Transborder Urban Complex in Latin America

Los complejos urbanos transfronterizos en América Latina

Haroldo Dilla Alfonso*

Abstract

The presence of cross-border urban areas is a sociological phenomenon that concerns Latin American borders. These settlements are the result of the activation of the flows of capital, goods and people through them and the formation of transborder corridors and regions. Based on a review of several previous theoretical positions, this paper discusses the validity of the conceptual definition of Transborder Urban Complex. Furthermore, it proposes a debate on a number of study variables that account for the nature of the systemic relationships between cities, including demographics, economics, politics, and social relations.

Keywords: cities, borderland, transborder, Latin America, unequal exchange.

Resumen

La presencia de manchas urbanas transfronterizas es un hecho sociológico en las fronteras latinoamericanas. Estas aglomeraciones son el producto de la activación de los flujos de capitales, bienes y personas a través de ellas, y de la formación de corredores y regiones transfronterizas. A partir de una recreación de algunos posicionamientos teóricos precedentes, este artículo discute la validez de una definición conceptual —complejos urbanos transfronterizos— y propone un debate en torno a una serie de variables de análisis que dan cuenta de la naturaleza de las relaciones entre las ciudades componentes desde la demografía, la economía, la política y las relaciones sociales.

Palabras clave: ciudades, fronteras, transfronterizo, América Latina, intercambio desigual.

Borders are increasingly becoming an urban issue. Based on geographic information and statistical processing, Sergio Peña (2008) counted the cities located within 50 km of any international border. This study documented 307 international borders and 985 cities around them. Europe, a highly urbanized continent with a high density of international borders, had 41% of these borders, followed by Africa and America.

The above statistics are not exact (even the author acknowledges omissions) and do not indicate a sociological reality)many cities are within 50 miles of a border without having a definite border vocation). However, they reveal an urban development situation in regions that, until half a century ago, were sparsely populated, with a

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* Universidad Arturo Prat, Chile, Instituto de Estudios Internacionales (INTE). Address: Vicente Huidoro 3600, Depto. 507B, Macui, Santiago de Chile, Chile. Email: hdillaalfonso@gmail.com

predominantly rural population and relegated by geopolitics to the rather unenviable title of the *ends of the country*.

The reason for this change is the prevailing trend of border development from geopolitical boundaries to spaces for social contact. According to Glassner and Blij (1980), the explanation is the transition from divergent relational systems to systems that are fundamentally convergent. Therefore, although they remain containment trenches for *the others*, borders have also become bridges through which goods, services, people, information and money flow. They have ceased to refer to an ending location and have become mediation centers. Furthermore, if needed, they adopt the political language in vogue, other *doors to the nation*.

Bob Jessop (2001), in a seminal article, focused attention on the territorial implications of these processes. He stated that the following three factors that are constantly in tension converge: the irrepressible vocation of capital to increase its value by spatial restructuring, the relativization of the international political order inherited from Westphalia, and the social and cultural interactions in communities. Consequently, according to Jessop, we witness the proliferation of cross-border regions involving de/reterritorialization, economic re-escalation, and the emergence of new spatial hierarchies in which cross-border urban areas play vital roles. We currently live in a time when these regions are no longer mere results of social practices or accumulation strategies but have become goals of public policies.

These urban areas that transcend boundaries and establish some types of conurbations that are more or less physically distant, but in complete functional agreement, are an indispensable characteristic of current border research. These areas imply the need for coordinated administrative and management actions)i.e., from the government(between the entities involved.

The main objective of the current paper is to propose a conceptualization of this urban phenomenon in Latin America. We have labeled this phenomenon as *Transborder Urban Complex* (TUC) and have defined it using six characteristics. The current aim is not to establish a definitive concept. Rather, we aim to contribute to an academic debate that has been intense and fruitful but overly focused on particular experiences such as the European, American and, most recently, East Asian experience.[1] Due to space constraints that prevent the extensive exploration of this debate (Kolossov, 2005; Anderson and Dowd, 1999; Perkman and Ngai Ling Sum, 2001; Leimbruger, 2005; Sohn, 2013 and 2014; Herzog and Sohn, 2014, among others), the present paper focuses on the beginnings of this debate. Specifically, in the nineties, European, US and Latin American scholars began discussing the systemic reality contained in the cities that were located, with close relationships, on both sides of the border lines.

