

The cross-border dimension of regional and urban planning in the greater Basque country (Spain-France)

La dimensión transfronteriza de los planes territoriales y urbanísticos en el ámbito vasco (España-Francia)

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Abstract

Cross-border cooperation has emerged as one of the key elements of de-bordering. The conventional role of borders as the insurmountable boundaries of the state has been diluted, among other reasons, by the territorial cooperation policies promoted by the European Union since the 1990s. However, regarding spatial planning, the state-national logic prevails, despite many initiatives in the opposite direction. For this reason, creating planning figures adapted to this new framework remains a challenge. In this sense, the present research seeks to settle the treatment of the (cross)border aspect in the spatial plans of the greater Basque country, both on a regional and local scale. The study results show that state logics continue to prevail when it comes to the planning and management of a border territorial context.

Keywords: borders, spatial planning, cross-border cooperation, State, Euskal Herria.

Resumen

La cooperación transfronteriza se ha erigido como uno de los elementos clave de la llamada “desfronterización”. La función tradicional de las fronteras en tanto que límites infranqueables del territorio estatal se ha ido diluyendo, entre otros motivos, por las políticas de cooperación territorial impulsadas por la Unión Europea desde la década de 1990. Sin embargo, en lo que se refiere a la ordenación del territorio, la lógica estado nacional prevalece, pese a numerosas iniciativas en dirección opuesta. Por este motivo, la conformación de figuras

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de ordenación adaptadas a este nuevo marco sigue siendo un reto. En este sentido, la presente investigación busca dirimir el tratamiento del carácter (trans)fronterizo en las figuras de ordenación territorial del ámbito territorial vasco, tanto a escala regional como local. Los resultados del estudio constatan que las lógicas estatales siguen prevaleciendo a la hora de ordenar y gestionar un entorno territorial fronterizo.

Palabras clave: fronteras, ordenación del territorio, cooperación transfronteriza, Estado, Euskal Herria.

Introduction

Border areas, classically conceived as marginal spaces of nation-states, have in recent decades attracted renewed attention as an object of theoretical and practical research, especially in the fields of anthropology, political science, geography and spatial planning (Jacobs & Van Assche, 2014). This context of growing academic popularity can be explained, in part, by the dynamics of territorial and cross-border cooperation experienced especially at the internal borders of the European Union (EU) since the 1990s (Svensson & Balogh, 2018).

Nevertheless, contrary situations are sometimes experienced due to processes such as Brexit or political discourses advocating border reinforcement, usually linked to immigration. Therefore, cross-border cooperation, understood as the relationships established between public and private actors separated by a border (Wassenberg & Reitel, 2020, pp. 217-221), can be key to overcoming these negative effects (Nienaber & Wille, 2020).

Considering this scenario, spatial planning is a crucial aspect that should be considered. As Jacobs (2014) points out, any spatial plan depends on the legal and institutional framework of the territory to which it is attached. Nevertheless, sooner or later it must consider its external context. Therefore, concerning the planning of border regions, the public and private actors involved on the other side of the border must be taken into account in order to procure a framework that allows the territory to be thought of from a shared perspective.

Cross-border spatial planning has become an object of research interest, with publications focusing both on its conceptualization (Durand & Decoville, 2018; Guillermo-Ramírez & Nikolov, 2015; Jacobs, 2014; Paasi & Zimmerbauer, 2016) and the analysis of specific cases (De Vries, 2008; Durand, 2014; Durand & Perrin, 2017; Knipschild, 2011; Paül Carril, 2022).

On this basis, developing cross-border cooperation is essential in encouraging the design of integrated territorial strategies that consider the other side of the border. In this way, it would be expected to address policies that consider the added value of cross-border cooperation regarding spatial and regional planning, such as the creation of cross-border infrastructure, the conservation of border natural areas, or the implementation of sustainable mobility programs between one side of the border and the other (Guillermo-Ramírez, 2018).

It is also worth assessing the transformations undergone in the EU regarding territorial cohesion policy (Lukkonen, 2010), especially in the sense that holds that territorial cooperation, particularly cross-border cooperation, is key to its achievement (Medeiros et al., 2023).

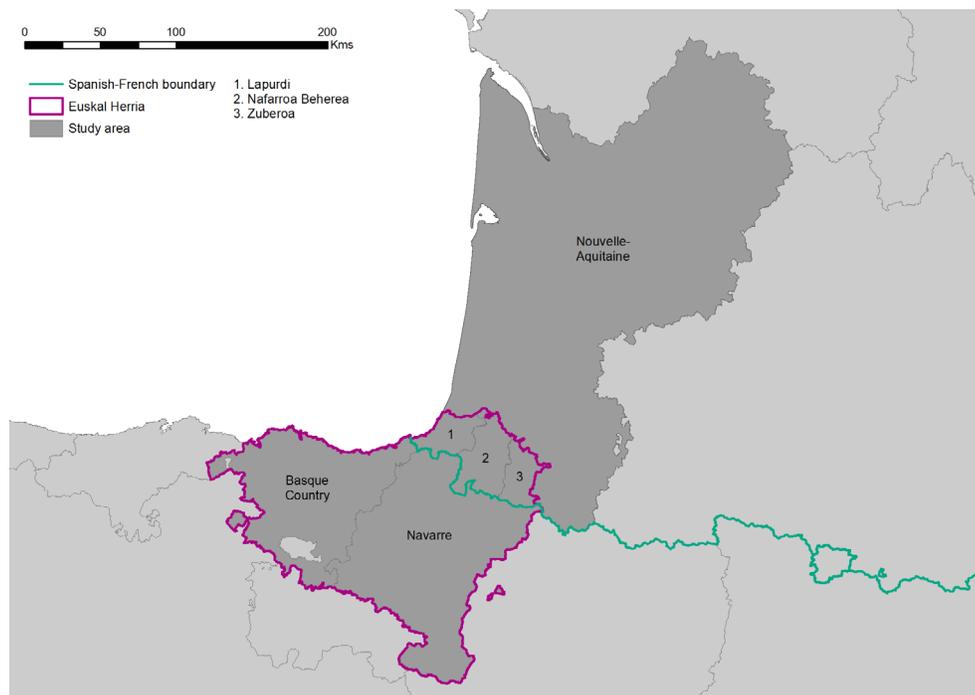
Having said this, the present research seeks to determine the treatment of the cross-border character in the spatial plans of the study area, made up on an overall scale of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (CAPV, acronym in Spanish for Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco), the Chartered Community of Navarre, and the French *région* of Nouvelle-Aquitaine. Thus, it is investigated how the cross-border issue is established in their spatial plans, addressing three scales of analysis: regional planning at the NUTS 2¹ scale, at the intermediate scale and urban planning. To this end, each of the classic sections of any planning document is studied: analysis, diagnosis and prognosis (Pujadas & Font, 1998).

The study area of this research is linked to what is known as Euskal Herria, etymologically the “country where the Basque language is spoken” (Beck, 2008; Esparza Zabalegi, 2011; Urrestarazu & Galdós Urrutia, 2008). Despite being divided by the Spanish-French boundary, this area has a regional identity and common cultural links (Bakry & Growe, 2024). Consisting of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country and the Chartered Community of Navarre—Hegoalde, “south side”—and the territories of Lapurdi, Nafarroa Beherea and Zuberoa—Iparralde, “north side”, in the French state—(Beck, 2008), it is an “intangible idea” (Lozano-Valencia & Latasa, 2019, p. 15), not having a defined legal-administrative entity or international recognition and being divided by the Spanish-French boundary (see Figure 1). Nevertheless, it is directly related to nationalist movements that advocate the construction of a Basque nation-state (Beck, 2008; Fullaondo & Zabalo, 2021; Leizaola, 2000; Letamendia, 1997). Based on these distinctive features, it is appropriate to study this border context as opposed to others since it enables addressing, in a complementary manner, the role that the Basque identity question occupies in the spatial planning of this area.

