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Territories in transition: the Uruguayan–Brazilian border

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the process of territorial restructuring in the Uruguayan–Brazilian borderland with a focus on the Mirim Lagoon Basin, in the context of two main driving forces, regional integration and decentralizing reforms. The analysis considers three different scales: the integration blocs in South America, the concerted programs of Brazil and Uruguay for integration and development of the bi-national borderlands, and the sub-regional level where projects of infrastructure are carried out. The results of research reveal that the role of institutions has been crucial in identity formation, increase in exchanges and interactions of cross-border scope, and in the design of proposals of endogenous development, although there is still incipient connection between innovation and local initiatives. The essay concludes that there are contradicting goals among restructuring projects and challenges to be addressed particularly in terms of risks for the environment, management of natural resources, and processes of decision-making relative to the borderlands agenda.

KEYWORDS

Mirim Lagoon Basin; Territorial Restructuring; Regional Integration; Institutions; Development

INTRODUCTION

Territorial restructuring in Latin American borderlands is closely associated to regional integration and decentralization policies. This essay examines the process of territorial restructuring in the Uruguayan–Brazilian borderland. Based on theoretical contributions of studies on regional integration and endogenous development, territorial studies, analysis of identity formation, and role of institutions, it intends to explore the connections between restructuring through renewal of infrastructure and dynamics of regional integration and development.

In so doing, it considers three different scales: the regional integration blocs Mercosur and UNASUR, the Uruguayan–Brazilian borderlands, and a sub–regional trans–boundary area which is the focus of the analysis: the case of the Mirim Lagoon basin, a land especially affected by programs of territorial restructuring resulting from local demands as well as transcontinental projects framed in UNASUR's initiatives.

This essay is divided into five parts plus this introduction and the conclusions. The first section discusses the theoretical perspective of the research. The following section presents a general description of the borderland territory and the area of the Mirim Lagoon Basin. The third section considers the institutional dimension. Section four examines the proposals for development of infrastructure of IIR–SA and the Uruguayan–Brazilian New Agenda. The last section deals with the territorial restructuring projects in the Mirim Lagoon Basin.

1. THEORETICAL APPROACH

The territorial dimension is central in any attempt to understand the international economy. Paul Krugman (1994) argues that international economics could be treated as a

[...] special case of economic geography, one in which borders and the actions of sovereign governments play a special role in shaping the location of production ... countries both occupy and exist in space ... and if we want to understand differences in national growth rates, a good place to start is

by examining differences in regional growth; if we want to understand international specialization, a good place to start is with local specialization (Krugman, 1994, pp.1–3).

Therefore, spatial issues are crucial to understand market structures. This fact, overlooked by most international economists, is particularly important in the study of international trade. A second reason in Krugman's view, is that “the lines between international economics and regional economics are becoming blurred in some important cases” such as the EU.

In the discipline of International Relations, traditional Geopolitics made of territory the central issue of analysis of power politics and security challenges. Globalization introduced a different approach to the territorial dimension of international politics: the focus on market economy gave priority to the expansion of free trade. In the global age, territories have emerged as important actors in national and global politics (Keating, 2001, p.371). The conjunction of regionalism and decentralization introduced new dynamics in international relations with local powers and civil society actively involved in new spatial configurations. Territorial restructuring is a complex process taking place at different scales from global to local, as a response to economic, technological, political, and intellectual challenges. Regional development policy has been refocused and, consistently with a decentralized approach, it has emphasized the role of the regional or local levels, on the grounds that there is greater capacity for horizontal integration and better knowledge of the relevant problems. Keating remarks that there is a strong emphasis on institution building, particularly at the regional level in order to establish networks of cooperation and partnership (Keating, 2001, p.374).

From this approach, regions are more than topographical constructions: economic changes, demographic movements, political competition, and culture, are powerful factors of region–building and territorial identity. On the other hand, territorial identity is recognized as a precondition of territorial development within the framework of decentralization. Local development became an attractive prospect for the economic recovery of communities badly affected by the collapse of the model inherited from the industrial revo-

lution (Arocena, 2002, pp.6–11). A new emphasis on the “local initiative” as a means of creating social relations emerged. Arocena proposes a definition of “local” considering two main levels corresponding to a set of key elements: the socio-economic level is characterized by the fact that relations among groups are mainly of local nature, and systems of production and wealth are locally generated; the cultural level includes feelings of belonging, shared values, internalized norms, and collective identity. In local identity formation, territory is a most important factor, together with cultural accumulation. According to Arocena, (2002, pp.28–30), there is no successful process of local development without a strong component of identity which articulates and stimulates the potential for initiative of human groups.

The model of endogenous economic development has been most influential in Latin American territorial studies as well as on economic policy design. The central question it aims to address is the right way to autonomous local growth by means of increasing the number of enterprises and jobs, improving the access to external markets with better infrastructure and education, and broadening the opportunities to get financial support. Studies on regional and local development highlight the role of place and the interface local-global: place becomes a factor of production of public goods, following patterns of social relationships that allow a balance of competition and cooperation (Keating, 2001, p.373). However, location is not enough to qualify every undertaking as development projects: Keating points to the example of the growing business services sector which is often the result of large firms outsourcing these services rather than experiences of endogenous development.

