspective of city-regional (Sellers, 2002; Sellers and Walks, 2013) and multi-level governance (Alcantara *et al.*, 2016;

Boronska-Hryniewiecka, 2016). In order to fix a suitable epistemological perspective in the study of the city-region, we are going to focus on cases referring to a considerable degree of regional autonomy (Mylonas and Shelef, 2017). Thus, the analysis in this article will blend analyses from three perspectives: political geography (Brenner, 2009; Sassen, 2002), urban, metropolitan and regional studies (Barber, 2013; Herrschel and Newman, 2017; Katz and Bradley, 2013), and social and political innovation studies (Calzada, 2013; Martinelli *et al.*, 2013; Moulaert *et al.*, 2014; Moulaert *et al.*, 2013; Richez-Battesti *et al.*, 2012). As an analytical tool, we will examine political innovation processes in the three aforementioned cases (Calzada and Bildarratz, 2015). Nevertheless, the study of the city-region should suggest a broader conceptual scope that could cover a range of politically and economically driven city-regional dynamics (or both altogether) (Harrison, 2010; Morgan, 2014; Scott, 2002). Hence, rather than a region merely being defined as ‘an intermediate territorial level, between the state and the locality’ (Keating, 1999: 9), we suggest specifying the taxonomy of the city-regions we refer to this paper. City-regions can: (1) defined through tense power relationships with counterpart (pluri)nation(al)-states; (2) be managed internally and self-autonomously; and (3) externally portray themselves as internationally self-sufficient actors driven by para-diplomacy (Acuto, 2013; Moreno, 2016; Therborn, 2017). The three cases in this article follow this taxonomy as ‘small, stateless, city-regional nations’, unlike the other five cases in the “Benchmarking City-Regions” research programme (Calzada, 2018).

Generally speaking—as a reason why this general preliminary framework is presented—this paper attempts to increase the understanding of the emergent nature of city-regions as new, dynamic, socio-territorial, networked entities in (pluri)nation(al)-state contexts (Herrschel, 2002; Herrschel, 2014; Herrschel and Newman, 2017). A recent natural consequence of the post-2008 economic recession has been the acceleration of some city-regions’ tendencies to highlight politically driven nationalist devolution strategies to move beyond their nation-states (Scotland, Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Iceland<sup>ii</sup>), while others steadily continue to implement economically driven strategies within their nation-states’ borders (Oresund, Liverpool/Manchester, Dublin, and Portland). Nevertheless, in both cases, city-regions are widely recognized as pivotal, societal, and political-economic formations that are key to national and international competitiveness and to rebalancing political restructuring processes within and, indeed, beyond nation-states (Ohmae, 1995). As Soja has recently pointed out:

[The city-region] represents a more fundamental change in the urbanization process, arising from the regionalization of the modern metropolis and involving a shift from the typically monocentric dualism of dense city and sprawling low-density suburbanization to a polycentric network of urban agglomerations where relatively high densities are found throughout the urbanised region. (Brenner, 2013: 282)