Following the above, first a series of theoretical considerations on cross-border spatial planning in the European context is presented, and, on that basis, the methodology and analysis of the spatial plans of the study area are formulated. Finally, this makes possible to evaluate the state of cross-border planning, both in the Basque territorial area and in the European context, and to reflect on the role of the nation-state borders in planning figures.

¹ Intermediate hierarchy in the Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics used in the European Union. In the Spanish case, NUTS 2 refers to the autonomous communities and Ceuta and Melilla. In the French case, it refers to the *régions*.

Figure 1. Research study area



Source: created by the authors.

Note: the Basque territorial area (Euskal Herria) is exceeded by choosing, for operational reasons, the institutionalized political-administrative NUTS 2 level on the French side

Open borders and spatial planning in the European context

In recent decades, borders have been conceptualized through two seemingly opposing perspectives (Rumford, 2006). On the one hand, as an element of protection, separation and exclusion, often accompanied by policies to reinforce their security—which has led to the emergence of the term *re-bordering* (Durand & Perrin, 2017; Newman, 2006; Paasi, 2009)—on the other, the “open” border, based on processes that seek to dilute its conception as a barrier—linked to the idea of *de-bordering* (Durand & Perrin, 2017; Frank et al., 2017; Paasi, 2009; Rumford, 2006).

The redefining of the border as a space for cooperation has occurred primarily within the EU. As early as the 1970s, there were Council of Europe resolutions related to cross-border cooperation, identified as a necessity, and to the adoption of regional plans in border areas as a means of harmonizing their spatial planning (European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional/Spatial Planning, 1973).

Nevertheless, with the creation of the Interreg program² in 1989, decisive progress was made on this issue (Durà et al., 2018). Based on cross-border cooperation

² EU funding instrument to promote crossborder, transnational and interregional cooperation.

(Interreg A), one of its funding lines has been the EU's main tool to support this type of process (Medeiros, 2014). After three decades of development, the program has had five complete editions; as of 2024, it is in its sixth edition (2021-2027) (European Commission, 2023). The development and implementation of this program have thus favored the transformation of border environments between member countries, leading to "new forms of socio-spatial governance" (Durand & Perrin, 2017, p. 3).

In this framework, in 2006 the EU established territorial cooperation as one of the core components of its cohesion policy, with the adoption of the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) as an instrument for this purpose (Committee of the Regions, 2007; Svensson & Balogh, 2018). The approval of this figure meant the appearance of the first legal tool directly focused on facilitating and promoting territorial cooperation at cross-border, transnational and interregional levels among its members (Evrard & Engl, 2018). It is thus aligned with the areas pre-established in the Interreg program by providing coherence to the EGTCs regarding their funding streams.

In any case, despite these advances, it is worth noting that the figure of the nation-state survives (Jacobs, 2014). The border continues to exercise a pre-eminent territorial marker role. Evidence of this are the multiple obstacles linked to it (Svensson & Balogh, 2018): cultural, discrepancies between actors, economic, fiscal, institutional, legal, health, political and technical (Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy et al., 2017; Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy & Martinos, 2017; Durand & Decoville, 2018).

Spatial planning also suffers from this limitation when presented in a cross-border perspective (Jacobs, 2014). Its most widespread and accepted definition, which declares as fundamental objectives the "balanced regional development" and the "physical organization of space according to an overall strategy" (European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional/Spatial Planning, 1983, p. 2), indicates that this discipline originally arose from the combination of two separate traditions, associated with the rationales of nation-states (Hildenbrand Scheid, 1996; Pujadas & Font, 1998).

On the one hand, the first objective cited here is linked to the French tradition of *aménagement du territoire*, aimed at seeking cohesion and balance among different regions. On the other, physical spatial planning, in the British tradition—called *regional planning*—, focuses on the organization of the elements that make up a given space, primarily at the subregional scale (Guillermo-Ramírez & Nikolov, 2015; Paül Carril, 2022; Pujadas & Font, 1998).

The mere existence of two previous traditions associated with the respective nation-state formulas shows that spatial planning highly depends on the political-administrative tradition in which it operates (European Commission, 1999; Friedmann, 2005; Jacobs, 2014). In this regard, Nadin and Shaw modeled the main dominant EU traditions—regional economic planning, comprehensive integrated planning, land use planning and urban planning (European Commission, 1999).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that, at present, these are mixed due to the attempts at harmonization that have taken place (Farinós, 2007; Paül Carril, 2022). Several authors have even pointed out the existence of a Europeanization in planning (Paasi & Zimmerbauer, 2016; Waterhout et al., 2009).

Beyond this assessment, it should be noted that spatial planning is a cultural phenomenon (Booth, 2015; Friedmann, 2005). Its results are subordinated to what Booth (2015, p. 86) calls "decision-making culture", and this, in turn, is strongly linked to the

figure of the State (Friedmann, 2005). In this context, nation-state boundaries act as a filter for decision-making (Kessler & Helmig, 2007) and consequently influence the resolution of decisions (Jacobs, 2014).

Despite globalization's unifying effects, the differences experienced on either side of the border can be notorious, even with shared cross-border objectives (Booth, 2015; Frank et al., 2017; Waterhout et al., 2009). Thus, Jacobs (2014) points to the challenge of designing alternative planning boundaries for the shared spatial planning of border regions and generating real integration scenarios.

Based on this, Decoville and Durand (Wassenberg & Reitel, 2020, pp. 262-264) identify three types of cross-border spatial planning initiatives that stand out in the EU context:

- Those related to the observation and understanding of the territorial dynamics present in the area under study—linked to what is known as territorial analysis and diagnosis (Gómez Orea, 2002; Pascual, 1999; Pujadas & Font, 1998; Zoido et al., 2013).
- The design of a territorial strategy that sets the general guidelines for undertaking joint actions as a result of prior analysis and diagnosis; that is, the formulation of strategic lines to achieve the desired objectives (Pascual, 1999; Pujadas & Font, 1998; Zoido et al., 2013).
- On many occasions, the approach of concrete actions focused only on one side of the border without a true cross-border rationale (Wassenberg & Reitel, 2020, pp. 262-264; Jacobs, 2014).

Despite the development of this type of initiatives, spatial planning, being anchored to a nation-state rationale, continues to be executed within what Faludi (2018) calls “containers” (cf. Taylor, 1994), whereby border areas become spaces of encounter but also confrontation of different planning cultures (Wassenberg & Reitel, 2020, pp. 262-264). This explains, therefore, the advisory nature of the initiatives, as they are developed in territorial contexts without formal powers to propose binding actions (Caesar, 2017; Paül Carril, 2022).

This scenario substantially constrains the issues to be addressed, given that uncontroversial measures are proposed—environmental protection, celebration of cultural events or design of tourist routes (Frank et al., 2017; Guillermo-Ramírez & Nikolov, 2015)—while others of greater territorial importance, such as airport transport planning or the creation of economic zones, are avoided (Wassenberg & Reitel, 2020, pp. 262-264).

Finally, a context is envisaged that straddles the need to adopt joint territorial strategies and the constraints imposed by the regulatory systems of nation-states (Jacobs, 2014; Kessler & Helmig, 2007; Wassenberg & Reitel, 2020, pp. 262-264). This scenario, coupled with the time and resources required, sometimes results in mere declarations of intent, far removed from the internal complexity needed to achieve a cross-border governance structure (Jacobs, 2014).