Adrián Rodríguez (2010) explores the economic development of the Uruguayan borderlands with Brazil from the perspective of endogenous development: according to this approach, territory is not only a geographical space but the result of interactions among individuals, institutions, capacities and traditions. In this respect, the research agenda should focus on the organization of production within the territory, the interactions between urban and rural areas, and the economic interrelations between dynamics of innovation and competitiveness, and local economies. Spillover effects are the main evidence to identify endogenous development.

Keating admits that “public expenditure and employment are often the key factors in regional development” and that regional politics are still alive in the age of globalization. A “development coalition”, defined as an interclass alliance supporting economic development in a specific location, is one important condition for the success of development policies, although external factors are of vital importance as well (Keating, 2001, p.379).

In the construction of development coalitions, five factors are crucial: culture, institutions, leadership, social recruitment, and external relations. Cultural facts such as social norms and practices, territorial identity, and shared understandings may provide the basis for social consensus on development. However, identities change constantly as a result of both global and local factors (Lima and Moreira, 2009, p.6). Territorial identity understood as a system of ideas, images, memories and feelings shared by individuals and societies, is created in the collective process of uses and production (Linck, 2006, pp.135–139). However, local identity admits contradictory meanings, from idyllic narratives of the past to egalitarian visions of communities based on solidarity. Whereas the theory of modernization construed identity-based resistance as rejection of progress, projects for local development include the socio-cultural identity dimension as a condition for consensus (Gehlen, 2006, pp.269–271).

Institutions shape behavior and set the frame for choice between alternative courses of action. Furthermore, institutions are also arenas for debating policy preferences. Two aspects of the institutional structure of regions are important for the analysis in this essay: public-private relationships, and intergovernmental relations, particularly those resulting from the process of decentralization. Leadership is an important factor in development coalitions because it may produce “the discursive element in constructing the ‘imagined’ city or region, a symbolic realm in which identities can be formed” (Keating, 2001, p.14).

The social base of the development coalition is vital in definitions about the content of policies: the representation of social interests plays a decisive influence on policy-making: territorially-rooted business elites and workers organizations may prove to have a strong commitment to territorial

regeneration and environmental issues. Finally, external relations are increasingly involving regions and cities as actors.

Borders represent a specific case in territorial analysis. The fact that boundary definition is a result of state power, and borders became areas of conflict and construction of hegemony since the early stages of the nation state, settling the borderland and building roads to connect them to the center have been traditionally associated with ideas of "national interest", either to assert sovereign control or to expand the national territory (Lima and Moreira, 2009, p.10). In the case of the Uruguayan–Brazilian borderland, to trace the history of boundary conflicts requires to go back to the Portuguese–Spanish rivalry in South America from the 16th century to Independence, followed by a succession of wars and negotiations up to the definite arrangement of limits in 1909.

In Latin America, borderland identities formation is multifarious. With the emergence of the nation state, the association of territory and sovereignty meant that frontier defense, and preventing conflicts in the neighboring areas were goals of the utmost importance. However, this fact was coupled with poor enforcement of law. Additionally, the low priority assigned to borderlands in economic policies contributed to the collective assumption of borderlands as neglected territories. In fact, borders were perceived as peripheral areas in national economies in Latin American countries, except for Chile and the Caribbean, where the national territory is a border on the whole, and peripheral areas in public policies design, especially in the field of foreign policy (Kerr and Marques, 2015, p.110). However, once regional integration gained strength, borders became central, particularly for infrastructure planning.

On the other hand, the conjunction of global and local factors made possible a variety of cultural, social and economic interactions which explain the emergence of border identities transcending national boundaries. Historically, frontiers had been spaces of interactions, exchanges and conviviality. In porous frontiers, the intensity of exchanges gives way to identities of cross–border scope: the economy, culture, transport systems and communications are the basis for social units that develop a specific regional identity attached to the frontier territory, without contra-

dicting the respective national identities. Nevertheless, differences in legal systems, transit regulations, and ID cards, may cause identity problems, as it happens in the Uruguayan–Brazilian borderlands (Souza, 2014, p.39).

Two interrelated processes, regional integration and territorial decentralization, changed the significance of borders and led to new approaches to the design of policies for borderlands. As to the process of regional integration, neo–functionalist theories have strong explanatory value in the analysis of the Latin American experience, especially the works written by Joseph Nye (1987) who studied the case of Central American integration. Nye argues that the original neo–functionalist paradigm, elaborated by Haas and Schmitter in 1964, identified four process mechanisms of regional integration: inherent functional linkages of tasks, central to the notion of "spillover", and defining integration facts such as reduction of tariff barriers and coordination of road transport; rising transactions in trade, capital movement, communication; deliberate linkages and coalition formation; and elite socialization.