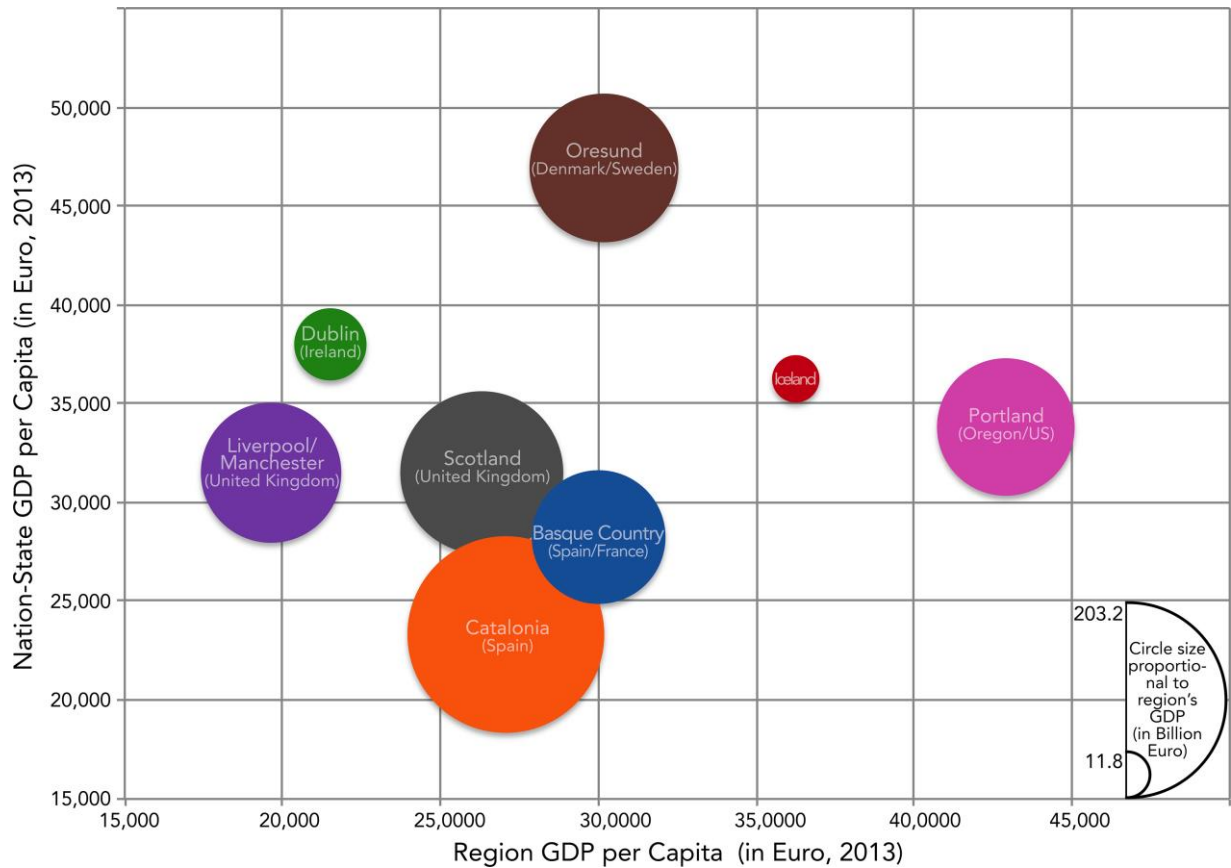
Hence, city-regions (Herrschel, 2014) have become a hotly debated topic in urban and regional political studies (Agnew, 2015) over the past decade. However, there have been relatively few comparisons of diverse city-region cases that trespass their nation-state boundaries, which has clear consequences in terms of reshaping the political and economic policies and spatial configurations of the nation-states themselves. Despite the centrality of city-regions to modern accounts of economic success (Scott, 2002), critics argue that advocates of a new city-regionalism approach overlook how city-regions are constructed politically (Harrison, 2010), which may extend beyond pluri-nationality, nation-state borders, and their understanding of these (Herrschel, 2014). This is exactly because of the different forms of territorial politics through which city-regionalism is conjoined with the nation-states' innovative visions (Jonas and Moisiu, 2016: 1) and the requirement to examine—in the three cases we present in this article—political innovation processes that lead us to identify smart devolution strategies in relational terms. Furthermore, as Keating (2001: 1) argues, 'globalization and European integration have encouraged the re-emergence of nationalism within established states'—a notion that connects directly with city-regions. Or, as Khanna (2016: 78) has more recently noted, '[t]he entire European Union is thus a reminder that local independence movements are not the antithesis of lofty post-national globalism but rather the essential path toward it'. These claims have sparked a flurry of research aimed at developing an understanding of nationalistic or non-nationalistic city-regionalism in order to avoid 'the ecological fallacy [that] supposes that what is true of some city-regions is true of all city-regions' (Morgan, 2014: 1). But, what has been achieved lately has been done through an explicit focus on non-nationalistic, state-centric led initiatives such as those that have occurred in the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands, among other countries (Harrison, 2010: 17). Meanwhile, the current, pervasive, and changing geo-political European context fuelled by "devolutionist movements"—the continuing struggle within (pluri)nation(al)-states revolving around new emergent centres of political identity and agency and resultant quests for consideration of their own specific interests and agendas—is absolutely ignored (Turp and Sanjaume-Calvet, 2016).

### **1. Post-national urbanity: metropolitanization beyond (pluri)nation(al)-states**

The key idea of this article is that the three nationalist city-regions analysed present their unique political innovation processes as challenging and timely research tasks regarding the recent “devolution” claims in the UK and Spain. Nevertheless, generally speaking, city-regions could be seen as emergent networked socio-territorial entities heading in either one strategic direction or the another. Consequently, some city-regions are embracing or even independence (i.e., secession, in purely political terms, from their respective nation-states) (Calzada, 2017a). In this context, factors such as institutional self-sufficiency and economic opportunity are driving city-regions in one direction or the other by fundamentally transforming the relationship with—and even the nature of—their established nation-states.

Before focusing on the three cases, we can observe some preliminary metropolitan comparative data visualization results of the general study (Hennig and Calzada, 2015). In the following graph, we calculated and crossed the nation-state GDP per capita with the city-region GDP per capita.

**Figure 1. Pluri(nation)al-states and city-regions’ GDP per capita (Euro, 2013).**



In a nutshell, by investigating the GDP and population contributions of the city-region cases in relation to their pluri-national states, we can conclude that the “regional political tensions” could be explained when city-regional entities critically stand out through some “alternative” economic, political, or social dynamics that differ significantly from their pluri-national states (Anderson and Keil, 2017). These regional political tensions should be understood as consequences of natural rescaling processes into pluri-national and nation-states (Brenner, 2009) insofar as they are merely an outcome of a wide and diverse range of political and economic factors that lead city-regions towards new regional equilibrium and order. An increase in GDP and a city-region’s population’s contributions to its pluri-national state shows an evident way to approach this issue. Moreover, it sparks a flurry of consequences involving tensions surrounding political and economic sovereignty whether in favour of or in opposition to either recentralization or devolution/independence (Calzada, 2016).