Nevertheless, despite the disillusionment and/or disinterest that it may generate in the population involved (Knippschild, 2011), the adoption of a shared territorial strategy offers tangible advantages as a result of the mutual transfer of means, knowledge and resources (Wassenberg & Reitel, 2020, pp. 262-264). Therefore, strengthening

the cross-border nature of territorial policies is a strategic element in achieving the EU's territorial cohesion objectives (Guillermo Ramírez & Trillo Santamaría, 2023).

Methodology

The research proposes a methodology combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to determine the treatment of cross-border issues in the different management figures. The reason for avoiding exclusively quantitative methods responds to the postulates of authors such as Tilly (1984) or Booth (2015), who pointed out in their research the lack of reliability that numbers can sometimes provide in studies of partially or entirely sociocultural phenomena.

Thus, a quantitative analysis scale based on Likert's method (1932)—and an evaluation rubric—is used, based on a previous qualitative study to determine the importance attached to the border issue in the analysis, diagnosis and prognosis sections of the spatial plans. Therefore, the evaluation rubric is structured according to these three variables (see Table 1), which comprise this document type's basic structure (Pujadas & Font, 1998). This evaluation allows for the establishment of a numerical classification of the treatment of cross-border issues in the different spatial plans studied.

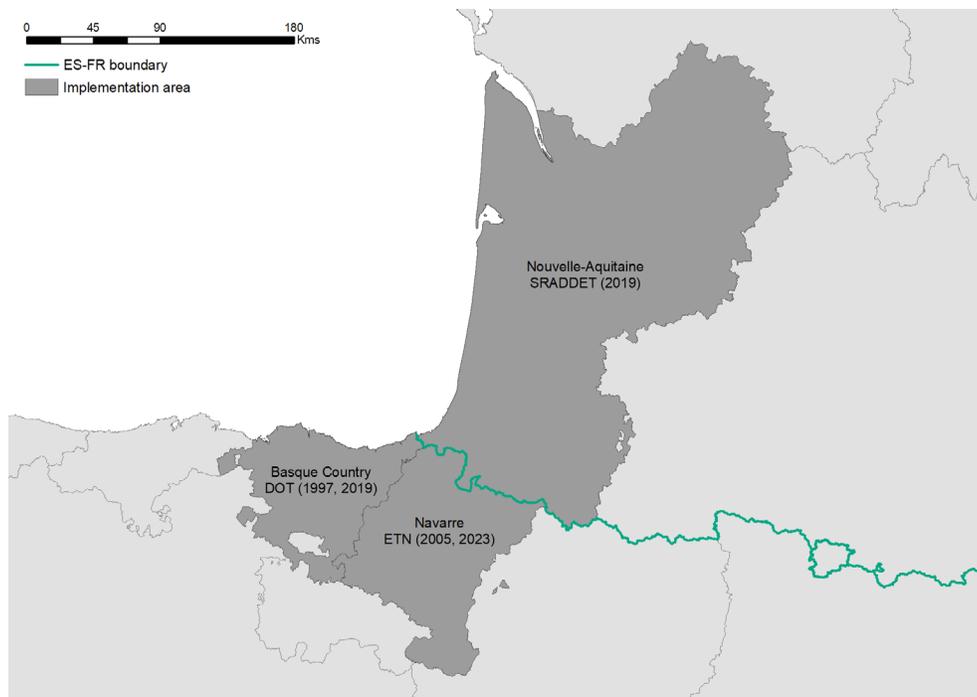
Management documents at various scales are investigated to achieve a complete view of cross-border planning in this area. Following, as a reference, the categorization developed by Pujadas and Font (1998), the following types of documents are collected:

- Regional planning, which, in turn, is subdivided into plans at two scales:
 - Territories at NUTS 2 scale (Autonomous Communities in Spain, *régions* in France, see Figure 2):
 - Basque Country Spatial Planning Guidelines (DOT, Spanish acronym for Directrices de Ordenación Territorial), in their 1997 and 2019 versions.
 - Navarre Territorial Strategy (ETN, Spanish acronym for Estrategia Territorial de Navarra), a document published in 2005 that sets out the planning guidelines for the Chartered Community of Navarre. The revision of this document, finally approved in October 2023, will also be studied.
 - Nouvelle-Aquitaine *Schéma Régional d'Aménagement, de Développement Durable et d'Égalité des Territoires* (SRADDET, French acronym for Schéma Régional d'Aménagement, de Développement Durable et d'Égalité des Territoires). This plan, published in 2019, is responsible for establishing a series of medium- and long-term objectives for the region concerning various topics crucial to spatial planning.

Table 1. Evaluation rubric used for the presentation of the results

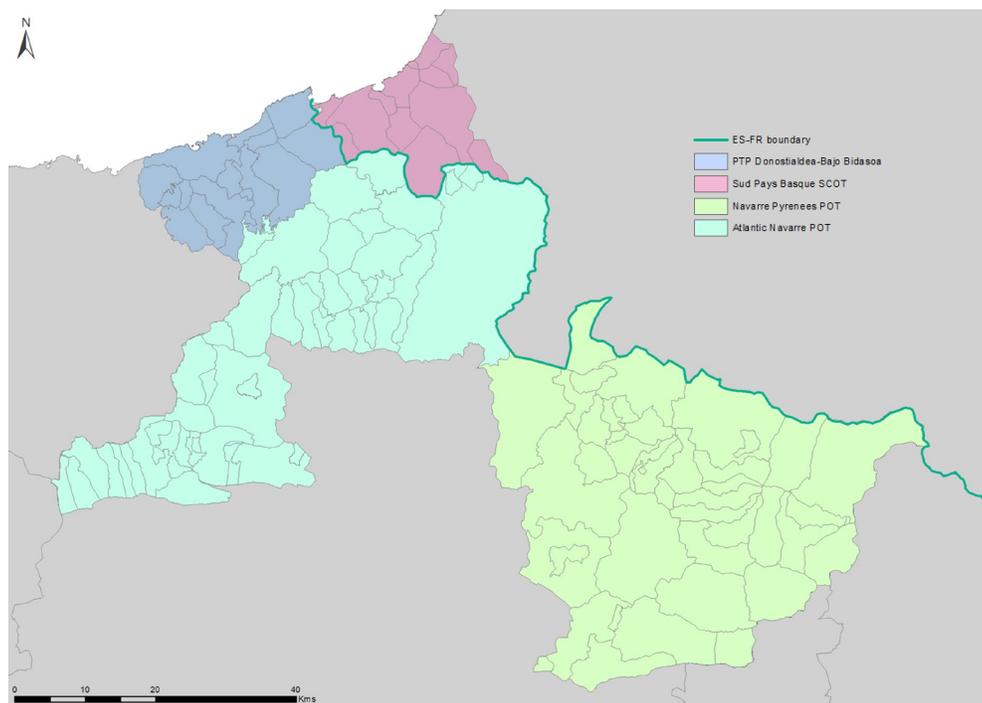
<p>A. The border as an object of analysis</p> <p>The frequency with which the border issue appears when identifying the main characteristics of the territory to be managed is studied.</p> <p>Possible evaluations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Never. No reference to the border aspect is included. 2. Rarely. At least one reference to the border is included, without further development. 3. Occasionally. The border is mentioned several times, although it is not one of the most relevant elements of analysis. 4. Frequently. The border issue is one of the most prominent elements in the territorial analysis of the spatial plan. 5. Very often. The border occupies a strategic place as an object of analysis. Data related to cross-border activities and initiatives are also included.
<p>B. Identification of the potentials and problems related to the border (diagnosis)</p> <p>The importance attached to the border in terms of the identification of potentials and problems is analyzed.</p> <p>Possible evaluations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Unimportant. No consideration of the border is introduced in the diagnosis. 2. Little importance. The border issue appears on at least one occasion, although not in depth. 3. Moderately important. The border appears on several occasions in the diagnosis section, without receiving detailed attention. 4. Important. The border issue is presented several times, and an effort to introduce it as a relevant element in the diagnosis is identified. 5. Very important. The spatial plan recognizes the border issue as a strategic territorial aspect when preparing the diagnosis, and its attention to it is consistent with its importance.
<p>C. Proposal of actions, measures or recommendations related to the border (prognosis)</p> <p>This section analyzes the actions, measures or recommendations established in each spatial plan to determine the level of in-depth study that the border issue receives in the prognosis.</p> <p>Possible evaluations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No development. No actions, measures or recommendations related to the border issue are proposed. 2. Low development. The border appears in at least one of the proposals. 3. Intermediate development. More than one related action, measure or recommendation is proposed. They are all of the same strategic orientation. 4. High development. More than one action, measure or recommendation linked to the border is proposed. They appear in different strategic orientations. 5. Very high development. More than three actions, measures or recommendations are proposed. They are also related to different orientations and topics.