Subsequent work by various scholars (Linberg and Scheingold, 1970; Robson, 1968; Hazelwood, 1967) added three mechanisms that may arise from the creation of regional economic organizations: regional group formation, regional ideology and intensification of regional identity, and involvement of external actors in the process. According to Nye, the "ideological and identitive appeal" is an important force in the creation of regional economic organizations, and it explains why governments and social groups are ready to tolerate short–term losses (Nye, 1987, pp.64–75). Political responses to these seven mechanisms partly depend on a set of conditions that Nye refers to as the integrative potential. These conditions, which determine the strength of the ensuing process mechanisms are: symmetry or economic equality of units, elite value complementarity, existence of pluralism in modern associational groups, capacity of member states to adapt and respond, perceived equity of distribution of benefits, perceived external cogency, and low (or exportable) visible costs (Nye, 1987, pp.75–86).

The Latin American integration process from the 1960s onwards accorded a growing attention to borderlands. Fol-

Following the creation of Mercosur in 1991, borders were included in the agenda of the regional bloc leading to the creation in 2002 of a special work group: the *ad hoc group for borderland integration* (GAHIF). As a demonstration of spillover effects, integration policies gradually changed the role of borders, which received increasing attention, partly as a consequence of the emergence of infrastructure as priority in the agenda of integration following the foundation of UNASUR in 2008.

However, the intergovernmental character of Latin American integration implies the absence of supranational institutions, and consequently, the need of complex negotiations to get the agreements concluded in regional organisms, finally approved by the parliaments of the member states. Regional integration may conflict with national territorial policies, urban planning and regional or local development. In the case of IIRSA, several projects have been at the center of conflicts with civil society organizations as well as with state bodies involved in territorial restructuring.

2. A DESCRIPTION OF THE TERRITORY AND THE CASE OF THE MIRIM LAGOON BASIN

The Uruguayan–Brazilian borderland is a highly homogeneous territory which is a part of what is called the *Campanha gaucha* or *Pampa* in Brazil, and the neighboring Uruguayan area, characterized by similar conditions of soil, climate and natural resources and a common economic history. Regular interactions between peoples residing in the two countries have existed since the beginning of the colonial settlement. The absence of geographical obstacles to transit across this area made possible multiple social and economic exchanges and the existence of mixed families. Portuguese attempts to expand the sphere of influence up to the River Plate were resisted by Spain. Successive agreements on boundary definition were later carried out by Brazil and Uruguay, with a treaty of limits signed in 1851, later adjusted in 1909 (Kleinpenning, 1995, pp.108–110).

All the cities on the borderline are easily connected by means of bridges (Artigas and Quaraí, on the river Quaraí, and Rio Branco and Jaguarão, on the river Jaguarão) and

roads. In the cases of Rivera–Santana do Livramento, and Chuy–Chuí, there are in fact integrated cities divided by roads marking the bi–national borderline. Rural areas present a uniform landscape: it is the *pampa* extending from the South of Brazil to the South of Argentina, characterized by plains where horizons are occasionally cut by low hills (Marques and Oliveira, 2015, p.121).

Interactions between Brazilian and Uruguayan societies were made feasible by easy communication, despite the differences between Spanish and Portuguese languages: in the areas close to the borderline, “*portuñol*” is the *lingua franca*. Marriages and mixed families, and a common symbolic universe based on music, oral literature, food, *mate* and horse riding are the main elements of the borderland identity. In the Uruguayan–Brazilian borderland, twin–cities play a key role in the emergence of this kind of identity (Souza, 2014, p.39).

The notion of borders as *loci* of both integration and conflict is generally assumed in Latin American scholarship. Contradicting narratives on the legacy of slavery and the extinction of indigenous people coexist with shared values and habits. Identity in borderlands is an outcome of the social process, mental representations of reality, and symbolic materials. However, it is not a homogenous creation: there are in fact many local different profiles making borderland identity a heterogeneous reality in a context of geographic specificities even if the *Gaúcho* is recognized as the common mythical ancestor (Lima and Moreira, 2009, pp.52–53). Furthermore, in borderlands, identities are unstable. Facts as migrations, political and economic changes, affect social networks and feelings of belonging. Being borders “hybrid zones,” possibilities for cultural creation and identification are immense.

The economy, based on livestock rearing under colonial rule, has experienced since the last quarter of the 20th century the expansion of forestry and industrial agriculture, and the renewal of mining prospects: several decades after the momentum of gold mining had passed, a new interest for iron ore has been the object of a project led by Indian businessmen, however later abandoned in 2015.

Rodríguez’s studies (2010; 2013) find that the Uruguayan territory bordering Brazil is characterized by complex in–

teractions between rural and urban economies. Nevertheless, it shows a “fragmented development” because most of the non-competitive sectors have little capacity to generate local economic interrelations, and the few competitive sectors operate without connections with the local economy. There are three main production chains based on: rice, meat and wool, and forestry and wood. Other economic sectors in the rural area are: horticulture, small scale livestock rearing, beekeeping, and milk and dairy production. The main urban economic sectors are services and retailing. Biotechnology is the leading innovation sector but its impact in terms of spillover effects is still negligible.