Raising a latent discussion

The events of the nineties incited the belief that borders were an object of the past. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Union triggered

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[1] An explanation is in order. Latin American literature on the subject exists, some of which is quoted throughout the paper. However, the current academic research examines individual studies rather than attempting to make generalizations and conceptual constructs. This Latin American literature, however, is not particularly accessible, especially when generated from universities that are located in the provinces. In its favor, unlike American and European academia, which regularly constrains its references to the North Atlantic world and does not review the Spanish literature, the Latin American literature has shown a less parochial vocation.

integration projects in Europe, resulting in the Maastricht Treaty in 1993. Europe simultaneously flooded with resources and provided a long-term plan for integration programs such as EuroReg and PHARE, aiming to build a *Europe of the Regions* on the scars left from Westphalia.

In the New World, Mexicans, Americans and Canadians signed the largest free trade agreement in history, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). At the same time, the so-called Washington Consensus placed the notion of Open Regionalism on the table and integration projects with various characteristics were organized. In Asia, with the discreet thoroughness of their ancestral cultures, several states began testing the refunctionalization of international borders. The best example of this is SIJORI, which placed workforce and natural resources in Malaysia and Indonesia at the service of the robust economy of Singapore.

Academia was shaken by this attack on the order of nation states. Universities and *think tanks* funded academic programs to account for this phenomenon, resulting in a myriad of studies with different positions and different levels of theoretical density. Unfortunately, the studies of this intellectual moment were not the most sophisticated. Rather, they were the simplest pieces (or informative) that were strongly committed to neoliberal cosmopolitanism and lacked the gift of conjecture. One of the studies was written by Ohmae (1991), who openly synthesized a globaphilic discourse as a global system without winners or losers and a "...borderless world where each day it is increasingly difficult to determine what constitutes traditional national interests" (p. 197).

It is reasonable to believe that these positive political and academic contexts have been ideal for the proliferation of frameworks that stress border integration dynamics. In particular, attention has focused on the sociological phenomenon most affected by these processes, i.e., cities.

Europe was the origin of the boldest, and likely the least articulated, theoretical product, i.e., the concept of *binational cities*. Its architects, linked to the border studies center at the University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands and quite close to its border with Germany, based their assessment on the will of two cities located at the border (i.e., Kerkrade and Herzongenrath(to form a single governing body and adopt a new name, Eurode. The example of Eurode produced a few replicas (although more limited in scope) at the Polish/German and Belgian/Dutch borders, prompting scholars in Nijmegen to believe that they were in the presence of a generalizable political phenomenon.

However, the specific experience of Eurode was atypical. The two cities were a single historical reality, divided by a boundary that was dictated by European geopolitics but easily passable. There was considerable cultural homogeneity and an experience of political contacts that were increasing due to successful integration programs (Ehlers, 2001). Hence, the concept of *binational city* did not extend beyond the level of symptom description, as follows: "(…) cities `divided´ by a national border, that share a common hinterland, and whose inhabitants have a sense of belonging together" (Ehlers and Buursink, 2000, p. 189). The studies conducted on the subject by Dutch scholars have remained interesting theoretical contributions concerning the scope and limits of the subjective factors (e.g., discourse, identities, and symbolic resources(in the integration processes but less relevant in relation to other key variables that influence the behavior of urban areas that are located on the borders.

At the same time that Europeans began to question the implications of Eurode, various scholars were producing studies on the US-Mexico border. Several decades later, these studies remain as references that are essential, although controversial, for border studies.

Some of these studies focused on how the intensification of binational contacts was creating a new cross-border reality. These were solid academic studies that successfully avoided simple teleological approaches, in the style of the world-without-borders of Ohmae. However, they were animated in all cases by a certain organicist vocation that considered separation as a starting point and anticipated opening, miscegenation and biculturalism as characteristics that define an improving world. All of these scholars recognized the inequality and tension derived from it, but they determined that it was an additional phenomenon that could be mitigated by integration itself, without taking into account that asymmetry was essential for integration. The contact provided by every border obscured the other unavoidable characteristic, separation.

