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Notes for a Discussion on Latin American Cross-Border Regions

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ABSTRACT

One of the most significant outcomes of the neoliberal globalization – and of its consequent relativization of borderland spaces – has been the emergence of cross-border regions. These regions constitute complex spaces that operate as locus for capital appreciation based on the exploitation of differential advantages and unequal exchanges. This paper acknowledges the multi-dimensional nature of such territorialities and goes on to suggest a preliminary typology of cross-border situations in Latin America, based on the economic scales on which these regions are fundamentally constituted. We suggest four types of regions – consuetudinary, self-contained, corridors and globalized – which are described as territorial overlapping and multidimensional space–time assemblies. Lastly, the article raises the need for further research on spatiality, development and governance of these space/time assemblies.

KEYWORDS

Regions; borders; Latin American; cross-border urban complexes

Introduction

Although regions have been considered a fact of world geography going back to the beginning of human activity, it is generally acknowledged that we must always refer to them as historical situations. This is evidenced in the emergence of regions under the umbrella of the capitalist system. During the Fordist accumulation regime – nationalist, with strong regulation by the state – the regions turned into centrally planned parcels of land spaces. These spaces were conflictive and subject to entropic and synergetic intertwining, yet with a defined hierarchical order and predictable itineraries. By contrast, the current stage of neoliberal¹ globalization not only intensifies the regionalization processes (due to the relativization of scales that Jessop 2001, noted earlier), but makes them more complex.

Consequently, we can address the issue from an operational definition that describes regions as space–time assemblies “... unified and distinguished by the density of linkages and flows within them relative to those outside” (Agnew 2018). However, we must stop just at this point, at least briefly, because of some essential questions that account for particularly complex contexts, in which the structuring of dimensions and scales is shown as a sort of fluid palimpsest with multiple contaminations.

Over a decade ago, Jessop, Brenner, and Jones (2008) and more recently Jessop (2018) proposed a heuristic instrument for the analytical dissection of complex regions from four constitutive dimensions: politicized territory, places, scales and networks (TPSN), whose conjunction would allow “... a more systematic recognition of polymorphy – organization of sociospatial relations in multiple forms and dimensions in sociospatial theory” (390). The proposal broke away from rigid, monofaceted descriptions and attempted instead a holistic approach based on the recognition of the existence of different factors and emphases depending on the modality of space/time arrangements, so that the “... crises of accumulation and regulation can be explored in terms of the growing disjunction among historically specific institutional manifestations of these four sociospatial dimensions as a basis for the structured coherence of capitalism” (397).

These proposals hint at a rich debate that offers first-rate methodological resources for research on the nature of contemporary regions. However, we must admit that the flexibilities implicit in them – resulting not only from the complexity of the subject, but also from the theoretical indeterminacy of a phenomenon in transition – may lead to a methodological relativism as negative as the hieratic determinisms being criticized, especially in reference to the role of economic factors.

The multidimensionality of regionalization processes has put on the agenda several extra-economic factors – political orders, cultural traditions and identities – which are relevant in the production and reproduction of social and power relations. It is also necessary to acknowledge that at certain moments these non-economic factors prevail over economic factors proper. That is the case of what we shall call “consuetudinary regions” further on. Also, in this interaction, capital and markets play determining roles in territorial configurations and for reasons already mentioned these roles become more relevant in neoliberal regimes. Contemporary regions usually constitute territorialities anchored in what Harvey (2014, 348) has called “the structured coherence of production and consumption,”² which “ultimately” turns out to be the basis of “material coherence,” as described by Jones and Woods (2015). Thus, save for exceptional cases, regional studies cannot ignore the analysis of such economic conditions – expressed in hierarchical scales – as the existence and strength of clusters and chains of value that intercross them.

The focus of this article is the emergence and existence of cross-border regions (CBRs) in Latin America. In a seminal study, focused on Asia and Europe, Perkmann and Sum (2001, 3) succinctly defined CBRs as “... territorial unit(s) that comprise contiguous sub-national units from two or more national states.”³ There are numerous studies that explain the formation of CBRs at world level, and even propose typologies, as was the early case of Jessop (2001), who addressed the European experience. No less relevant is the production of analyses in Latin America from particular matters such as borders regimes (Dilla and Hansen 2019), formal and informal practices combinations (Machado de Olivera 2005) or density of cross-border contacts (Brazil, Ministério da Integração Nacional 2005). Our proposal is therefore part of an existing production and theoretical debate. What is new is that it suggests a classification of the Latin American CBRs – not only for the borderland zones anchored on part of the borders, but for the whole of the regional cross-border zones – and does so with an approach – the dominant economic scale – that has an organizing effect on the rest of the variables. As this is also a very dynamic variable it should increase its heuristic value as the “bioceanic corridors” that connect the continental economy with the dynamic Pacific Basin develop further, and borders become new

places for capital appreciation and for the articulation of a “geopolitics of discontinuity” (Herrera 2019).