As to the Brazilian bordering territory, there are analogies with the Uruguayan side. Even though the state of Rio Grande do Sul is considered one of the wealthiest states of Brazil, there is a sharp contrast between the northern and southern areas. According to the *Atlas Socioeconómico do Rio Grande do Sul*, in 2008 the state was the fourth economy in the country and it ranked third in terms of HDI (human development index). However, the southern territory bordering Uruguay presents several signs of stagnation (Menezes and Feijóo, 2011, p.175).

The economy of the South of Rio Grande suffered from the reduction of the industrial sector (which accounted for half of the state’s total industrial production in the beginning of the 20th century). In the first decade of the 21st century the economy was mainly based on livestock rearing and agriculture, with cattle and pig farming and irrigated rice production as the leading activities. Menezes and Feijóo point to the economic specialization in the primary sector, the low population density, the reduced size of the sub-regional market, and the absence of economies of agglomeration as the determinants of backwardness of the south of the state.

The goal of sustainable development inspired new initiatives which were intended to overcome economic stagnation in the South of Rio Grande. Two innovative projects, framed into the Clean Development Mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol, were related to promising economic sectors: electric power generation from biomass, and pig farming. Both sectors were firmly rooted in the traditional economy:

agriculture and livestock rearing. The first project, effected by the Camil Rice Mill Company in Rio Grande, helped reduce 28.53 emission of CO₂ using a method consisting of generating electric energy in the combustion of the rice chaff, so eliminating the potential effects of release of methane gas, which has a high global warming potential, resulting from decomposition of rice chaff. The second project, carried out by Master Agropecuaria had the aim of reducing greenhouse effect gases generally associated to pig farming, by means of the installation of an anaerobic biodigester in order to convert organic acids into biogas (Souza, Alvim and Santin, 2011, pp.310–315). The two projects successfully conciliated continuity in production and reduction of impacts on the environment through technological innovation. Their potential for territorial regeneration may be estimated in terms of jobs creation, retaining population in the area, improving environmental quality, and spillover effects as in the case of rice agriculture and generation of biomass energy. In the Uruguayan borderland, the expansion of wind power parks is the best examples of innovation.

Both sides of the border exhibit little advancement in endogenous development: interactions between rural and urban areas are very rare, and experiences of economic innovation have little impact on the local economy, except for the two cases in Rio Grande do Sul, previously discussed. There are new sectors as biotechnology in the Uruguayan department of Cerro Largo, and energy generation from alternative sources such as biomass or wind power which have great potential for the future but the effects have not yet been evaluated. The energy sector can play a leading role in projects of cross-border cooperation, in territories where there is an increasing demand of energy services. On the other hand, the expansion of forestry and industrial agriculture is a major disincentive to innovation and a powerful factor that favors the traditional economic sectors.

The Mirim Lagoon basin is a distinct unit in the borderland. Extending over Brazilian and Uruguayan territories united by a system of rivers and coastal lagoons, the Mirim Lagoon is the center of a territory situated between 31°54’18” and 34°24’51” South latitude, and between 53°02’27” and 55°22’10” West Longitude. The Gonzalo canal unites this lagoon with the Brazilian Dos Patos Lagoon which is linked to

the Atlantic Ocean by the Rio Grande (Achkar, Domínguez and Pesce, 2013, p.119). According to a FAO report, this is the second most important source of fresh water in South America, after Lake Titicaca (INIA, 2010).

Before the arrival of European colonizers, native inhabitants established a community of fishermen in the area, and were the first people to navigate from the Western coast of the Mirim lagoon toward the coast on the Atlantic Ocean, sailing along the route connecting both lagoons and the sea, as shown in maps of the 18th century.

The Mirim lagoon is made up of waters from the rivers Jaguarão, which marks the boundary between Brazil and Uruguay, Parao, San Luis, Tacuari and Cebollatí and its tributaries. Livestock rearing, mainly in the form of cattle farming, was the first economic activity organized in the territory. Farmers of Portuguese and Brazilian origin, as well as Uruguayan landowners settled on the area, on both sides of the borderline. The traditional condition of the farming business up to the mid-1900s was evidenced in the little interest shown in crossbreeding and techniques for increasing output: “less progressive entrepreneurial mentality” was the accepted explanation among local observers and academics (Kleinpennig, 1995, p.146).

In the 1970s rice agriculture became the main productive sector, based on Brazilian investment and technological transfers. Brazil is also the main market for exports. In the 1990s, forestry began to expand, and during the first decade of the 21st Century, soy agriculture coupled with agribusiness made its appearance in the area. Finally, urbanization with tourism purposes on the beaches of the Mirim Lagoon completes the picture of the regional economy.