The best example of this trend is the invaluable anthropological studies that were conducted by Oscar Martinez (1994). Martinez considered that the binational border consisted of a heterogeneous series of regional links that were all exposed to what was called a "Transnational Milieu". This environment was characterized by a series of situations involving conflicts and their resolutions as well as coexistence and separation.

In an effort to organize the evidence and generalize from heterogeneity, Martinez built a series of *ideal types,* which have become concepts in subsequent scholarship. An example of these ideal types is the typology of border development stages, which is incomplete and flawed from the previously mentioned organicist perspective, in which the border moves from a primary stage of closure to a superior stage of opening. The generalization from heterogeneity is also evident in his fundamental classification of Mexicans, Mexican-Americans and Anglo-Americans into approximately three dozen types that, similar to the border itself, evolve from the nationalist closure to superior levels of miscegenation and transnational vocation. Of note, none of his studies distinguished between cross-border relations and transnational relations, two categories that are frequently switched over in the presentation for aesthetic rather than conceptual purposes.

Martinez explored several urban issues, and nearly all of his constructed types were of city dwellings. He presented the "Twin Cities" as "unified entities despite the division imposed by international limits" and as the quintessential "highly interdependent binational systems". However, he only used cities as references and did not pay particular attention to the problem of urban interaction at the border. He also paid little attention to the fact that four years before the publication of his book, the American scholar Lawrence Herzog (1990) published an essential book under the suggestive title "Where North Meets South".

Herzog performed the best and most comprehensive account to date of the transborder urban situation)understood as relational systems); thus, the book became a required reference point. However, he focused the analysis on Tijuana/San Diego, undoubtedly the paradigmatic case. From here, he developed a concept that has survived, associated with lively debates, to this day, i.e., *the transfrontier metropolis.* According to Herzog (1990), a border metropolis is:

[…] an urbanized area consisting of a US settlement to the north of the border and a Mexican settlement to the south. The urbanized area is fused into a single functional spatial domain that transcends the international border… functionally unified by common daily activities, shared natural resources and environmental features… and product and labor markets that overlap the political boundary (p. 139).

It was not a linear relationship. In his study, Herzog provided a detailed discussion of the disparities that are present in an unequal relationship. Furthermore, in the title of the book, the words "South" and "North" do not describe latitudes but socioeconomic conditions. From these disparities, he derived elements of "friction" and "fusion", which would subject cross-border relations to stress, progress and setbacks. The essential aspect of Herzog's analysis was the idea that "border towns have become so connected functionally that their futures are inevitably linked, regardless of whether national governments can establish formal procedures to influence border problems" (1990, p. 140).

However, it is clear that Herzog did not attempt to create a concept for analytical purposes, as this would have forced him to further characterize his "transfrontier metropolis". Rather, he simply filled a terminological vacuum with a vague term that was not adequate in the end. Tito Alegría discussed this inadequacy in several of his best writings.

In 1992, Alegría published *Urban development on the US-Mexico border*, a study in which he discussed important aspects of cross-border relations. He explicitly differentiated this concept from the transnational dimension. In many ways, this study is a seminal work in Latin American border studies, although his contributions have been more known than recognized because they have been incorporated as academic "common sense".

The strength of the book is a critique of cross-border relations from the viewpoints of political economy and urban geography, marked by inequality and asymmetry. Consequently, even if American authors consider the border as an opening, here it is emphasized (with reasonable pessimism) as a "selective line".

> Both processes, the complementary asymmetric relationship and the selective barrier, are forms of expression of the structural and more substantive elements that have marked the current character of the cities of the Mexican border; the contiguity of differences (p. 42).

Of note, the difference and asymmetry that Alegría described did not refer to contrasting situations, as was typical in the American production. Rather, they referred to relations that reinforced both characteristics. Consequently, they provide a suggestive turn to the meaning of 'binational urban subsystems" generated along the border line:

> […] the complementarities based on structural differences [the author noted] are intensified selectively and conflictually … The intensity arises from market mechanisms, the selection arises from both the regulation in the economic sphere as well as from policies translated into regulations; and conflict, from the confrontation of diverse interests included in two separate rules-regulations (p. 46).

However, it was not until the current century that Alegría (2000, 2008) articulated a specific criticism against "fusionist" approaches that had continued evolving following the studies mentioned[2]. Alegría focused his critical attention on the study of Herzog and particularly on the alleged existence of a "transfrontier metropolis" at the US-Mexico border. However, due to this strong focus, he stopped questioning any systemic feature in the urban settlements that he studied. Thus, he implicitly denied the strengths of his earlier study.