Nevertheless, if we focus our attention on the three city-regional small nations that are presented in this article, the following correlation between the percentage of the city-region’s population and its GDP contribution in relation to its referential nation-state and nation-state GDP occurs. This is the case of Scotland, which constitutes 8% of the UK population and 9% of the UK’s GDP. In Catalonia, one of the main arguments we are



going to present later is Catalonia's large contribution to Spain both in population and in GDP at 16% and 19%, respectively. Finally, the Basque Country, benefitting from a self-government tax agreement (*Concierto Económico*) (Colino, 2012; Gray, 2016; Serrano-Gazteluurrutia, 2012; Uriarte, 2015) with the Spanish central government, constitutes 6% of the Spain's GDP and 5.5% of its population (See Table 1).

**Table 1. Small, stateless, city-regional nations' population and GDP contributions to their referential (pluri)nation(al)-states** (Calzada, 2014).

City-regional small nations	Population in Millions (Nation-State %)	GDP contribution related to Nation-State (%)
Scotland	5.3 (8)	9
Catalonia	7.5 (16)	19
<u>Basque Country</u> [i]	2.2 (5.5)	6

[i] Data relate to the Basque Country side in Spain. The French side is not represented in these figures.

Notwithstanding the geo-economical evidence-based analysis, we can argue that within the scope of the European context, these complex dynamics occur through political innovation processes and smart devolution strategies and require further pervasive and qualitative analyses to explain the sources and potential scenarios of this new city-regional order.

This new city-regional order that we call "post-national urbanity" is characterized by a profound metropolitan rescaling process (Brenner, 2009), in which the (pluri)nation(al)-state formations are under huge pressure, even modifying their internal and external structures. "Post-national" (Sassen, 2002) "urbanity" (Corijn, 2009) refers to the current pervasive metropolitanization phenomenon (Clark and Moonen, 2013; Katz and Bradley, 2013), which is increasingly shaping the political regional claims in small, stateless, European nations for the right to decide their own futures and the potential rescaling processes in some (pluri)nation(al)-states, such as the UK and Spain. Actually, globalization restructures "spaces of flows" and "spaces of places" (Castells, 2009),

repositioning cities and regions on a wider scale than just their national environments (Herrschel and Newman, 2017). At present, Europe's changing re-foundational momentum, shaped by small, stateless nations' claims and fuelled by metropolitan dynamics, is both part of and a reaction to this (Calzada, 2017b). Now, in 27 member states, the EU regulates at least half of our daily lives, and simultaneously, within the (pluri)nation(al)-states' realities, significant devolution processes are occurring, transferring socioeconomic regulation in a competitive environment to smaller units. As Khanna (2016: 63) argues:

Devolution is the perpetual fragmentation of territory into ever more (and smaller) units of authority, from empires to nations, nations to provinces and provinces to cities. Devolution is the ultimate expression of local desire to control one's geography, which is exactly why it drives us toward a connected destiny.

This "connected destiny", according to Barber (2013), is already happening between cities and regions, rather than between (pluri)-nation(al)-states. Thus, pluri-nationalism itself is a term that is debated between decentralized positions, such as federalism, devolution and secessionism, and recentralization state imperatives. Looking at cities and the global-local nexus in the European context thus immediately introduces the question of urbanity as a pre- and post-national formation, and therefore a para-national domain. Cities are not just parts of countries. In the current post-national context, urbanity—made up of city-regions in certain state configurations—is trespassing upon pluri-nationality in internal geopolitical terms while establishing an uncertain and unpredictable scenario in external geostrategic metropolitan terms between small, stateless, city-regional nations, their referential states, and the supranational European Union (Klinke, 2016).

## **2. Small, stateless, city-regional nations' taxonomy and benchmarking: political innovation processes and smart devolution strategies**

For the purpose of this article, it is rather difficult to proceed with an analysis of political innovation processes and smart devolution strategies based solely on politically constructed subjective categories such as nations. Nations, according to Benedict Anderson (1991), are "imagined communities", which could be interpreted ethnographically in many different pluri-national and cross-border national territories (Moncusí, 2016). Yet Guibernau (2013: 368) provides a wider definition when she

defines nation as ‘a human group conscious of forming a community, sharing a common culture, attached to a clearly demarcated territory, having a common past and a common project for the future, and claiming the right to rule itself’. It is, therefore, a subjective construction that could be applied to any nationalistic political idea. Paradoxically, nation-states are the most reluctant entities to accept that they have also been built on the basis of “invention”. Recently, a radio programme called “The Invention of Spain” by BBC Radio 4 was issued (2015), aiming to provide objective information regarding the controversial debate on the Catalan self-determination strategy fulfilled in the plebiscitary election of September 27, 2015 (Basta, 2015).