The expansion of forestry, mainly in the shape of eucalyptus plantations, after the approval of the 1987 Forestry Promotion Law in Uruguay, was planned to secure the production of wood pulp for export and, eventually for a local paper industry. The area dedicated to forestry has expanded to the detriment of native woodland, with serious consequences in biodiversity decrease. Additionally, massive cutting down of native woodlands has caused fluvial erosion and severe impacts on the courses of several streams.

High degrees of air pollution in the twin cities of Rio Branco and Jaguarão, and the inland cities of Melo and Treinta y Tres are mainly originated in rice agro-industry as shown in a report dated 2008 (PNUMA/CLAES/DINAMA, 2008).

3. THE INSTITUTIONAL DIMENSION

Unlike Uruguay, Brazilian established a conceptual framework for policy formulation concerning the borderlands: this is the concept of *faixa de fronteira* included in Brazilian constitutions as early as 1934, even though this notion was already implicit in several projects from the 1850s on (Pucci, 2010, p.31). Subsequent constitutional reforms changed the extension of that area but the original criteria of measurement remained: a strip of land some kilometers wide from the borderline.

In consistency with the constitutional definition, a series of laws have established precise regulations on uses of land, property rights, industrial activities, trade, and residence rights, based on the idea of borders as priority areas for national security. The 6634 law of 1979 imposed the requirement of previous authorization from the National Security Council over activities in the *faixa de fronteira* such as construction of bridges, international roads, and airports, surveys on, and extraction of, mineral resources; colonization of territories; acquisition of property rights by foreigners in rural areas. However, some of these regulations have not been completely implemented (Pucci, 2010, pp.35–36). Additionally, several attempts to introduce a degree of flexibility in order to stimulate foreign investment have led to proposals to reform this law.

Differences between Brazilian federal system (Kugelmas, 2003) and Uruguayan centralism are frequently the cause of delays in decision-making. This fact explains the inter-governmental character of the institutional design for the management of border issues and cross-border cooperation. Regional and local governments of both countries form the network of organisms involved in proposals for the region.

The regional integration process in the 1960s set the foundations of the first efforts of bi-national cooperation for

the management of the Mirim Lagoon basin. In 1963, the governments of Brazil and Uruguay agreed to create the Bi-national Technical Commission of the Mirim Lagoon Basin. It was made up of delegates from various national states-bodies and representatives of local governments. This organism established from the beginning solid ties with the private sector, one of which most influential members was the Association of rice agriculturalists, whose representatives have been very pro-active as shown in the records of the Commission, held at the Ministry of Foreign Relations of Uruguay. In 1977, Brazil and Uruguay concluded a treaty for the development of the Mirim Lagoon Basin.

The institutional design laid in 1963 has lasted to the present. Its main bases have been: bi-national participation, multilevel representation (with representatives of national, regional and local authorities: the governor of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, the *intendentes* of the Uruguayan *departamentos*, heads of local councils), attendance of members of several governmental departments or ministries (foreign relations, economy, industry, energy, mining, social development, food and agriculture), and inclusion of members of civil society organizations, and the private sector. Participation of universities has steadily grown after 2002. Far from being in retreat, the State has been the leading protagonist in the institutional design and agenda setting, confirming Keating's argument on the strength of state power over public policies.

In the mid-1980s the Borders Committees emerged as new institutional actors. At first, they met rarely but their activities gradually increased and were channeled through a regular schedule of meetings. Their membership includes local authorities, social organizations and citizens to discuss a variety of problems including sewage, water resources management, air and water pollution, tourism and track traffic. Since 2002, with the approval of the New Agenda of Cooperation and Borderlands development by the governments of Brazil and Uruguay, regular meetings of six Borders Committees are held before the High Level Meeting (RAN) celebrated twice a year. In the period following 2002, the committee integrating the twin cities of Rio Branco (in Uruguay) and Jaguarão (in Brazil) actively involved themselves in debates and projects over issues concerning the Mirim Lagoon Basin.

Regional and local governments, the governor of the State of Rio Grande do Sul, *intendentes* of Uruguayan departments, the heads of municipal governments (*prefeitos* in Brazil, and *alcaldes* in Uruguay, after the decentralizing reform of 2010), the Legislative Assembly of the State of Rio Grande do Sul, and departmental *juntas* and local councils in Uruguay, form the institutional network involved in decision and implementation of measures for the region.

Although the agendas of the organisms described in above sometimes overlap, this institutional network offers room for participation of a number of social and state actors in demands and proposals, acting as the public arena. In fact, projects for territorial restructuring together with policies of identity and culture have been the most relevant issues in debates (MIDES, 2007, p.7).

The Uruguayan law of political decentralization and citizen participation, approved in February 2010, established elected municipal governments, and provided for the transfer of government competences and financial resources to the local authorities. Although the degree of municipal autonomy is limited, and the law incurs in several imprecisions and contradictions (Alvarado, 2014, pp.54-58) it has been considered as a step toward empowerment of local citizenship. Participation of local governments in bi-national institutions and their involvement in cross-border coordination of proposals and activities with their Brazilian counterparts are evidence of increasing autonomy and agency.