Basically, Alegría ruled out the existence of a "transfrontier metropolis" based on the following three situations that he considered to be vital: there was no single urban ecology, border markets were not integrated, and there were substantial differences in terms of land management and urban planning (2008). All of these factors led him to state the following:

> […] the intense interurban interaction between Tijuana and San Diego does not allow urban convergence because the differences between those cities depend on national conditions rather than local conditions … There will only be a border metropolis when the economies of both countries are less different and national regulations are less restrictive for cross-border interaction (pp. 161-162).

Alegría made several arguments about the primacy of a number of factors "strengthening" separation that hinders interaction or makes it a subordinate relationship that denounces asymmetrical interdependence as the axis of the binational relationship. However, there are fewer reasons to consider them to be fatal impediments to the formation and operation of cross-border urban systems.

The organicist systemic perspective)concerning sociological functionalism(, which curiously stimulated the two parties in dispute, is not a useful theoretical resource to approach the asymmetries and contradictions that determine the vast majority of the transborder urban conurbations accounted for by Peña (2008). Therefore, these urban systems can only be considered, recalling an accurate expression of Alejandro Grimson (2000), as relational systems based on conflict.

Of note, some of Alegría's main objections to the concept of *Transborder Metropolis* are easily identifiable in any city within a national space. Factors such as the diversity of social practices, the coexistence of different communication codes, market fragmentation, and even the lack of a single governance mechanism are visible in many contemporary cities. This does not result in questioning their status as cities; however, we must consider them in the diversity that is generated from the socio-spatial fragmentation.

On the other hand, none of the authors sufficiently took into account one dilemma proposed by Jessop (2001), i.e., the existence of a vital trend in border regions involving the denationalization of border regimes. Therefore, any assessment on sharing management responsibilities increasingly includes local actors, such as a

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[2] Some of them have been tantalizing pieces of great methodological rigor, such as the controversial article by Robert Alvarez (1995), who presents the US border anthropological studies as a paradigm. In addition, the collective book edited by Dear and Leclerc (2003) coined the term Bajalta California as an expression of an order of post-border cities. They also elicited other Latin American critical responses, such as those of Grimson (2000) and Vila (2000). Unfortunately, the available space and the specific focus of this article pose an obstacle to delving into this interesting deployment of disparate positions that interestingly never resulted in an explicit debate, which we would have welcomed.

number of non-state organizations that form networks that are related to issues such as the environment, human rights, markets and culture. A deeper look at this phenomenon does not lead us to validate the metropolitan notion of Herzog or the institutional void of Alegría.

As previously indicated, there was no debate on the topic, hindering a more sophisticated exchange. Nevertheless, border studies continued to describe binational urban areas, providing functional descriptions, and warnings about the need to consider transborder forms of spatial management for what was effectively a transborder phenomenon.

In order to continue advancing: notes for a methodology analysis

In previous articles, I proposed the term *transborder urban complexes* (TUC) (Dilla, 2008) to describe this phenomenon. The use of the word "*complex*" is sufficiently broad to indicate different levels of interactions and, therefore, systemic conformation. The word "*transborder*" indicates a relationship that specifically involves local or localized actors of the interacting communities. In other words, it is a flexible conceptual term that can conceptually cover a variety of specific conditions. However, beyond the purely terminological matter, the conceptualization of TUC is built on a series of six variables that may show different degrees of development for each specific experience. Therefore, the main response that we obtain from this discussion is not whether a pair of cities on a border is a TUC, but the extent to which and the way in which it is a TUC.

TUCS, therefore, are defined as complex and contradictory systems with the following quality indicators:

1. Sharing the same environment. For fundamental reasons, there must be geographical proximity between urban centers. This does not refer to adjacency (hence, the vagueness of the term "conurbation") but sufficient proximity to share the same environmental space and a series of natural resources that are vital to the cities. If we consider that many borders are defined by the misnamed *natural boundaries* that involve the established use of resources)e.g., water from rivers(, then we conclude that it is a matter of extreme importance. In some places (such as the rugged frontier that Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina and Uruguay share), it is an issue that has international connotations of strong media impact (Montenegro and Giménez, 2006; Bello, 2012).