Source: created by the authors

Figure 2. Area of application of the different spatial plans at NUTS 2 level included in the study

Source: created by the authors

- Intermediate territorial scales, often addressed as a development of previous plans (see Figure 3):
 - Donostialdea-Bajo Bidasoa Partial Territorial Plan (PTP), a spatial plan developed for the functional area of Donostialdea-Bajo Bidasoa.
 - Navarre Pyrenees and Atlantic Navarre Spatial Plans (POT, Spanish acronym for Planes de ordenación territorial). These are two supra-municipal planning instruments developed in Navarre's border areas; the first is the northeast, and the second is the northwest.
 - Sud Pays Basque *Schéma de Cohérence Territoriale* (Scot), a tool for designing and implementing inter-municipal strategic planning at the scale of a large functional region or urban area.

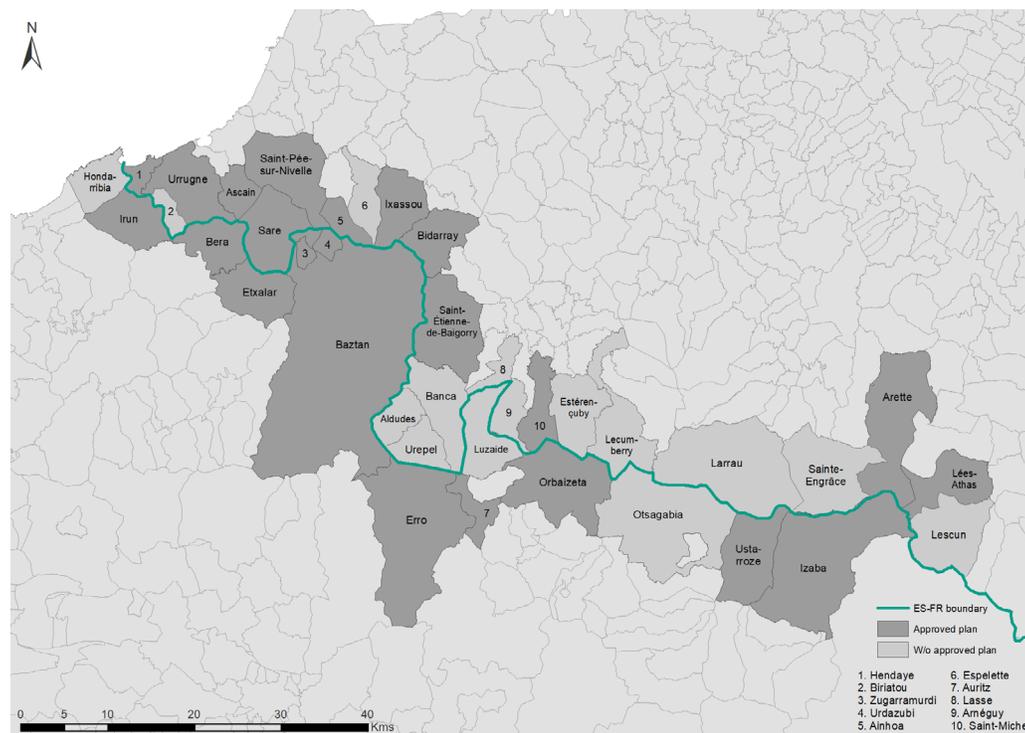
Figure 3. Areas of application of the intermediate scale plans included in the research

Source: created by the authors

- Urban/municipal spatial plans (see Figure 4):
The spatial plans of all those bordering municipal entities are analyzed: *uda-letxeas* in Hegoalde and *communes* in Iparralde. In this way, general urban development plans (PGOU, Spanish acronym for planes generales de ordenación urbana) and general municipal plans (PGM, Spanish acronym for planes generales municipales) are dealt with in the case of the municipalities of the CAPV and Navarre, respectively, and the *plans locaux d'urbanisme* (PLU) for the French communes.

The study of the spatial plans of this last category involves the revision of the planning figures in force in a total of 38 border municipalities—2 municipalities in the CAPV, 12 in the Community of Navarre, and 24 in the Nouvelle-Aquitaine region—except for Zugarramurdi, which, although not strictly a border municipality, has been included in this research due to its proximity to the border demarcation.

Nevertheless, as shown in Figure 3, it should be noted that only some of the municipalities included in the study have their own spatial plans. The mobilization of municipal spatial plans has been facilitated by two tools for consultation and downloading documents. On the one hand, the Géoportail de l'Urbanisme (<https://www.geoportail-urbanisme.gouv.fr/>), in the case of the French *communes*; on the other hand, the Sistema de Información Urbanística de Navarra (https://administracionelectronica.navarra.es/SIUN_Consulta/Index.html#/inicio), in the case of the municipalities of Navarre.

Figure 4. Municipalities included in the analysis of urban spatial plans

Source: created by the authors

Each of the scales included in the research follows the same study model. Firstly, the importance of the border issue is analyzed in the analysis and diagnosis sections, with attention being paid in this second point to its inclusion in both its strengths and weaknesses. Next, the actions, measures, or recommendations related to the border—the prognosis section—are studied. Finally, a synthesis is presented, based on the rubric, through tables for the cases of regional planning at NUTS 2 and intermediate scale and cartographic representations for urban planning.

Results

The cross-border issue in spatial planning at NUTS 2 level

The spatial plans documents at NUTS 2 level framed in the area of study assign, in each of their respective updates, increasing importance to the border issue. Therefore, there is a trend towards a progressively greater consideration of the border as a strategic element of analysis and diagnosis. In this regard, reference should be made to the successive versions of the Basque Country Spatial Planning Guidelines (DOT) (Gobierno Vasco, 1997, 2019) and the Navarre Territorial Strategy, in its 2005 version (Gobierno de Navarra, 2005) and the 2023 revised version in the process of approval (Gobierno de Navarra, 2023).

Firstly, although the 1997 DOTs (Gobierno Vasco, 1997) include considerations related to the border—recognition of a European context marked by the opening of borders and the promotion of the Donostia-Baiona corridor as one of the objectives—, in the 2019 DOT, it is given greater prominence. Thus, the spatial plan makes a direct reference to cooperation structures instituted in the study area, such as the “Euroregion Nouvelle-Aquitaine Euskadi Navarre”, to which it attaches strategic importance “to establish collaboration in spatial planning with Nouvelle-Aquitaine (...) [and] Navarre” (Gobierno Vasco, 2019, p. 45).