Regarding the three cases, the political innovation processes occurring in such changing contexts reveal that beyond Europe, there are separatist challengers to nation-states, who made their cases for greater autonomy based not only on identity-based arguments, but also on considerations of a fair distribution of resources within their nation-states (Pattie and Johnston, 2017). The Basque Country, Scotland, and Catalonia have long histories of making claims for more regional autonomy and have been characterized by significant degrees of devolution over the past two decades (Keating and Harvey, 2014). They now each have their own parliaments, governments, and executive leaders. Therefore, by measuring devolution, we mean that power is shared between tiers of government, and the power that is exercised by lower tiers, such as regions and provinces, varies across and within (pluri)nation(al)-states.

In the context of this article, we are going to apply to three political contexts a working definition of social innovations as processes ‘which allow going beyond the containerised view of territory, by starting from the political dimension of territories, and by placing and considering innovation and networks in their spatial and historical context without losing sight of the material territoriality’ (Calzada, 2015a: 354). In this attempt to deconstruct the political meaning of “metropolitan” and “post-national urbanity” through social innovation processes, we should clarify what we mean by political innovation processes as particular types of social innovation. Richez-Battesti *et al.* (2012) make a triple distinction between social innovation as: 1) a neoliberal instrument of modernization of public policies; 2) a way to promote the figure of social entrepreneurs; and 3) a model to refer to a socially responsible and solidarity-based model of local development. In the context of this paper, the understanding of politically applied social innovation processes goes beyond the particularized triple meaning Richez-Battesti *et al.* (2012) attribute to the term of social innovation itself. Furthermore, social innovation

processes are generally observed through actor-network theory analysis (Latour, 1996), where social contexts are built by the actors in certain social settings. However, including the political factor in these processes suggests that despite the social interactions between agencies, there are also pervasive political confrontations and tensions between institutional structures and non-institutional manifestations at the national political level. As such, within the scope of this paper, the given “metropolitan” and “post-national urbanity” of the three analysed cases, embodied in a unique composition of a network of cities, produce an unequivocal repertory of political city-regional responses. Thus, in the benchmarking analysis of the three cases, political innovation processes should be understood as socially rooted city-regional and political responses produced by the metropolitan stakeholders in the national-state context characterized by a variable post-national complex urbanity.

By observing Table 2, we can see that the political innovation process for each case varies. Whereas the established fiscal, irregular policy and political asymmetric devolution scheme made up of three administrative entities (Basque Autonomy, Statutory Community of Navarre and Pays Basque) has been entirely fixed by its own institutions, over the past forty years, the political violence between the organization ETA (*Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*, or Basque Country and Freedom—the armed Basque nationalist and separatist organization) and the Spanish state has impacted almost all social relations in the political realm (Alvarez, 2017; Anderson and Keil, 2017; Calzada and Bildarratz, 2015; Zabalo and Saratxo, 2015). Gladly, to this end, there is some progress being made, or at least an interest in founding the post-violence politics in the Basque Country, as the most substantial political innovation process in the last long decades of violent troubles. Notwithstanding this, the political innovation process now is to set up for a more imaginative and smarter “devolution” scheme based on two opposite strategies: bilateralism, agreeing with the central government (as in Scotland in 2014), or unilateralism, setting up a constitutive territorial and political process regardless of the opposed prohibition of exercising the “right to decide” by the central government (as in Catalonia in 2015 and now in 2017).

In Scotland, the political innovation process since 2014 has been the rationalized dialectic within the city-region and with the central government. However, the recent response by the British PM, Theresa May, to the Scottish FM, Nicola Sturgeon, warning that it was not the “right time” to call a second independence referendum between 2018 and 2019 could present very challenging momentum for addressing smart devolution

strategies in a post-Brexit period onwards. Thus, the political innovation process in Scotland in reference to the UK is not that straightforward given the tensions and the external geopolitics involved in the relations between Scotland and the UK regarding the re-foundational momentum the EU is embracing. However, rejoining the EU, respecting the 62% of Scottish people who voted to remain, may not be that easy to achieve. This new situation may require further “smart devolution” avenues.

In Catalonia, civic society has shown the most vibrant response to pushing its government into a unilateral secession process insofar as the central government was unwilling to establish any sensible dialectic to channel the emotional and rational desire by thousands of Catalans to split from Spain. Under these circumstances, the EU seems to be seen as a potential ally, although the political innovation process for Catalans through unilateralism presents remarkable shortcomings amidst the broad crisis the EU is facing: sooner or later, the EU will have to consider “minority issues” as essential parts of the European integration, unlike state-centric composition.