The readers may note that we often use the term “border situations.” The reason for this is methodological: ours is a proposal for “constructed types” by means of the comparison of cases through their differences (Neiman and Quaranta 2006). This type of exercise always subordinates complexity, albeit assuming it as the starting point for generalizations, comparisons and predictions (Velasco 2001). The term *situations* seeks to relativize *types* and to account for complex realities that imply the coexistence and interaction of different scales in the same spaces, which may be described as “overlapping territorialities” (Agnew and Oslender 2010), even if they can be defined from the economic scale variable.

Finally, the article is underpinned by field studies carried out by the authors in several Latin American border situations, in particular, Projects FONDECYT / Chile 1150812 and 1190133, as well as by the review of the existing specialized literature on the subject.

Cross-Border Regionalization

As noted before, one of the most interesting and least known regionalization modalities in post-Fordist capitalism is that of the cross-border region (CBR), as defined by Perkmann and Sum (2001). These regions appear under very different circumstances – hence their multidimensional and multiscale forms – but today their appearance is linked to two contexts of power asymmetry: the first one, between two or more dissimilar national territorialities, and the second one, between capital and territorialized factors. Thus, the borders are considered as resources either because of differences in price, their spillover of flows, or the socio-cultural hybridizations that create a frame that is more favorable to business (Sohn 2018).

The emergence of CBRs can only be understood in terms of a radical change in the function of contemporary international borders. Until the end of the twentieth century, due to geopolitical reasons and reasons derived from the economic regimes, borders were control and separation mechanisms, symbolized by checkpoints swarming with surly-looking soldiers and customs and immigration officers. Their controlling functions – economic, sanitary, ideological, political, etc. – were exercised in relation to other national states/societies and had a strong protectionist bent. Border areas were mechanisms for the geopolitical management of the contact/separation binary opposition. The eventual emergence of crossing points for people or goods made them become “non-places” (Augé 1992) to get away from as soon as possible, which fail to evoke any sense of relation or identification.

Contemporary borders do not escape this dilemma, and considerable sections of them are still governed by the strict rules of classical geopolitics. But the distinctive sign of contemporary border divisions is not a wall, but the disciplinarian filter, suggested by Kearney (2008), with specific reference to human mobility. Every border, he says, has two essential classifying missions: one that catalogues according to the ethnic-cultural dimension, and other that focuses on class. Both classifications reinforce each other, which the author assumes as an anthropological reinterpretation of Marx’s theory of value. “Accordingly,” states Kearney, M. (81), “the border policies and practices of a nation-state can be considered as a resource to obtain a net flow of economic value across its border into its territory by means of classification in the two senses noted here.”

In this regard, CBRs become a specific form of time–space solution that maximizes capitalist profitability by incorporating to the accumulation territories that had so far been marginal because of geopolitical or economy of scale reasons. On doing so, they generate unprecedented opportunities to reduce costs through the use of price differentials. But, above all, they create what Lefebvre (2013) called “appropriate places” for accumulation. The difference with the classical procedure is that that they do so by separating the locations of production relations from the locations of reproduction relations, which relieves the former from part of the costs of the latter.

CBRs – and the cities that articulate them⁴ – operate as neoliberal institutional laboratories (Brenner and Theodore 2002) and filters to guarantee uneven exchange processes (Kearney 2008, 81) under conditions of additional complexity. From these conflicting collisions, border filters turn workers into aliens, merchandise into contraband and cultures into folklore. Cross-border territorialities become what Balibar (2013) called “subordinate sacrifice zones,” crucial for accumulation on different scales.

Latin America is no exception in this sense. The strict geopolitical boundaries that characterized the first half of the twentieth century have been yielding space to more flexible limits resulting from the flows of people, goods and information. Also here, as we shall see below, CBRs emerge as a fact of the continental geography. But unlike other latitudes that have prevailed as model explanations, the most important feature of this border relativization process is the prominent place of informal relations and social activities that act as “organizing practices” (Certeau 2008) of cross-border contacts, primarily expressed as human mobility.