This type of assessment is also repeated in the 2005 Navarre Territorial Strategy. This document advocates “improving the permeability of the Pyrenees” (Gobierno de Navarra, 2005, p. 23), as well as the application of “an integrative approach with other areas” (Gobierno de Navarra, 2005, p. 110). Nevertheless, there is a preeminently interregional—not cross-border—orientation focused on the so-called “Ebro axis”, comprised of the Autonomous Communities of Aragon, Catalonia and La Rioja. This approach changes substantially in its 2023 revision. Thus, it is pointed out, both in its analytical and propositional sections, that cross-border cooperation between neighboring territories must be rigorously planned to “take advantage of the border character and supra-regional relations” that are present in this area (Gobierno de Navarra, 2023, p. 52).

Nevertheless, regarding actions, measures or recommendations in a cross-border context (see Table 2), the Nouvelle-Aquitaine SRADDET stands out for the time being from the rest of the documents approved to date. A broader thematic spectrum is also apparent, with proposals in education, environment, labor and governance. Along these lines, although it has yet to be definitively approved, the revision of the 2023 Navarre Territorial Strategy offers a clear advance compared to its previous version of 2005, which includes initiatives mainly aimed toward cross-border coordination and planning.

Although the analyzed documents advocate coordination or the development of shared strategies, their joint study reveals a clear lack of coordination between one side of the border and the other. An illustrative case is cross-border road communication. While the Nouvelle-Aquitaine and Euskadi documents advocate rail interconnection—especially high-speed rail—the current Navarre strategy advocates roads for motor vehicles (Gobierno de Navarra, 2005). This discrepancy shows the presence of partially different territorial perspectives, lacking a cross-border agreement to guide future policies in the same direction.

To summarize, and based on the rubric proposed as a methodology, the spatial plans at NUTS 2 level in the study area present the assessments described in Table 3.

Table 2. Proposals (included in the prognosis) linked to the border formulated in the spatial plan in force at NUTS 2 level

Spatial plan	Proposals formulated	Thematic areas
Basque Country DOT (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of regular working groups (p. 329). Create synergies in environmental protection (p. 332). Generate conditions that promote competitive collaboration (p. 332). 	Coordination Economy Environment
Navarre Territorial Strategy (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage cross-border tourist routes (p. 147). 	Economy Tourism
Revision of the Navarre Territorial Strategy (2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning areas of environmental and landscape value in sites with territorial continuity (p. 46). Establishment of synergies and cooperation networks (p. 46). Cooperation in the management of water resources, infrastructures and assets (p. 46). Definition of socioeconomic activation formulas (p. 46). 	Coordination Economy Environment Spatial planning
Nouvelle-Aquitaine SRADDET (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advance in the knowledge and use of the languages of the Euroregion (p. 110). Promote knowledge and interaction among the young population (p. 110). Structure R&D cooperation (p. 110). Implement an integrated Euroregional job board (p. 110). Promote a sustainable mobility model (p. 110). Develop a shared environmental strategy (p. 110). Promote multilevel governance (p. 110). 	Coordination Education Employment Environment Mobility

Source: created by the authors

Table 3. Summary of the analysis of the spatial plans at NUTS 2 level, accompanied by a numerical assessment according to the rubric

Spatial plan	Ratings obtained
Basque Country DOT (2019)	<i>The border as an object of analysis</i> Its border nature is mentioned, and cross-border cooperation is considered a strategic task given the territory's characteristics (3).
	<i>Identification of potentialities and problems</i> It points out the consolidation of the Euroregion as the main potential but does not develop a diagnosis focused on cross-border cooperation (2).
	<i>Actions, measures or recommendations proposed</i> Proposals aimed at improving communication and increasing synergies, but no specific issues are formulated (3).
Navarre Territorial Strategy (2005)	<i>The border as an object of analysis</i> It attaches strategic importance to it, although institutional and territorial perspectives are the main obstacles to greater development (2).
	<i>Identification of potentialities and problems</i> Cross-border cooperation is seen as an economic potential, linked to tourism. It denotes a clear economic orientation (2).
	<i>Actions, measures or recommendations proposed</i> Only promoting tourist routes as a tool for tourism development is proposed (2).
Navarre Revision of the Territorial Strategy (2023)	<i>The border as an object of analysis</i> It attaches importance to it in the analytical section and points out its cross-border commitment to Nouvelle-Aquitaine, especially after integrating the Chartered Community of Navarre into the Euroregion (3).
	<i>Identification of potentialities and problems</i> A greater importance is given in the case of border <i>comarcas</i> (groups of municipalities). Thus, both for the Baztan-Bidasoa and Pyrenees <i>comarcas</i> , cooperation and coordination are seen as an opportunity to "take advantage of its border character and supra-regional relations" (Gobierno de Navarra, 2023, p. 10) (3).
	<i>Actions, measures or recommendations proposed</i> It determines the main orientations, set out in Table 2, that cross-border cooperation should have. It implies a clear advance compared to the previous territorial strategy (4).
Nouvelle-Aquitaine SRADET (2019)	<i>The border as an object of analysis</i> It is pointed out that borders are "interfaces to manage". Nevertheless, they are irrelevant in the analytical part (2).
	<i>Identification of potentialities and problems</i> It indicates that improving the railway infrastructure is a strategic element for developing the <i>région</i> . In this respect, it points out the willingness to implement high-speed rail to the Spanish border, promoting a potential high-speed cross-border connection (3).
	<i>Actions, measures, or recommendations proposed</i> It proposes a package of measures related to cross-border cooperation with a thematic spectrum based on education, employment, environment and mobility measures (4).

Source: created by the authors

Cross-border spatial planning at the intermediate scale of the study area

Regarding the intermediate scale planning indicated in the methodology, the border issue is irrelevant in the analysis sections. It appears marginally and from a superficial point of view in most of the documents and sections that make up the different plans. Proof of this is the analysis sections, in which there is hardly any consideration of the border. It is mentioned as a relevant aspect to be considered, as in the Donostialdea-Bajo Bidasoa PTP, but without going into greater depth.

On the other hand, in the diagnostic sections, the identification of the potentialities and problems linked to the border are more developed in the Navarre Spatial Plans (POT) and in the Sud Pays Basque *Schéma de Cohérence Territoriale* (SCOT). On the one hand, the Navarre documents point out that cross-border measures in terms of the management of natural areas and environmental protection represent an opportunity for the territory to “enhance the tourism potential of the area” and achieve “cross-border sustainable development” (Gobierno de Navarra, 2011a, p. 50, 2011b, p. 56). On the other hand, the French spatial plans show concern for the discrepancies identified in the railroad lines on both sides of the border due to the “geographical limitations of the Spanish network”³ (Syndicat d’Études pour l’Élaboration du SCOT Sud Pays Basque, 2005, p. 85).

Nevertheless, the prognosis is not consistent with these diagnoses. Indeed, except for the Donostialdea-Bajo Bidasoa PTP—in which the construction of a railroad network connecting with the French high-speed network is formulated (Basque Government, 2016)—generic guidelines are put forward based on “promoting” or “prioritizing” certain orientations toward the cross-border, in sectors such as mobility (Gobierno de Navarra, 2011a; Syndicat d’Études pour l’Élaboration du SCOT Sud Pays Basque, 2005) or the management of natural spaces and water resources (Gobierno de Navarra, 2011a, 2011b).

