

Chapter 3

Borders as a Space for Mobility, Cooperation, and Tourism: Dynamics, Resources, and Policies at the Central Portugal and Spain Border

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ABSTRACT

The border is framed as a political/administrative element, as a space of contact of cultures and geographies, as a line of separation and permeability, generator of mobilities of different scales. During the last decades, the Iberian border has experienced depopulation dynamics and socio-economic reorganisations that have transformed the ways of working, the models of social organisation, occupation, and land use. In this context of growing mobility, tourism has become an important activity for the border due to its ability to generate employment and foster economic and social development. The mobilization of natural and cultural resources assumes significance in the valorization of these spaces, in line with the current policies of cross-border cooperation promoted by the EU and the efforts of the two Iberian countries. The border between central Portugal and Spain is taken as a study object, highlighting the existing dynamics and forms of cooperation, given the heritage values, capable of generating new attractions and functions in the oldest European border.

INTRODUCTION

Borders can generally be understood as regions where economic and social life are directly and significantly affected by the proximity of an administrative division, whose political, financial and cultural differences imply territorial specificities and pose their own challenges to management. Borders, as political boundar-

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ies and contact zones, represent two basic implications: one refers to the material barrier effect through the creation of means of controlling border flows that can have immediate social and economic effects; a second is a result of the perception of the border based on historical features of identity and linguistic and cultural diversities, which in themselves generate differences and separation. Although a physical border may change its meaning and functions, the effects of immaterial barriers can persist in the form of imaginary barriers, embodying feelings and estrangement that penalise these spaces, requiring the construction of cooperative relationships (Lois & Caballo, 2015; Trigal, 2013). The control of the movement of people, goods and capital between states is the most relevant function of border management, accompanied by its assertion of sovereignty in terms of its administrative boundaries. The persistence of national borders has been based on the fact that they are crucial for the reproduction of territoriality and national identity narratives (Medeiros, 2010; Paasi & Prokkola, 2008). In this context, and considering a line that separates, divides and controls the existence of areas/territories on both sides of the border line, it implies that the effects disappear with distance, besides the emergence of new meanings and dynamics depending on their accessibility, resources held, forms of settlement and economic activities.

Tourism development is seen as an instrument for the diversification of economies in peripheral and often underdeveloped regions. From both nature and tourism perspectives, travel destinations should not be limited by political borders and these, because of their heritage and cultural hybridities, can represent destinations for visitation (Campesino & Jurado, 2014; Fernandes, 2014; Timothy, 2006; Trigal, 2005). There is a growing significance of tourism and leisure activities, due to the increase in mobility, cooperation and the dissemination of border resources and heritage, as well as the incorporation of technologies in the qualification and promotion of these territories. The creation of the Schengen space enhances and expands mobility, without border controls, generating positive effects on tourism and leisure activities among the citizens of colliding countries. These spaces present, due to their history and natural heritage, resources of great value, of which the international rivers, the classified natural areas, the castles and fortifications, the historical villages, the traditions and festivities, the gastronomy and the presence of different cultures stand out at the central Iberian border. Given this panorama, this chapter seeks in an articulated manner to reflect on the meaning of the border, considering the dynamics of formal and informal relationships around this line of territorial specificity. The border is framed as a political/administrative element, as a space of contact of cultures and geographies, as a line of separation and permeability, generator of mobilities of different scales, potentiated by the dimension of the border in the tourist process.

The Luso-Spanish border is taken as an object, in particular, the border between central Portugal and Spain, highlighting the existing dynamics and forms of cooperation for the construction of a space of resilience, given the existing constraints and heritage values, capable of generating new attractions and functions in the oldest European border.

THE BORDER: A COMPLEX, SYMBOLIC AND CHALLENGING CONSTRUCTION

The term “border” establishes the legal line of division between states, indicating their differentiation, a space in which cultures and policies generate tensions, in a dynamic relationship that requires its own measures and logics of governance. They represent fields of forces that oscillate between cooperation and conflict and draw a geographical space with distinct social and cultural values, according to their administrative and functional attributes, with a dynamic that recreates itself, generating, depending on

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