From the start, universities took a leading role in the process. The Uruguayan national Institution for Agricultural Research (INIA), participated together with FAO in a first scientific survey of the Mirim Lagoon Basin starting in 1967. It was framed into a project for sub-regional development which was jointly presented by Brazil, Uruguay and FAO. It included experimental agriculture with varieties of rice, fodder, and pasture (INIA, 2010).

In Brazil, the Federal University of Pelotas participated in relevant territorial restructuring projects and development studies. The *Agência de Desenvolvimento da Lagoa Mirim*, (ALM), created by decree of 26th of May 1994 as a center of reference linked to the University of Pelotas, is responsible

for the management of the works in the Lagoon, particularly the locks and dam of São Gonzalo and the *Distrito de Irrigação do Chasqueiro*. ALM also acts as an advisory body of the Brazilian delegation in the bi-national Commission. During the second Lula administration, (2006–2010) a newly founded state university UNIPAMPA settled in various cities near the borderline, one of which is Jaguarão. Soon after, the Uruguayan president José Mujica promoted a program for decentralization of university studies with the creation of a Center of Border Studies established in Melo.

4. SOUTH AMERICAN INTEGRATION AND NEW AGENDA OF BRAZIL AND URUGUAY

Latin American integration brought about a change of focus in public policies for borderlands with the adoption of new programs of territorial restructuring: Brazil approved of the national policy on territorial restructuring (PNOT), the national policy of regional development (PNDR), the Program for sustainable regional spaces (PROMESO), and the Program for the development of the borderland strip (PDDF) (Ker and Marques, 2015, p.111). In 2006, Uruguay and Brazil concluded an agreement for deeper integration in the energy sector, resulting in a line for hydroelectric energy transmission between Candiota in Rio Grande, and Melo in Uruguay. After 2010, both governments accorded strong support to programs of renewal energy: Wind power parks began to expand in the borderlands.

Development of infrastructure to strengthen regional integration was a concern in the early years of Mercosur but it was after the creation of a South American bloc when infrastructure became a top priority in integration policy. IIRSA was created in 2000, at a South American summit convened by the Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso in Brasilia, to discuss an ambitious program of construction of new roads connecting isolated regions with ports mainly on the Pacific, but also on the Caribbean coast. The Brazilian initiative was based on the joint effort of government agencies and financial international institutions.

Despite the presidential agreement on the initiative general goals, to reach a consensus about the specific projects, and

the means to implement them, was not easy. The presidential summit in Cuzco in 2004 approved the implementation agenda of a list of 31 projects, together with the creation of a South American Community of Nations. The plan for implementing the agenda in the period 2005–2010 was based on the category of “axes of integration and development” defined as transnational territorial strips of land encompassing natural spaces, human settlements, productive areas, and trade movement, where investment in infrastructure could help create better opportunities for sustainable development (Mellado and Alí, 2011, p.57).

The Mirim Lagoon Basin was included in the axis “Mercosur–Chile” which contained several Brazilian states, the Republic of Uruguay, Argentinian provinces, and the center of Chile: the inter-oceanic route was expected to make feasible linking the Brazilian ports on the Atlantic and Valparaiso.

The Mercosur–Chile Axis comprehends several projects concerning the Mirim Lagoon Basin: improvement of the way Rio Branco–Montevideo–Colonia–Nueva Palmira, construction of an international bridge over the river Jaguarão, rehabilitation of the Rio Branco–Montevideo railway, and reconditioning of the section of road nº 26 from Rio Branco to the border with Argentina.

After the foundation of UNASUR the 23rd of May, 2008, IIRSA was reformulated under the supervision of the South American Council for Infrastructure and Planning (COSIPLAN), a body presided over by the ministers of infrastructure of the twelve state members, and created at the presidential summit of August 2009 in Quito. Roads, harbors and hydroelectric plants became the object of most of the ongoing projects. Under the direction of COSIPLAN, the financial support from CAF, BID and FONPLATA diminished while that of BNDES increased. Later on, Chinese capitals entered the South American scene, attracted by projects designed for regions rich in copper.

Table 1. IIRSA Projects from 2004 to 2015

Year	2004	2014	2015
N° of projects	335	579	593
Budget in US\$	37.000.000	163.000.000	182.000.000

Source: Own elaboration based on data from COSIPLAN, Cartera de Proyectos, in: www.iirsa.org/Page/Detail?menultemId=32

By the end of 2015, IIRSA showed an impressive result of 106 projects concluded amounting to US\$ 20.000.000 and 176 projects at work amounting to US\$ 74.000.000. A third of the investment was destined to hydroelectric energy with new plants and dams.