I do not believe that it is possible to determine a table of proximities that ranks TUC. A few kilometers in villages that are separated by ridges is a crucial impediment to contact. However, at the US-Mexico border, this is an inviting neighborhood.

2. Different spatial configurations. A border town is exposed to as many brokerage roles as the spaces in which it is constituted; hence, its strong heterotopic implication. A city such as Arica, at Chile's border with Peru, is both a hinge that connects the economy of northern Chile to southern Peru and a commercial *entrepot.* According to Aranda, Oviedo and Corder (2010), these factors prepare the city to serve as a bridge between South Asia and the South American subregion. Even more complicated is the situation of the three-way confluence of Foz de Iguazu, Puerto Iguazu and Ciudad del

Este, a triple border where trade and geopolitics form a convoluted web of intrigue and media campaigns that Bello (2012) suggestively described.[3]

The conceptual framework that allows us to explain and provide a rationale for all of these mediations and spatial roles of border cities are transborder corridors. This phenomenon is defined as spatial hierarchical linkages in which cities serve as centers for the provision of services, goods, capital, and information in different quantities and different manners (Felix, Zepeda and Castro, 1996). In this sense, TUCs are particularly sensitive regions of these spatial linkages because they ensure the continuity of transborder corridors. The quantity and quality of these corridors depend on factors such as the type of interaction involved, the intensity of the flows, and the specific spatial physiognomy. However, there are two characteristics that are worth mentioning.

The first characteristic is that, although any border interaction involves various activities, the way in which these activities occur determines the character of the corridor. There are quite active corridors that fundamentally limit their activity to the flow of goods and specific political and cultural relations. Other corridors evolve into higher forms of interdependence that involve productive activities that are related to the transborder situation while, at the same time, promoting other non-economic flows. When the latter occurs, this signifies the existence of cross-border regions and TUCs with adequate roles (Dilla, 2007).

The second characteristic refers to the differences in spatial relationship that a transborder corridor or region provides for each of the cities. Typically, the poorest city in the TUC is more involved in cross-border relations because it experiences a type of colonization in favor of the dominant cities of the corridor and its twin in the TUC. Two examples are the Tijuana maquilas that supply leading technology industries in San Diego and Ciudad del Este as a supplier of cheap re-exported goods to the Brazilian subcontinent. Various investments flow to these cities, and they operate as privileged places of transactions, although only marginally of accumulation. By contrast, cities that are located on the strong side of the border consistently have more discrete border functions and operate as "factories" in a manner that is similar to European business bridges in mainland Asia.

For this reason, and because they are in contact with richer regions, weaker cities are typically more populated and offer an image of greater drive than the strongest part of the urban system. They also tend to be better able to mobilize their immediate *hinterlands*. Furthermore, unequal exchange (i.e., the net transfer of surplus product from one place to the other) is an inevitable quality of TUC.

3. Economic interdependence. The definition of this condition implies a relationship (ultimately) of mutual convenience that determines the material reproduction of the cities involved but does not define it *in toto*. That is, the economic interpenetration of the two cities is never absolute. Each city has activities that are related to the national reality and do not depend on cross-border relations. Thus, urban economies demonstrate an overlapping of different activities, but the primary activities of each city are derived from the relationship with the other.

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[3] Such overlapping of contradictory spaces in one place causes the border effect, as discussed by Bauman (2004), in which any attempt to give a single territorial meaning to conflicts is futile and "... the fences and palisades, rather than account for a fact are a statement of intent" (p. 116).

This is a complicated matter that has many nuances. Here, I discuss two such nuances.

The first consideration emphasizes the crucial difference between the urban relationship that is established based on large binational trade flows and based on the myriad of exchange networks and use of services that are characterized by informality and underreporting. The first type of relations are those that provide statistical visibility to the TUCs but offer little benefit in return for the occurrence of a number of negative externalities that arise from vehicular traffic, militarization, and the operation of gangsters on a large-scale. The second type of relations increases jobs, lowers the cost of consumption, and increases the establishment of binational social networks that have a substantial impact on local life.