As shown in Table 4, mobility and environmental issues are the predominant areas at this scale, present in three of the four documents studied. It should also be noted that other issues, such as the economy or education, which are important at the NUTS 2 level, do not have even a token presence in this case.

The discrepancies between the actions or objectives proposed on either side of the border are shared with the previously analyzed scale. While the Donostialdea-Bajo Bidasoa PTP and the Sud Pays Basque SCOT advocate the improvement of cross-border transport infrastructures, especially railways, in the POT of the Navarre Pyrenees, they point out “the termination of the cross-border agreement aimed at increasing the permeability of the Pyrenees” (Gobierno de Navarra, 2011a, p. 49). Despite this, promoting “the mobility of young people through the geographical space of the Working Community of the Pyrenees” (Gobierno de Navarra, 2011a/, p. 28) appears as one of its orientations.

³ All translations of French-language documents were done by this article’s authors.

Table 4. Border-related proposals formulated in intermediate-scale spatial plans

Spatial plan	Proposals formulated	Thematic areas
Atlantic Navarre POT (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize cooperation in the management of natural areas and water resources (p. 56). 	Environment
Navarre Pyrenees POT (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the mobility of young people throughout the Pyrenees (p. 28). • Prioritize collaboration in the management of natural areas and water resources (p. 50). 	Environment Mobility
Donostialdea-Bajo Bidasoa PTP (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of a rail network connecting to the future French high-speed rail network (p. 28). 	Infrastructure Mobility
Sud Pays Basque SCoT (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimize cross-border transport infrastructure (p. 39). • Define a cross-border program of facilities for environmental preservation (p. 39). 	Environment Mobility

Source: created by the authors

Considering these evaluations, and in the same way as described in the previous section, the evaluation rubric for the plans analyzed for this scale of analysis is shown in Table 5.

The cross-border issue from the point of view of urban planning in the study area

Of the 24 urban spatial plans analyzed in this research, it should be noted at the outset that 11 of them *de facto* ignore the border. Although some of them occasionally mention the presence of the border, as in the case of the Saint-Étienne-de-Baïgorry PLU or the Auritz General Urban Plan, it is not relevant, both in its analytical and propositional sections. The plans are based on the regulation of land uses in the municipality without establishing considerations on the border.

In contrast, the remaining 13 documents—of which six are located in the Autonomous Community of Navarre, five in Nouvelle-Aquitaine, and two in the CAPV—include the border issue in at least one of their sections. Regarding the border as an object of analysis, three cases stand out: the Ainhoa PLU, in which relevant aspects such as cross-border mobility are studied; the Sare PLU, which includes provisions on the port of Lizarieta—border crossing between the municipalities of Etxalar and Sare—; and the Irun PGOU, which notes, among other issues, that the municipality of San Sebastian is characterized by its “historical maritime and industrial activity” linked “above all [to] the activity associated with the border” (Ayuntamiento de Irun, 2015, p. 46).

Table 5. Synthesis of the analysis of the intermediate scale spatial plans, accompanied by a numerical evaluation according to the rubric

Spatial plan	Ratings obtained
Atlantic Navarre POT (2011)	<i>The border as an object of analysis</i>
	It hardly appears as an object of study. It focuses on analyzing the territorial characteristics of the area, without delving into its border nature (1).
	<i>Identification of potentialities and problems</i>
	It is stated that cross-border cooperation, especially in environmental terms, represents an opportunity to promote sustainable development in the area. Nevertheless, this same assessment appears in the POT of the Navarre Pyrenees without considering the characteristics of each territory (2).
Navarre Pyrenees POT (2011)	<i>Actions, measures or recommendations proposed</i>
	In this regard, only one environmental proposal is formulated of a generic nature and without any further development (2).
	<i>The border as an object of analysis</i>
	As in the case of the POT of the Atlantic Navarre, the border issue is of little importance in the above analysis (1).
Donostialdea-Bajo Bidasoa PTP (2016)	<i>Identification of potentialities and problems</i>
	As previously mentioned, this spatial plan reproduces word for word the diagnosis of the POT of Atlantic Navarre (2).
	<i>Actions, measures or recommendations proposed</i>
	It introduces the promotion of cross-border mobility of young people as a guideline to be followed, which is an addition to the provisions of the Atlantic Navarre POT. Despite this, the generic aspect remains present (2).
Sud Pays Basque SCoT (2005)	<i>The border as an object of analysis</i>
	It points out the importance of creating cross-border entities to plan a border area, such as the Basque Eurocity (2).
	<i>Identification of potentialities and problems</i>
	The border issue is not present in this aspect. Other potentialities and problems are identified, but none are linked to the border or cross-border initiatives (1).
Sud Pays Basque SCoT (2005)	<i>Actions, measures or recommendations proposed</i>
	It is the only intermediate-scale spatial plan that proposes a specific measure related to the border context (2).
	<i>The border as an object of analysis</i>
	Although the border is mentioned at some points, it lacks relevance as an object of analysis (2).
Sud Pays Basque SCoT (2005)	<i>Identification of potentialities and problems</i>
	It points out that the differences in the rail network between one side of the border and the other are an obstacle to achieving better cross-border mobility (2).
	<i>Actions, measures or recommendations proposed</i>
	It proposes two cross-border orientations based on environmental preservation and mobility. Nevertheless, they lack depth (2).

Source: created by the authors

Among these three cases, the Irun PGOU is also notable for its treatment of the border in its diagnosis, which emphasizes “the particular importance in the case of the Basque Country of the implementation of the European Union’s cross-border cooperation programs” (Ayuntamiento de Irun, 2015, p. 47). Nevertheless, despite the attention given to the subject, signs of a lack of coordination are identified between one side and the other of the border regarding mobility. In the municipality of Irun, they criticize the extension of the second beltway of Donostia, built as a road for motor vehicles, because it seems implausible “that it could continue on the other side of the Bidasoa [river that marks the boundary line between Spain and France]”, an issue that they rate as “essential” (Ayuntamiento de Irun, 2015, p. 121).

Another notable documents are the Hendaye PLU, which states that “the history and urban organization of the territory give the municipality a weight and a structuring role on an inter-municipal and cross-border scale” (Communauté d’Agglomération Pays Basque, 2020, p. 4) and the Urrugne PLU, which points out the strategic importance of the border town of Ibardin and identifies the imbalances between the two sides of the border—in this case, the Navarre side has most of the commercial facilities—. This locality continues to receive special attention in the propositional part since the urbanization of an area of 1.4 hectares is proposed, aimed at boosting commercial activity and correcting the previously mentioned imbalances, as shown in Table 6.

From the classification of the measures into thematic areas, it can be seen that economic proposals predominate over the rest; they are present in ten of the thirteen spatial plans included in this item. It was indeed corroborated that, at the local level, economic development is one of the key points. Thus, measures such as generating cross-border services (Ayuntamiento de Irun, 2015) or developing commercial facilities in border areas (Ayuntamiento de Etxalar, 2000; Commune d’Urrugne, 2019) are included. Nevertheless, most of these measures focus on tourism; in this regard, seven related to tourism were found.

Next, the proposals linked to establishing or improving the municipality’s infrastructure are prominent since they are present in six spatial plans. Road communications with the other side of the border are the most frequent object of prognosis—they appear in the Izaba, Urdazubi and Ustarroze PGMS —related to mobility measures, present in four municipal plans. Cultural (present in three plans), environmental (in two), sports (in one), or identity (in one) proposals are less prominent.

Similarly to previous scales, cross-border mobility is again the source of discrepancies between one side of the border and the other. A notable one is the case described in the Irun PGOU, in which the prolongation of a road for motor vehicles coming from Donostia is criticized, given that they consider that “it is essential that it can be continued on the other side of the Bidasoa [border]” (Ayuntamiento de Irun, 2015, p. 121). The possible existence of this discontinuity is explained by considering the French transport policy in cross-border terms, based preeminently on the development of railroad lines.