Some IIRSA projects (particularly hydroelectric plants and roads) encountered resistance from several civil society organizations in South America. Indigenous movements and peasant organizations were particularly decided to defend their property rights of land against the construction of dams required by the construction of hydroelectric plants; environmentalist associations denounced the risks for biodiversity and the quality of water resources; other protests were originated in the defense of particular productive sectors as in the case of fishermen who alerted against the possible extinction of fisheries in rivers and lagoons.

Soon after the launching of IIRSA, the governments of Brazil and Uruguay reached a bilateral agreement on the issues to be included in what they called "The New Agenda of Cooperation and Borderland's Development." The first result of these efforts was the approval in 2002 of an agreement of permission of residence, study and work for borderlands inhabitants. This measure helped strengthen economic and social relations between the communities residing on the frontier area. The creation of the Structural Convergence Fund of Mercosur (FOCEM) at the summit held in December 2005 was an important measure because it secured financial support for projects dealing with issues of cross-border cooperation.

In the period 2010–2015, the workings of the Ministries of Foreign Relations of Brazil and Uruguay gained dynamism. In successive meetings Presidents José Mujica and Dilma Rousseff agreed on the creation of a bilateral commission on strategic planning and integration of productive sectors (Brazil, 2010).

The projects of high priority for the strategic association between Brazil and Uruguay were: a deep sea port to be built on the Atlantic coast of Uruguay, the waterway across the lagoons Mirim and Dos Patos, and two bridges on river Jaguarão. In the area of energy, priority was given to a project for electric inter-connection which would be car-

ried out by the state-owned companies UTE (in Uruguay) and ELECTROBRAS (in Brazil). A project for sanitation in the twin towns of Aceguá (in Brazil) and Aceguá (in Uruguay) confronted an old problem affecting people's lives. Works to implement this project started in 2012 and were carried out by the state-owned companies OSE (in Uruguay) and CORSAN (in Brazil).

The projected waterway of Mirim and Dos Patos lagoons included a system of navigation for transport of goods and passengers, and works for improvement of port *La Charqueada*, near the mouth of river Cebollati in the Mirim lagoon. The agreement to start surveys on the feasibility of this plan was signed by the presidents in July 2010 (Uruguay, 2010). A Technical Secretariat was created to coordinate works and activities such as dredging the bed of rivers and canals, set the rules of navigation and carry out surveys.

Additionally, two projects for the neighboring area were the construction of a new bridge over the river Jaguarão and restoration works of the bridge Mauá, inaugurated in 1930 and connecting the twin cities of Rio Branco and Jaguarão. Several projects in the New Agenda are part of the IIRSA portfolio as shown in Table 2. (estava in the table below:)

However, some projects emerged from initiatives advanced long time before, as in the cases of the railway connecting Montevideo–Rivera, pending from the times of the old British Company of North Eastern Railways (nationalized in 1947), or the system of navigation of the lagoons whose first precedent goes back to the pre-Columbian period.

5. TERRITORIAL RESTRUCTURING IN THE MIRIM LAGOON BASIN

The institutional framework already described made easy bi-national coordination. The growing links among universities of both countries have added applied knowledge and informed advisory to government agencies as it happened with ALM–UFPEL.

The Uruguayan strategy was based on a diagnosis that identified several critical situations such as reduction of

Table 2. New Agenda and IIRSA-COSIPLAN portfolios compared

Projects	IIRSA-COSIPLAN	NEW AGENDA 2002
Ports	La Charqueada Tacuarí Atlantic coast	La Charqueada Tacuarí Atlantic coast
Bridges	New bridge on the river Jaguarão	New bridge on the river Jaguarão Restoration of bridge Mauá
Routes	Route 26 (axis Chile-Mercosur)	
Railways	Rivera-Livramento junction Rio Branco	Rivera-Livramento Junction
Sanitation	Aceguá-Aceguá	Aceguá-Aceguá
Energy	Two small hydroelectric plants on river Jaguarão	

Source: Own elaboration based on data from COSIPLAN and the Brazil-Uruguay Joint Communiqué (2010), available in: Brazil, Ministério das Relações Exteriores, Atos assinados por ocasião da visita do Presidente do Uruguai José Mujica 29 de março.

horticultural production and family-run farms, soil erosion caused by technology associated with soy agriculture, expansion of forestry at the expense of agriculture, loss in the output of fresh water fishery, and roads deteriorated by heavy transport mainly due to export of wood.

The main guidelines for territorial regeneration in the government strategy recommended to establish areas of preferential use for productive activities according to criteria of sustainable development and by means of specific incentives; promote and protect family-run production units; encourage soil and water conservation preventing erosion, desertification, and pollution, considering the vulnerability of ecosystems of the area; adopt different territorial scales for the coexistence of transgenic, conventional, and organic cultures, establish clearly defined areas apt for forestry, to minimize undesirable impacts of infrastructure projects (such as bridges and ports for the waterway) in order to protect agricultural production, tourism, and quality of life (MVOTMA, 2013, pp.38-45).