This difference is crucial to understand some disparities that occur in border cities. For example, the Laredo/Nuevo Laredo urban system is the TUC with the greatest trade flows of the US/Mexico border and possibly of the world. Through their customs, there is a flow of slightly over 40% of the legal values that circulate through that border. However, they are very poor cities (Laredo is among the ten poorest cities in the United States) and have crime levels that are above those of other similar cities. Further south, in the Caribbean, Jimaní/Mal Passe is the main Dominican-Haitian land port, with 60% of the traffic. However, Jimaní is an incapacitated city and the poorest of the commercial ports of the border. It is a genuine non-place through which large trucks that stop at the public offices pass as quickly as possible. People do not go to Jimaní, they go through it.

An additional issue concerns the asymmetry of the relationship. Regardless of how unpleasant the finding of inequality between cities in close contact might be, it should be specified that this inequality is a condition of the economic relations between such cities worldwide. In other words, only at a certain level of inequality, border cities attempt stable and intense trade relations to the same extent that differential profit opportunities expand. Thus, although the economic relationship is based on "antagonistic material interests" (reminiscent of the appropriate expression of Wright (1994) on classes(, the less favored cities accept this situation when it implies chances of survival and marginal accumulation.

This does not imply that there are no opportunities for complementarities in relatively symmetrical relations. The city of Cúcuta in Colombia and the urban axis of San Antonio/Ureña/San Cristóbal form an urban sprawl of over one million people and serve as the location of the most important inland port in South America, with approximately 3000 million US dollars of goods exchanged legally. They constitute a typical TUC that is fueled by an active local trade in goods, services and labor, although the socioeconomic differences between them are not sufficiently acute to constitute a stable differential appeal.[4] Therefore, despite trade intensity and shared culture, economic relations typically do not extend beyond the commercial level and are subject to opportunistic variations due to political and currency exchange factors (Valero, 2002, 2008). This may occur in such a drastic manner that it causes the transfer of markets across the Tachira river, which serves as a "natural boundary".

This situation is in contrast to that existing in border areas of higher inequality, such as those shared by Mexico and the US; Haiti and the Dominican Republic; and Brazil and

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[4] Border relations in this region appear to be "symmetrical" and "balanced" such that Bitar (2011) rejected considering the existence of any unfair trade practice or negative representations of the *other*.

Paraguay. In these places, the economic relations have been established as an asymmetric constant that may exceed the strictly commercial basis. Specifically, the stronger country may take advantage of the differential gains of the weak country due to the lower cost of labor, flexibility of environmental controls, and tax exemptions, among other advantages.

Sohn (2014) found a similar situation in Europe at the axis shared by Basel, Geneva and Luxembourg but noted an interesting difference, i.e., the transformation of border spaces from "geo-economic models" to "territorial projects". Whereas the former models are based solely on the utilization of differential benefits, the latter projects involve heavy symbiotic loads, technology transfers and cooperation. Latin American readers may note that speaking of this second "ideal type" in our continent can be an exercise in excessive optimism. However, the intentions of this type can likely be found in continental cross-border interactions if we assume that they are trends rather than models.

4. Existence of intense primary social relations between the people of both cities. The life of any TUC, including those permeated by a xenophobic discourse in cases of societies that define themselves antithetically, is a conglomerate of crossings, exchanges and sharings. The Paraguayans of Ciudad del Este and Encarnación, Haitians of Ouanaminthe, and Nicaraguans of San Carlos use medical and educational services on the other side of the border with the same intensity that the inhabitants of Foz do Iguaçú, Los Chiles, Posadas and Dajabón delve into the cheapest markets of their border counterparts and eventually take advantage of recreational opportunities from more active and permissive cities than their own. The same is true of Americans who visit Tijuana every day to buy medicines without prescriptions, ride on gentle donkeys dressed as zebras, or partake in the drugs and cheap sex of Avenida Revolución.

These social practices reveal solidarity and selfish benefit calculations, although they are some of the most important sources of energy of a TUC. These are the practices that Oscar Martinez (1994, p. 60) noted when he described an identity dimension of "transnational border people", an admittedly controversial statement, but without which the TUC and the subjectivities that encourage and enable them to survive all contingencies, political and mercurial, cannot be explained.

Finally, I briefly address the relationship that may exist between the more active operation of a TUC and transborder cultural homogeneity. Most of the borders of Latin America are characterized by shared cultural traits and even the ripening of specific cultural profiles that strongly revalidate that axiom in which border people are more similar to each other than the inhabitants of the capitals that govern them.