Table 6. Cross-border proposals formulated in urban spatial plans

Spatial plan	Proposals formulated	Thematic areas
Ainhoa PLU (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of an interconnected water supply system with Urdazubi (p. 57). 	Infrastructure
Baztan Valley Municipal Plan (PM) (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain tourism quotas in consolidated markets and increase them in emerging markets, such as France (p. 42). 	Economy Tourism
Erro PM (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance, care for, and protect the attractiveness of the Camino de Santiago (p. 30). Connect the power line from Aurizberri to the French energy supplier (p. 39). 	Economy Infrastructure Tourism
Etxalar PGM (2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Border constructions linked to sports and leisure activities, commercial and hospitality uses (p. 13). 	Sports Economy Tourism
Hendaye PLU (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further development of cross-border environmental management (p. 107). Participate in the development of a new cross-border axis based on rail (p. 172). Promote the identity of the Basque territory, characterized by its way of life, heritage and culture (p. 355). 	Culture Identity Environment Mobility
Hondarribia PM (advance, 2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of a joint strategy with Hendaye (p. 5). Establishment of a central communication axis connecting to Hendaye (p. 58). 	Coordination Mobility
Irun PGOU (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generation and attraction of new businesses and cross-border services (p. 93). Construction of a high-voltage line connecting the town of Arkale to the French side (p. 343). 	Economy Infrastructure
Izaba PGM (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotion of educational exchanges (p. 77). Promotion of tourist itineraries, festivals and other cultural events (p. 77). Improvement of the road to Arette (p. 77). 	Culture Economy Education Infrastructure Tourism

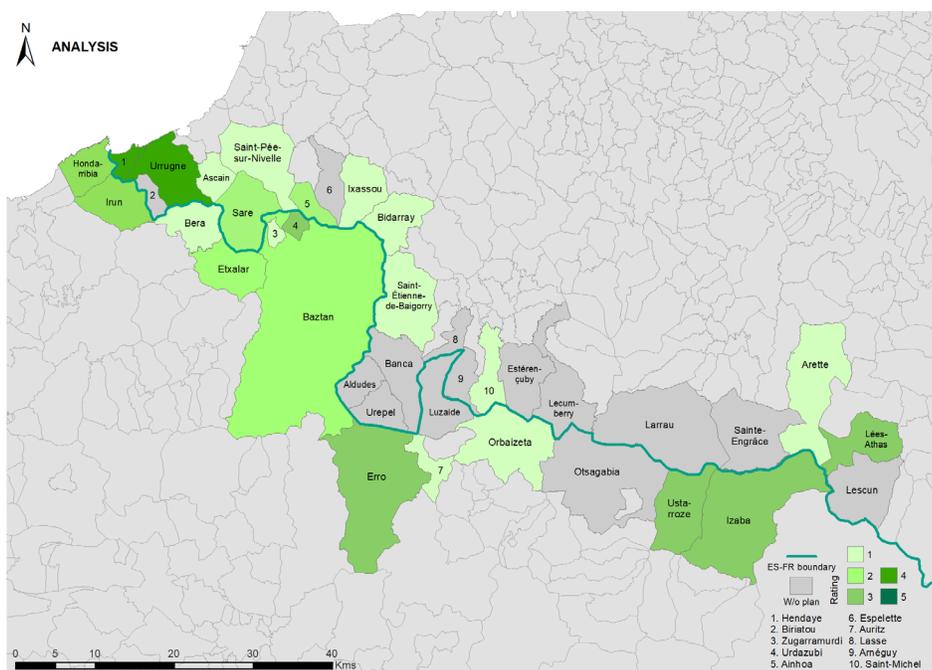
Lées-Athas PLU (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convert the Accous auditorium into a cross-border cultural space (p. 175). • Organization of tourism stakeholders in a cluster (p. 226). 	Culture Economy Tourism
Sare PLU (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design of a sustainable tourism development strategy at the cross-border pass of Lizarrieta (p. 8). 	Economy Tourism
Urdazubi PGM (1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote economic activity in the cross-border area of Dantzarinea (p. 43). • Improvement of international communication routes (p. 43). 	Economy Infrastructure
Urrugne PLU (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration in the development of a cross-border biodiversity conservation strategy and action plan (p. 65). • Creation of a cross-border sustainable mobility model (p. 136). • Development of a new commercial zone in Ibardin, a border area (p. 417). 	Economy Environment Mobility
Ustarroze PGM (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of educational programs (p. 55). • Promotion of cross-border tourism itineraries (p. 55). • Strengthening and development of road communications with France (p. 60). 	Economy Education Infrastructure Mobility Tourism

Source: created by the authors

Based on their evaluation according to the rubric, Figure 5, Figure 6 and Figure 7 show the evaluations obtained for each of the sections analyzed: analysis, diagnosis and prognosis. As shown, the western sector of the border (Gipuzkoa/Lapurdi) in this area receives, in general terms, more positive evaluations.

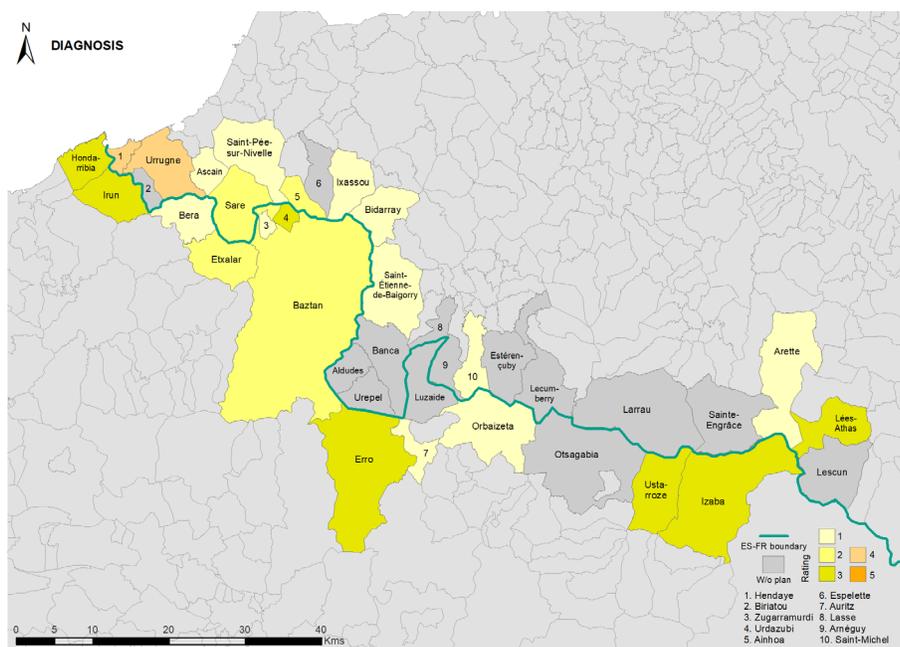
Within this framework, the spatial plans of Hendaye, Irun and Urrugne stand out, given that they obtained scores higher than three in any of the three variables studied. In the easternmost sector of the study area, the urban plans of Izaba, Lées-Athas and Ustarroze also stand out. The positive evaluation of these plans is explained by their constant attention to the border and the proposal of measures in different thematic areas, such as culture, economy (linked to tourism), education, infrastructures or mobility.