The rationale behind each project refers to a set of different priorities. While the two ports projected on the Uruguayan coast of the Mirim Lagoon are integral to the waterway design, which in turn is firmly rooted in the sub-regional economy, the project of deep sea port is aimed at creating a maritime hub for big shipping companies with facilities for container transport and also for passenger traffic: the new port would make part of the transcontinental corridor

Mercosur-Chile uniting the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans. The second bridge over the river Jaguarão is necessary to link route 26 in Uruguay with Brazilian routes thus completing another section of the Mercosur-Chile axis. The projected railways connection in Rivera-Santana do Livramento and Rio Branco is mainly related to the needs of local and cross-border transport of goods. The same logic lies behind the proposal of hydroelectric plants near the Mirim Lagoon. Finally, sanitation of Aceguá-Aceguá responds to a long-lasting social demand in one of the poorest areas in the bi-national borderland: in this case, the main goal is social inclusion improving life conditions and health. As to the projected works of restoration of the bridge Mauá over the river Jaguarão, they address a question of deep identitive appeal for the population of the twin cities.

The expected results of the waterway, and to a lesser scale, that of the railways junctions, would be a reduction in costs of maintenance and repairing of roads presently used for transport of heavy goods as wood. Also an increase of regional exchanges could stimulate endogenous development.

As to feasibility, there are sharp contrasts among projects. The case of the deep sea port is the most problematic: plans for expanding Argentinean and Brazilian ports on the Atlantic coast would cause the projected new port to become superfluous. Additionally, funding depends heavily on IIRSA and its investment priorities.

Social reception of projects for the Mirim Lagoon Basin has been a mix of resistance and agreement. Some measures are acceptable for local societies because they respond to previous common expectations as easy transit across the borderline, facilities for trade, permissions of work and study. The necessary role of the state in promoting family-run agriculture, preserving environment, providing services, and offering education is generally agreed with. Nevertheless, projects as the second bridge over the river Jaguarão and the port in the mouth of river Tacuarí have raised several protests and demonstrations. A local group, *Amigos de la Laguna Merín*, carried out a campaign against both initiatives on the grounds of alleged negative environmental impacts. As for the projected deep sea port, it confronted strong opposition both from local communities and businessmen investing in tourism, so that the Uruguayan government decided in 2015 to withdraw the idea.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The case examined in this essay illustrates the complexities of territorial restructuring in borderlands, partly resulting from the specific condition of borders as territories whose definition is strictly dependent on the action of the State, and as areas of conflict and unstable identity. Furthermore, the interrelation of territorial decentralization and regional integration has added a new significance to borderlands that transcends the traditional idea of boundary or borderline, and changed the approach in policy-design with a new focus on regional identity. This essay explains this transition examining a section of the Uruguayan-Brazilian frontier, the Mirim Lagoon basin, as the result of a combination of internal and external factors: while decentralizing reforms have introduced dynamics of participation in local politics, the process of integration leading to the organization of regional blocs as Mercosur and Unasur has increased the demand for the renewal of infrastructure, new spatial configurations, and local economic growth with strategies of endogenous development. However, in the international perspective, globalization, in Krugman's words, has blurred the lines between international and regional economies so that international financial flows and investments are intended to expanding free trade and opening transocean-

ic and transcontinental routes toward a different spatial configuration.

The analysis of the interplay among territorial identities, local demands, and intergovernmental relations set the framework for understanding the role of decentralization, participation of civil society, proposals for local development, and development coalitions. In this process, institutions emerge as public arenas where public-private relations take place. The converging processes of regional integration and decentralizing reforms have been determinant in the construction of an institutional architecture based upon local governments and bi-national organisms, as well as in an agenda of cross-border cooperation.

Besides, regional integration and decentralization have been crucial for the transition of borderlands from neglect and isolation to high priority in projects for sub-regional development and territorial restructuring. The system of bi-national institutions created the framework for the emergence of local leadership and agency. The main challenges are associated with the low degree of connection between innovation and local economies, as well as the negative impacts on the environment, biodiversity and management of natural resources. Additionally, shortcomings in the construction of development coalitions may cause the failure of the model of local development.

Finally, dilemmas between endogenous development and insertion in global circuits of trade and investment lie behind contradictions among projects of new infrastructure as seen in the case of the deep sea port, finally abandoned, and projects intended to respond to local demands.

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ACRONYMS

ALM – Agência da Lagoa Mirim

BID – Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo

BNDES – Banco Nacional do Desenvolvimento

CAF – Corporación Andina de Fomento

COSIPLAN – Consejo Sudamericano para Infraestructura y Planeación

FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization (ONU)

FONPLATA – Fondo Financiero para el Desarrollo de la Cuenca del Plata

GAHIF – Grupo Ad Hoc de Integración Fronteriza

IIRSA – Iniciativa para la Integración de la infraestructura Regional Sudamericana

MIDES – Ministerio de Desarrollo Social

RAN – Reunión de Alto Nivel

UNASUR – Unión de Naciones Suramericanas