There are historical cases in which the border regions struggled at some point to become independent nations or regions beyond the formed borders. This was the case, for example, of Tachira - Norte de Santander in Venezuela/Colombia, as reported by Bustamante (2004). Other cases inform us of ancient cultures that were artificially divided by colonial boundaries and now regain their identities and develop practices of paradiplomacy of highly symbolic and practical value, as in the case of the Aymara communities at the Chile/Bolivia border (Rouviere 2009; Aranda, G.C. Ovando, and A. Corder, 2010).

However, the empirical evidence suggests that although cultural homogeneity is a positive scenario, it is not sufficient to generate interactions that lead to TUC development.

Buursink (2001) discussed a paradigmatic example, the twin cities of Niagara located next to each other in the US and Canada. Both cities share similar life spans, the same language, the same resource (Niagara falls), and even a common appearance, combining "urbanized" sections. Muñoz (2008) described these cities as clean, fun and safe, with larger neighborhoods with visible signs of degradation. The author stated that they appear to be two perfect twin cities, but they are a couple living apart, simply because neither of the two cities achieves gains from contact with the other.

5. The perception of mutual need. Social interaction and the utilization of cross-border social practices do not imply, as sought by the definition of "binational cities", that the inhabitants of the TUCs have a "sense of belonging together" (Ehlers and Buursink, 2000, p. 189). Aiming for the residents of El Paso to feel part of the same complex as their Mexican neighbors from Ciudad Juarez seems to be a distant goal. What the inhabitants of either place certainly perceive, at least those who are engaged in the transborder culture, is that they are two communities that are linked by many ties that benefit both. That is, they perceive themselves as mutually indispensable.

De Jesús (2010) conducted a study on the Dominican border town of Dajabón. He found a type of stepwise rejection/acceptance of Haitians. Nearly all of the Dominicans who were interviewed wished to work with Haitians, which is a logical aspiration in a city whose prosperity is linked to trade with the neighboring city of Ouanaminthe. However, nearly none of these interviewees were willing to accept a Haitian person becoming part of the family. The options became more distant from acceptance as they approached intimacy. Conversely, they became distant from rejection as they approached pragmatic utilitarianism.

A crucial question was whether the Dominican people considered the relationship with the Haitian city to be beneficial, to which an overwhelming majority said yes. The same number of people reported that if these relationships were eliminated, Dajabón would be poorer. It is interesting to note that many of the people who declared to be in favor of maintaining and increasing cross-border relations, believed that Haitians were responsible for backwardness, taking away jobs and opportunities from Dominicans, and interested in invading the Dominican Republic. This is a perfect example of political schizophrenia as a result of the overlapping of a reality of successful exchanges, an incomplete border opening, and a racist and anti-Haitian discourse that is part of the dominant ideology.

At the Chile/Peru border, there are two cities that constitute a typical TUC, Arica and Tacna. This border was the result of a war that Peru and Bolivia lost. As a result of this loss, part of their territory was incorporated into the victorious Chile. The border has been organized on resentments of a "*pax castrense*" in the words of González (2006). However, this has not prevented the growth of the economic, social and cultural ties that shape everyday life in the two cities. When chauvinist winds have blown with force on the border region, the local actors (e.g., municipalities, civil society, and business groups(have explained that the problems between Lima and Santiago should be resolved without affecting the relationship that nourishes urban dynamics.

6. Construction of formal institutional relations, including the State and civil society. Finally, TUCs inevitably involve formal political and institutional relations that attempt

to accommodate a governance system that takes into account the duality. As the interaction of the variables listed above increases, the formal institutional interaction increases either from the states or from civil societies.

These relationships can be expressed in two main levels. The first level accounts for binational formalization and includes integration agreements, cooperative arrangements, or specific contacts around four key issues that govern any border, trade, migration, security and the environment. It is a necessary level to achieve a climate of understanding and predictability that every society requires.

Many border disputes, such as those now appearing at the Chile/Peru and Nicaragua/Costa-Rica borders, are problems that do not concern the border communities. Such communities attempt to maintain their levels of trade despite the conflict and are negatively affected by the conflict. Even when there are no explicit territorial disputes, regulatory and institutional gaps are not the best scenario for border development. One of the serious problems of the Dominican/Haitian border is that it exists even though there are no minimal binational arrangements. Therefore, intense trade and migration flows occur with institutional precariousness, which often erupt and create greater conflicts.