Despite the fact that the three cases present the same drivers for devolution, as they have been presented so far, their political innovation processes are nonetheless grounded in diverse factors and their smart devolution claims are proceeding with divergent strategies and covering different dimensions (see Table 2). However, within the scope of this paper, the city-regional nature of the three cases is a relevant similarity for overcoming the traditional approaches to “peripheral nationalisms” or “minority issues” as such. To cap it all, the suggested urban dimension in this paper is a response to a necessity to further analyse the city-regional vs. nation-state confrontations from a dynamic metropolitan perspective instead of a fixed state-centric dysfunctional understanding that we have called “post-national urbanity”. Indeed, what does the “metropolitanization effect” mean to small, stateless city-regional nations and to their nationalisms, and vice versa? To answer this complex question, we could notice that Brexit and the soon-to-be end of the UK’s continued membership in the EU have triggered a much wider debate, not only about the organization and the legitimization of nation-state power, both institutionally and territorially, but also about the way in which metropolitanization has influenced inclusive/exclusive migratory political positions regarding welfare state provisions by fuelling two types of “nationalistic” responses, which are, in essence, the causes of a deep re-scaling process regarding the UK as a nation-state. Here, then, we should distinguish between two nationalisms: the first is “ethnic”, backwards, xenophobic, right-wing and populist (Winlow *et al.*, 2017); by

contrast, the second is “civic”, conciliatory, inclusive, forward-looking and emancipatory (Macwhirter, 2015). Thus, by responding to the previous question, we could conclude that “metropolitan” and “post-national urbanity” have affected “stateless nationalisms”, namely, the three compared in this paper, Scottish, Catalan, and Basque, by reinforcing their European profiles and policy agendas towards the second type of nationalism: the “civic”. These three cases thus share a common ground of “civic nationalism” that appeals to universal and European values, such as freedom and equality, in opposition to “ethnic nationalism”, which is populist, zero-sum, aggressive and nostalgic, and draws on race or history to set the nation apart.

“Metropolitan” and “post-national urbanity” thus should suggest more detailed analysis of how small, stateless, city-regional nations’ cross-border cooperation schemes, political positions on migration, Europeanization and welfare state provision policies are influencing the state political game, and, in parallel and as a consequence, altering their political priorities and updating their metropolitan strategies (OECD, 2015). The impact of the post-2008 economic recession has intensified the political strategic trend of some small stateless city-regional nations to highlight politically driven nationalistic devolution priorities. As we are going to pose, in the Basque case, the permanent negotiation driven by the main political party running the Basque regional institutions over the last forty years, PNV (Basque Nationalist Party), around the Economic Agreement (*Concierto Económico*) has been pivotal in relations with the Spanish central government (either *Partido Popular*, or PP, or *Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, PSOE). Despite the critics, it has allowed a certain level of “devolution” for the Basque citizenship. Here, the question remains open: in addition to the Economic Agreement between the PNV (representing the Basque regional government) and the PP (representing the Spanish central government), what will be feasible in the short-term future to complement this fiscal devolution scheme (between elites) with “new political status” through the democratic experimentation of the “right to decide”?

In the case of the Basque Country (BBC, 1955), after suffering from political violence, there is remarkable evidence that this era is being left behind. As evidence-based qualitative data to prove this statement, in 2015 in St. Sebastian, a non-precedent-based summer school event titled “Political Innovation: Constitutional Change, Self-Government, the Right to Decide and Independence” took place (Calzada and Bildarratz, 2015). The event showed that political parties were pursuing a normalized context in which they could express projects without the threat of political unrest and violence. In

this context, there is an intense and committed effort from institutions and civic society to cure the wounds of political violence. Indeed, devolution claims may not be radicalized but, insofar as self-government status is rooted within the population, they are deliberately engaged in further city-regional devolution. However, it should also be mentioned that the recent budgetary state agreement between the central government (run by *Partido Popular*, PP) and the PNV will allow a new trade-off between the “elites” (Spanish Government, 2017): the central government will have the support of the PNV to accept the state budget in the Spanish parliament, and, in exchange, the fiscal devolution scheme will be fed by the central government in what has been seen as a new “devolution era”, far beyond the hostile atmosphere experienced for years with the Catalan government. As such, the PNV embraces bilateralism, whereas the Catalan regional government leans towards unilateralism. This is because, in line with citizens’ willingness, the Basque Autonomy and Navarra Statutory Community own full fiscal powers as a consequence of the Economic Agreement (*Concierto Económico*) with the nation-state, which is the source of the Basque Country’s historic self-government system. Similarly, it can be argued that the Basque Country presents a remarkable policy (education and health, among others) and political devolution (insofar as the regional political parties determine strategic discourse). Due to the increasing presence of Basque institutions stemming from the building up of institutional instruments in the thirty-eight years since the Gernika Autonomy Statute, institutions have been the principal leaders of this autonomist strategy. In regard to the political innovation processes currently driving Basque society, we could summarize the current situation as having post-violence political momentum. Thus, the devolution agenda may have some “smart” modifications as a consequence of the acceleration of these processes. However, the aforementioned budgetary state agreement between the PP and PNV has been criticized as being a “smart” agreement between the “elites” without having given Basque citizens the “right to decide”. This is a present example showcasing the complex policy arena that the mix between “political innovation processes”, “smart devolution” and the “right to decide” involve in (pluri)nation(al)-states.