Latin American Specificities and Their Academic Coverage

Latin American laws deal with its borders in a utilitarian and short-term manner, as territorial mechanisms subordinated to security reasons (such as Brazil), nationalist defence reasons (Dominican Republic) or simply, do not consider them at all, as is the case in Argentina and Chile (Dilla and Hansen 2019). Integrationist projects, on the other hand, have only recently started to include borders in their agendas, and when they do, they usually perceive them as places for the passage of goods. Institutions such as MERCOSUR, for instance, only included the issue of borders in 2009, without paying attention – except for some experimental cross-border urban complexes – to the specificities of local histories and societies. Thus, following Jaquet (2008) in connection with the Posadas/Encarnación cross-border urban complex on the Argentine/Paraguay border, there have been more setbacks than achievements:

As for MERCOSUR, contrary to expectations, its implementation in 1991–94 did not bring about the integration of the peoples so emphatically proclaimed in the treaties but has rather interrupted and created more conflicts in a historical framework of relations between the residents of the two banks. The integrationist policies soon exposed the existence of a *top-down* MERCOSUR addressed to those *on top*, and another one endured by *those below* ... a first-class MERCOSUR that benefited large businessmen and transnational circuits, and a second-class MERCOSUR, which affected enormously the local border populations on the periphery. (57)

When these projects have opted for broader visions (and have induced their member countries to act accordingly), as is the case of the Andean Community of Nations, their

most advanced postulates have been mediated by the nationalist and centralist attachments of the member states. In Colombia – the nation that has made more formal progress – this has been widely discussed by authors such as Hurtado and Aponte (2017) when they criticized “a precarious, inefficient and limited, as well as discriminatory institutional framework in terms of management, design and implementation” (84), which suggests “... some lack of coordination between the legislative evolution and its effective local implementation” (71). In turn, Ramírez (2006) – referring to the Colombian-Venezuelan border – detected a disadvantageous “... overlap of spontaneous cross-border relations ... and intergovernmental agreements subscribed in the exercise of national sovereignty,” which raised the need for “... central modifications in the relations between the local and the national, the sub-regional and the regional” (88–89). In short, even in these more advanced projects, it is possible to observe what Peña (2015) argued: “The cross-border space is the scenario in which low politics becomes part of the high politics agenda and in which the boundaries between high and low politics agendas are not clearly demarcated” (203).

The legal/political invisibility of borders and the prevalence of state control practices have impinged on the situation of studies on the subject. This does not mean that there are no relevant studies of particular cases, such as (among others) those by Valero (2008 & 2009) on the Colombian-Venezuelan border; the Retis Group (Ministerio da Integração Nacional 2005) and its studies on Brazil; Dilla (2016) and Dilla and Álvarez (2018) on Haiti/Dominican Republic and Peru/Chile respectively; Dammert and Bensús (2017) on the Peruvian/Ecuadorian border; and Zárate, Aponte, and Victorino (2017) on the Amazonian borders. However, there has been no serious systematizing academic effort in connection with the continental experience resulting in compared analyses and proposing generalizations and typologies going beyond the national sphere. In addition, there are no mature epistemic communities with specialized networks capable of offering comprehensive explanations on current issues and influencing public policies, as discussed by Álvarez and Figueroa (2018).

Probably the only places in which it is possible to find a fledgling epistemic community on the subject of borders is where there has been an express structuring demand on the part of the community itself: networks of researchers associated with Latin American international organizations (such as ECLAC) and the European academia, or networks housed in some specialized centers in the north of Mexico. The perception of cross-border relations and cooperation stemming from these networks – with no major innovative elements – is that posited by Perkman (2003) for Europe, as multilevel institutional collaboration. Because of this, cross-border complexity gets diluted in an institutionalist perspective of rational decisions, agreement on the ECLAC notion of “territorial pact” (i.e. a formal act between legal peers), and cooperation as the prolongation of planning policies.

Although this is an approach with recognizable theoretical merits – for example, its emphasis on multilevel governance with a relevant role to be played by local governments – it is ultimately a proposal of limited heuristic value in a context in which cross-border regions are underpropped by informal and poorly institutionalized relational systems. In this connection, we should mention the study commissioned by ECLAC to Oddone et al. (2016) and a book compiled by Barajas, Wong, and Oddone (2015), perhaps the best academic systematization of this analytic approach.