However, binational institutionalization is not a positive condition per se, particularly when it avoids the recognition of policy and regulatory arrangements and social practices of the second level, the local or properly cross-border level. When the legal and institutional formalization of boundaries occurs from the centralist and nationalist perspectives, TUCs are under pressure for closure and the establishment of limits that are as serious as those that occur when there is no institutional boundary. The history is well known and includes militarization, forbidding ancestral social practices, and disqualifications of "informal" economic exchanges. In a fascinating article on the Brazil/Argentina/Paraguay borders, Hector Jaquet (2008) vividly described the impact of MERCOSUR (the Southern Common Market), as follows:

> In connection with MERCOSUR, contrary to expectations, its implementation since 1991-94 did not bring the integration of peoples so much recited in treaties, but rather came to interrupt and add more conflict to a historical framework of relations between the inhabitants of both sides. The integration policies soon marked the existence of one MERCOSUR "from above" and "for those above" and another for those suffering "below". In terms of some Border Patrol agents, "An upper MERCOSUR" that would have benefited big business and transnational circuits, and "a lower MERCOSUR", which notably affected the peripheral border local populations (p. 57).

At the local level, TUCs tend to test governance formulas through local agreements that involve municipalities, decentralized state institutions and civil society. There are many experiences of that nature that warrant a specific study or concern the achievements and failures of attempts of cooperative planning and management, for example, at the US-Mexico border. Discussions of these attempts were compiled by Fuentes and Peña (2005). These experiences certainly show that TUCs have been active laboratories in what is currently called "paradiplomacy", even though the actors have not become fully aware of this situation.

Often, these approaches are much richer in functional procedures than in regulations. Therefore, an observer may not perceive that the process of interactions is much richer than the formal appearance. At the Dominican/Haitian border, despite the existence of

vast paraphernalia of cooperation institutions and protocols, the only binational spaces that have functioned in the past decade have been established by local authorities at the border. The existence of a Transborder Intermunicipal Committee seems to be more developed. This committee includes the municipalities in one of the most active parts of the border and has generated)with the support of international cooperation(several productive projects, employment, and the provision of technical services for both sides of the border.

Clearly, TUCs cannot be approached from the traditional political perspectives that Leresche and Saez (2004) called "topocratic" and that are based on the traditional view of a center and a periphery border and the perception of the latter as a filter and barrier for the *other*. Rather, as implied by Leresche and Saez (2004), an "adhocratic" vision of "Synaptic Governance" and the replacement (for these purposes) of the nationalist discourse with a discourse of shared local values are needed.

A subject for further discussion

The discussion thus far refers to attempts to conceptualize a growing sociological phenomenon, i.e., the urbanization of borders and the emergence of related clusters that tend to behave)with different success(as systems. This is what Herzog (1990) described as *border metropolis*; Peña (2008) called transborder *conurbations*; Valero (2004) described as *transborder cities*; and we refer to here as *transborder urban complexes.*

This conceptual discussion invites us to consider two reflections. First, we should examine the crucial issue of how to organize the cooperative management of the spaces and flows that are effectively shared and, therefore, are beyond the purely nationalist institutionalities and binational integration. This issue has a rather practical purpose in terms of the perception of local development to optimize the cost/benefit ratio of a cross-border relationship and shows ways to reach agreements and consensus in binational scenarios that range from latent hostility to rhetoric brotherhood.

Second, we should take the opportunity to lead a discussion on a comparative basis to place our continent in this specialized academic scenario, as it currently only appears as a footnote. Unfortunately, the discussions on border issues that prevail in the global academy are those that address the North Atlantic realities that rely on English references. It is the responsibility of our scholars and intellectuals to generate a qualified discussion that cannot be avoided. However, this goal requires an intellectual production with global outreach that avoids the nationalist and protectionist entrenchments of our specificities.

This paper presents an invitation to this debate. The proposal of Transborder Urban Complexes aims to provide a series of notes for an open methodology on an issue that involves the daily lives of millions of people on the continent. If the concept can endure unscathed, then it fails in its intentions.

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