Scotland is recognized as a constituent nation of the UK, an issue that contrasts with the “indivisibility unity of the Spanish nation” that is the principal source of conflict in the case of Catalonia. Scottish autonomy is newly developed; it was established by the Scotland Act, in which the New Labour government of 1998 enabled the election of the first Scottish Parliament in May 1999 and the formation of a new, devolved Scottish

government in charge of a wide-range of policy fields, including health care, education, and energy. Thus, Scotland has been gaining political and policy devolution fuelled by the new Scottish government. This is the same government that held the independence referendum in 2014 (Geoghegan, 2015; Johns and Mitchell, 2016) and obtained 54 and 35 out of 59 MPs from Scotland in the 2015 and 2017 UK general elections, respectively. At the end of the day, the Scottish public's interests are essentially to achieve greater levels of trust in Holyrood than in Westminster, even beyond claims for further fiscal devolution. To summarize, even though independentists were defeated by a very slim margin (45% in favour of independence versus 55% opposed), the rationalized way in which the independence debate was run showed a smart dialect by constructively identifying pros and cons (BBC News, 2014). Hence, we could argue, based on many other final conclusions (Hazell, 2015), that the September 2014 referendum and the recently confirmed Brexit vote established a turning point not only in Scotland and the UK, but also for devolutionist processes elsewhere. In the despair over Brexit, there could be the opportunity to ask what the UK is and what it can be now. As the English were prepared to vote in a way that would disrupt the union, it should be no surprise to the union is at risk. This was a vote for English independence at the price of English dominance. The English were not asked about independence but, in its own way, the decision makes it explicit that devolution debate has come to stay.

Finally, the pro-independence parties in Catalonia framed the 2015 Catalan regional election, held on September 27, as a proxy for an independence referendum (Martí and Cetrà, 2016) that has been recently announced for October 1, 2017 (Crameri, 2015b; Cuadras-Morató, 2016; Davidson, 2016; Editorial, 2017a; Herszenhorn and Von Der Burchard, 2017; Rovira I Martínez). Thereafter, the new government aimed to declare independence in 18 months by unplugging Catalonia's institutional structures from Spain. In 2006, a new Statute of Autonomy was approved by the Spanish Parliament, the Catalan Parliament, and a popular referendum in Catalonia, but it was immediately challenged in the Spanish Constitutional Court by the right-wing, unionist Popular Party (PP). In 2010, the Constitutional Court published its sentence on the Statute of Autonomy, culling significant parts of the text. This led to massive demonstrations in Catalonia. The "Catalanist" feeling, though not directly secessionist, became one of independentism, while the Catalan political profile could have been portrayed as federalist up to this point (Serrano, 2013). The so-called "Right to Decide" (Cagiao y Conde and Ferraiuolo, 2016; Calzada, 2014; Requejo, 2015; Sanjaume-Calvet and Gagnon, 2014) became the key



motto of the secessionist and federalist demonstrators, increasing tensions between the Catalan city-regional nation and the Spanish (pluri)nation(al)-state<sup>iii</sup>. It should be pointed out that the lack of respect for the fiscal devolution claim led federalists/Catalanists/secessionists to the organization of anticipated regional elections in November 2012, leading, in turn, to political parties supporting the right to decide and the self-determination of Catalonia, which now represents nearly two-thirds of the Catalan Parliament. Catalonia's strategy is focused not only on getting policy, political, and fiscal devolution, but also on creating its own state that will be "directly" integrated with the EU member states' structure (Herszenhorn and Von Der Burchard, 2017).