Figure 5. Classification of municipalities according to the evaluation obtained in the rubric for the analysis section



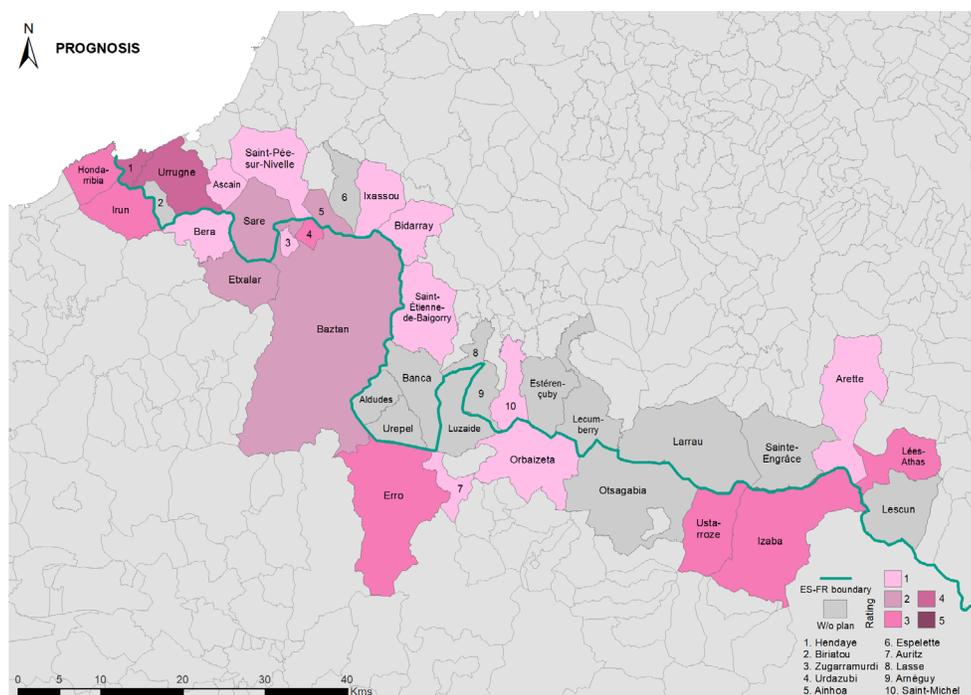
Source: created by the authors

Figure 6. Classification of municipalities according to the evaluation obtained in the rubric for the diagnostic section



Source: created by the authors

Figure 7. Classification of municipalities according to the evaluation obtained in the prognosis section of the rubric



Source: created by the authors

Discussion and conclusions

The results presented in this research show that spatial planning is still remarkably constrained by state rationales in a cross-border context. Thus, it can be affirmed that the persistence of the Spanish-French border and the role of the respective States are a brake on the processes of integration of the Basque territorial area, in this particular case concerning spatial planning. A case that exemplifies this phenomenon is the discrepancies identified between the Navarre Territorial Strategy and the Nouvelle-Aquitaine SRADDET.

Therefore, while Navarre's spatial planning is committed to linking up the territory through roads for automobiles, the Aquitaine side advocates the implementation of railroads. This lack of understanding concerning cross-border mobility also extends to local planning, as seen in the Irun PGOU.

A profound lack of coordination between the two sides of the border is therefore evident, which may ultimately cause the cross-border connection of the territory to be delayed indefinitely. This aligns with the views of Durand and Decoville (2018), who point to differences on the territorial aims to be achieved as one of the most common obstacles to cross-border spatial planning.

Regarding the results shown, it should be noted that the two intermediate-scale spatial plans for Navarre (Pyrenees of Navarre and Atlantic Navarre POTS) express the

same cross-border orientations. As observed, the evaluation of the area's tourist potential is literally proposed to achieve cross-border sustainable development, which is also aligned with the spatial planning of Navarre at NUTS 2 level.

Thus, it can be seen how, on occasions, intermediate-scale spatial plans transcribe the guidelines proposed by higher authorities without adapting to the specific characteristics of the area to be managed. Therefore, it is no longer just that regional spatial plans reiterate national state rationales, as noted in numerous investigations (Booth, 2015; Frank et al., 2017; Jacobs, 2014; Kessler & Helmig, 2007), but that these are reproduced at different administrative levels or scales.

This often leads to avoiding issues vital for spatial planning and searching for proposals on which it is easy to reach a consensus. As this research shows, the thematic spectrum of the initiatives proposed needs to be improved. Thus, in general terms, the most frequently repeated thematic areas are based on economic issues—mainly linked to tourism—and environmental issues, in which coordinated action is urged among the different actors to strengthen or preserve their specific characteristics.

This finding confirms the results of various authors, who point out that some of the measures taken in cross-border contexts are to promote environmental protection or the development of tourism (Frank et al., 2017; Guillermo-Ramírez & Nikolov, 2015). Nevertheless, no measures with a wider territorial impact are proposed, per Decoville and Durand's assertion (Wassenberg & Reitel, 2020, pp. 262-264). The development of strategic planning documents, advisory in nature, is chosen due to the lack of formal responsibility for formulating binding proposals from either side of the border (Caesar, 2017; Paül Carril, 2022).

Regardless of this assessment, it should be noted that the thematic areas vary slightly depending on the scale at which they are developed. Accordingly, this research shows that environmental proposals are mainly found in spatial plans at the NUTS 2 and intermediate scales or levels. The explanation for these divergences between planning scales is due to a question of responsibility, especially in the case of Basque and Navarre planning, where no environmental protection measures are proposed in the municipal plans studied.

According to García Morales (2013), Spanish legislation confers environmental powers on the State and the autonomous communities. Likewise, the economic nature of many of the measures proposed, especially in Navarre's municipal planning documents, supports the contention of Trillo Santamaría and Lois González (2014, p. 10), who point out that the Chartered Community of Navarre "links external action and territorial cooperation to the Department of Economy, which shows a special interest in attracting and managing European funds", especially those allocated to tourism.

Likewise, as far as urban planning is concerned, the results show that the geographical situation of the municipalities and their links—or lack thereof—to previous cross-border cooperation initiatives strongly influence the treatment of the border. In this respect, it is seen how the spatial plans of the western sector, in particular of Hendaye, Irun and Urrugne—municipalities included in the cross-border project of the Basque Eurocity Bayonne-Donostia—receive the best evaluations in each of the studied variables: analysis, diagnosis and prognosis. This factor indicates that this type of initiative contributes positively to a better approach to the border issue in the spatial plans of the different administrations embraced by the cross-border structure.

On the other hand, regarding the specific characteristics of identity in the study area, it should be noted that the spatial plans studied do not show a special interest

in this issue. Although proposals have been identified that may be linked to this—development of cross-border cultural events, promotion of the use of the languages of the region, or the development of educational exchange programs—these are not sufficiently clear to determine that there is an explicit interest in the promotion of Basque identity.

Only one of the 32 plans analyzed, the Hendaye PLU, takes a clear position along these lines, with the proposal to promote “the identity of the Basque territory, characterized by its way of life, heritage and culture” (Communauté d’Agglomération Pays Basque, 2020, p. 355). Thus, although researchers such as Bakry and Growe (2024) argue that the greater Basque country has strong cross-border cultural links, these do not translate directly into how spatial planning is approached.

In conclusion, this research shows that the nation-state and its rationale persist and meaningfully influence the spatial planning of border areas. This is shown in the issues addressed in the spatial plans and their advisory nature. After all, the figure of the nation-state plays an essential role in explaining why border regional or local administrations do not have formal powers that would allow the formulation of truly cross-border regional strategies. In the context discussed here, such constrictions are evident, and they also condition the treatment of identity issues in the greater Basque country.

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