**Table 2: Small, stateless, city-regional nations' taxonomy and benchmarking**  
(adapted from (Calzada, 2015b).

Small, Stateless, City-Regional Nations' Taxonomy and Benchmarking			
	Basque Country	Scotland	Catalonia
<b>1) Post-National Urbanity = Metropolitanization</b>	Network of cities: Bilbao, San Sebastián, Vitoria, Pamplona, and Bayonne. <sup>4</sup> Established fiscal, irregular policy, and political asymmetric devolution in three administrative entities (Basque Autonomy, Statutory Community of Navarre, and Pays Basque). Fixed by institutions.	Network of cities: Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness, Aberdeen, and Dundee. Gradual policy and limited political devolution. Fuelled by governments.	Network of cities: <sup>5</sup> Barcelona, Tarragona, Girona, and Lleida. Constrained political devolution and banned fiscal devolution. Driven by civic society.
<b>2) Political Innovation Processes</b>	Post-Violence Politics: Unilateralism/Bilateralism?	Rationalized Bilateralism      Dialectic:	Antagonistic Dialectic: Unilateralism
3) Smart Devolution Strategies			
<b>3.1) To what extent is the starting point of each city-regional small nation's devolution similar according to governance, history, and policies?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· 1979: Gernika Statute of Autonomy with fiscal, political, and policy devolution.</li> <li>· 2016: a new political status update requires the articulation of the right to decide beyond legal instruments. While the centre-right nationalist party, PNV, follows bilateralism to agree the Economic Agreement (<i>Concierto Económico</i>), the left-independentist coalition, EHBildu, strongly encourages a unilateral strategic pathway for implementing the right to decide from the grassroots movement called <i>Gure Esku Dago</i> (Geller <i>et al.</i>, 2015) by imitating Catalonia through its main associations: ANC (Catalan National Assembly), AMI (Pro-independentist Municipalities' Association) and Òmnium Cultural (Language, Culture, Country).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· 2014: independence referendum held on September 18 provoked a turning point in the fiscal devolution within the UK (Pike, 2014).</li> <li>· EU Referendum has led Scotland to the Second Independence Referendum (Qvortrup, 2017).</li> <li>· Recent UK general elections in 2017 depict a less positive outcome for the SNP than previous elections, which has turned into a strategic reflection upon the party and the independence of Scotland as a gradual goal.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· 2010: the Spanish Constitutional Court invalidated the democratically achieved 2006 Statute of Autonomy.</li> <li>· November 9, 2014: a non-binding self-determination referendum was organized.</li> <li>· September 27, 2015: a plebiscitary election with a unity list in favour of "YES" was announced.</li> <li>· October 1, 2017: the independence referendum has been already announced.</li> </ul>
<b>3.2) What are the potential political scenarios for each city-regional nation as a result of the de/recentralization attitude of its referential (pluri)nation(al)-state?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· General elections determined the PNV and EHBildu strategies to suggest a content application of the right to decide whether or not to be linked to the constitutional change.</li> <li>· Regional elections as "bulletproof".</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· In 2015 54 and now in 2017 35 MPs in Westminster could renegotiate further devolution beyond Smith powers (Cairney, 2017).</li> <li>· The second independence referendum has been determined by the EU membership of the UK (as the opportunity to legitimate a secession from the side of the SNP).</li> <li>· Although after the outcome of the 2017 general elections, the SNP and the pro-independence parties have entered a novel period in search for setting up the new strategic pathway towards independence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· September 27, 2015: elections were uncertain, but the "YES" vote gathered international focus.</li> <li>· Regardless of the outcome, the key issue remains pending; as long as "YES" wins, what will be its role within the EU? (See next section: Final remarks)</li> <li>· Uncertainty and tension is increasing between the Spanish central government and the Catalan regional government. Mutual accusations are taking place and will be until the unknown outcome by October 1, 2017. Something will happen in Catalonia but nobody knows quite what (Keating, 2017b).</li> </ul>
<b>3.3)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· With no doubt, the leading politically innovative process has been the achievement of peace and the end of political</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· It is noteworthy that even after the independence referendum, a</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· The most striking point in the Catalan devolution dynamic is the way the 'YES' campaigners are</li> </ul>

<p><b>What are the most relevant strategic political innovation processes occurring in each case?</b></p>	<p>violence. Although currently some uncertainties are focusing the attention of many regional actors: ETA prisoners to be moved closer to families, recognition of all the victims of the armed struggle, truth and reconciliation, competing memories, etc. Regardless of the cause, it should be taken into account that a pluralistic approach to Basque society should be required to articulate a bottom-up and top-down “right to decide” binding consultation/referendum: which of the pending powers would it be? How will be the Basque Country organize a deliberative experimental consultation as the highest democratic level that guarantees the coexistence of the wide range of political projects?</p>	<p>large majority of the public expressed opinions that the referendum implied a new turning point in Scottish politics. The positive influence of the debate among the citizens has increased trust in politics and the importance of devolution in citizen’s daily lives.</p> <p>· However, Brexit vote has entirely re-focused the independence debate throughout a wider multi-dimensional phenomena by including both, the foundational momentum in the UK and in the EU (STV, 2017).</p>	<p>dealing with their differences. A diverse range of remarkable stakeholders such as politicians, activists, academics, businesspeople, entrepreneurs, public managers, public figures, and others, are portraying themselves as a collective plural leadership (Editorial, 2017b).</p> <p>· The weeks before October 1, 2017, can be foreseen with strong mediatic and social tensions.</p>
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## **Conclusion: towards an age of smart devolution in the EU?**

This article has benchmarked a taxonomy that encompasses three “small, stateless, city-regional nation” cases—particularly Scotland, Catalonia, and the Basque Country—in a growing metropolitan European context (OECD, 2015) regarding their politically innovative processes in attaining smart devolution strategies in reference to their constitutive (pluri)nation(al)-states—the UK and Spain, respectively (Molina, 2017; Moreno, 1986). In all three cases, the article articulated some interpretations regarding self-determination and democratic experimentation, using the EU as a supranational and geopolitical reference. In this direction, as Connolly (2013) and Avery (2014) argue, independentism or secessionism is a living issue in Europe today as a result of two main consequences. First, the effects of the post-2008 recession brought about broader processes of territorial transformation and re-scaling in the context of welfare state reforms. Second, the “denaturalization” of nation-state space is a process that reveals that stakeholders might keep sharing a space but have no common interests as to how to order that space in the broader sense of the term.

This paper did not aim to resolve any of the particular cases presented. Instead, amidst the original research project “Benchmarking City-Regions” (Calzada, 2018), it has shed light on the political analysis of three particular European small stateless city-regional nations by observing them from the metropolitan and post-national urban perspective. Unlike those city-regions that are not driven by any particular nationalistic vision (Oresund, Manchester/Liverpool, Dublin or Portland), the three cases compared stem from “civic nationalistic” political principles. As a general conclusion, first, we may argue that the key political issue for these three city-regions is how nation-states can share their democratic sovereignty with city-regions that are willing to request further devolution through experimental democratic practices such as the “right to decide”. Second, it is not clear yet how the city-regional political parties and stakeholders could be democratically organized to serve the general public interest rather than particular party politics, an aspect that is applicable with different intensities and forms in the three compared cases.

Regarding European metropolitan dimension, authors such as Bourne (2014), Muro *et al.* (2016), and Moreno (2015) have investigated the role of the future EU memberships of these three cases as potential new states in debates on the advantages and disadvantages of devolution, secession, or even independence. However, paradoxically, the EU’s structure may stimulate support for an independent state while discouraging acts of secession. In fact, insofar as the EU could provide a complex web of opportunities and constraints for approximately 20 significant pro- and anti-independence or devolution movements, it is likely to remain

implicated in secession processes (Bourne, 2014: 95). These arguments can be considered arguments about “Europeanization” or the ways in which European integration affects politics, policies, and institutions within interdependencies between current European (pluri)nation(al)-states and small, stateless, city-regional nations (Huwyler, 2017).

Highlighting this timely issue,<sup>6</sup> Herrschel (2015) suggests the European Union’s regional policy and multi-level arrangements of governance have provided an important set of mechanisms for such politically innovative activities on the basis of growing metropolitan consciousness as places that “matter” and that are willing to own their decisions and their political futures “in their hands”.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, these dialectics may vary in nature depending on the respective power and influence of the relevant players. The outcome is a complex, multi-level, continuously re-negotiated, composite political identity that can express itself through local, regional, or “national” narratives and implement the so-called “right to decide” through remarkably diverse, deliberative experimentation exercises.

However, the current context requires the EU’s adoption of an anticipative and active role within its policies and programmes as to re-found what we can call “smart devolution”. This re-foundational momentum of the EU should deal with the tensions between the small, stateless, city-regional nations (such as those in Scotland, Catalonia, and the Basque Country) and their referential (pluri)nation(al)-states. As we have seen, such states depict different democratic articulations in order to accommodate territorial diversity and devolution schemes. As Connolly (2013: 12) points out, the EU will play a leading role in determining the outcomes of Scottish, Catalan, and Basque nationalist claims. However, he also adds that devolution and the rights to secession and self-determination, as currently understood in international law, provide little in the way of guidance for addressing separatist claims by Europe’s stateless nations or, for that matter, other parts of the world. He continues to say that in Europe, self-determination claims will increasingly be dealt with through the institutions of the EU as a part of the ongoing push and pull among EU member states and city-regions. Whether this results in “independence in Europe” or some form of accommodation short of secession remains to be seen. In the same direction, reinforcing what Connolly suggests, Khanna reflects and concludes on the nature of self-determination:

Self-determination should be seen as “pre-legal” in the sense that it reflects the will of peoples rather than the international law’s bias toward existing states. [...] Self-determination is a sign not of backward tribalism but of mature evolution. We should not despair that secessionism is a moral failure, even if it recognizes innate tribal tendencies. A devolved world of local democracies is preferable to a world of large pseudo-democracies. Let the tribes win. (2016: 67)

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The summary and the outcomes of this study can be read in the following article: Calzada, I. 'Benchmarking Future City-Regions beyond Nation-States'. *RSRS Regional Studies Regional Science*. 2(1) (2015a): 351-362. DOI: 10.1080/21681376.2015.1046908. [www.cityregions.org](http://www.cityregions.org) Retrieved: August 31, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> The fact that Iceland is a former colony of Denmark is relevant here.

<sup>3</sup> The usage of "(pluri)nation(al)-states" attempts to highlight, especially in this sentence but also throughout the article, the lack of a plural and diverse understanding of the state territory. As such, the post-national urbanity pattern is pervasively depicting the centralistic resistance of the Spanish nation-state by being reluctant to articulate a federal configuration in the XXI century, as authors such as Moreno argues.

<sup>4</sup> BAB is the Biarritz-Anglet-Bayonne metropolitan conurbation, which could be considered as part of the Eurocity cross-border multilevel governance articulation. Bayonne and Biarritz are its chief towns, included in the Basque Eurocity Bayonne-San Sebastian.

<sup>5</sup> The inclusion of Valencia, Balearic Islands, some parts of Aragon, Roussillon and Perpignan in France, the Principality of Andorra, and the city of Alghero in Sardinia in Italy should be considered in order to establish the nationalistic vision of "Països Catalans". "Països Catalans" refers to those territories where the Catalan language, or a variant of it, is spoken. It is commonly used for the Spanish regions of Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands, and for the French region of Perpignan.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.politico.eu/article/president-of-catalonia-vows-to-go-ahead-with-independence-vote-referendum-spain>

<sup>7</sup> The grassroots movements in favour the "right to decide" in the Basque Country is called "Gure Esku Dago", which means "In Our Hands". [www.gureeskudago.eus](http://www.gureeskudago.eus)

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