As far as our objectives are concerned, on the continent there has been no proposal for a typology of cross-border regions. The closest to a proposal is found in the studies conducted by the Retis Group, at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, commissioned by the Ministerio da Integração Nacional of Brazil at the beginning of the century (Ministerio da Integração Nacional/ Grupo Retis 2005). Their diagnosis includes a detailed conceptual construction of the Brazilian border territorialities and proposes several analytic categories for the regions described as spaces endowed with functional, political and symbolic coherence. These regions were classified into five types according to their internal situations and their degrees of interaction with the regions across the border, and were evaluated according to variables such as job market behaviors, flows of capital, provision of natural resources, quality of collective consumption services, quality and implementation of infrastructure, among other factors:

1. Marginal regions, with very infrequent and occasional cross-border interactions
2. Stopper zones, which are characterized by spatial and institutional blockages that hinder or prevent access.
3. Fronts, considered as settlement and colonization areas.
4. Capillary zones, which base cross-border relations on local exchanges.
5. Synaptic zones, which involve major relationships that transcend the local scales.

According to the authors, when these region modalities correspond to the more active types, they include the existence of what they call “twin cities” whose relationships and symmetries are often conditioned by the regional environment.

Despite the merits mentioned, the RETIS team restricted its attention to Brazilian border areas fundamentally. Thus, the regions that they describe are not proper cross-border spaces, but characterizations of the national border strip, penetrating up to 50 kilometres and recognized as such by the state of Brazil.

From this perspective, Machado de Olivera (2005) – one of the members of the RETIS research team – developed another taxonomic approach. It is a study in which the methodological axis adopted by the author is the binary dichotomy between two situations: formal (institutional) integration and functional (mainly economic exchanges) integration. This dichotomy – drawn from Wong-González (2005) – was based on the logical resource of an axis of coordinates that originated four types of regional situations:

1. Situation A: Low formal and functional integration, conforming a “dead” or “marginal” border according to the Retis typology.
2. Situation B: Low formal integration and high functional integration, leading to illegality, informality and anomie.
3. Situation C: High two-way integration, which Machado calls “live borders,” with high exchange flows governed by high levels of institutionalization. It refers in part to the synaptic borders described by the Retis Group (2005).
4. Situation D: Low functional and high formal integration, which he defines as bureaucratic borders.

Machado’s classification was an important step forward on our subject of study. Three decades later, it still is a theoretical benchmark on border regions in Latin America. But his

virtues do not fully make up for some weaknesses. Not only does Machado concentrate on the national scale, but his work assumed a methodological commitment to the formal/informal dyad, acknowledged as academic doxa in borderland studies dealing with the European and North American experiences. He failed to consider what had already been noted in several specialized studies: on the one hand, that the formalization of border spaces in Latin America has not led to virtuous situations based on cross-border realities and, consequently, that informal situations continue to be key vectors in the cross-border phenomenon.

Cross-Border Regions in Latin America: Types and Situations

There follows a typological approximation based on specific profiles and their connections to the economic scales that govern exchanges and thus, differentiate between them. There are other variables that may be used for other typological groupings, as suggested by Jessop, Brenner, and Jones (2008) in their TPSN model that we have discussed elsewhere. In a clarifying article, Brunet-Jailly (2005), reminds us of the existence of four dimensions which he considers to be the basis for specific theoretical frameworks, namely, market forces, multilevel political activities, particular influence of borders and specific cultural sphere. Accepting the prevalence of the economic sphere does not imply ignoring this complexity. But, as mentioned before, it does imply believing that the economic scale has a decisive influence on the regulation of economic and other variables.

Probably the main theoretical objection to this proposal is that in all CBRs there are territorial overlaps⁵ on different scales. To cite a known example, there is the cross-border region articulated around the city of Cúcuta in Colombia and the urban network whose hub is San Cristóbal in Venezuela. Historically, this region has been characterized by a remarkable number of shared cultural and ethnic elements, expressed in their mutual perceptions and in minor exchanges in the rural zones. At the same time, their urban spaces have been the setting for strong flows of local trade, whose direction has varied depending on the economic situation on each side of the border and the ups and downs of the currency exchange rates. It is worth noting that until the crisis in Venezuela, this corridor was one of the most active trade routes on the continent – some 3.6 billion dollars in 2006 – and impacted the regional space in different ways. When referring to this multiplicity of scales and dimensions, Valero (2008) states that they

... constitute the origin/destination of inter-societal interests, derived from demands and needs – some of which are local, others regional and national and others arising from the global impact of the contemporary world – expressed through ... networks and flows that strengthen their dynamics and, hence, binational interdependence. (74)

Consequently, what we see here is a multi-layered dynamic of local flows – with high levels of informality – stemming from the cross-border relation proper, and other binational flows that are less locally related. Both flows are related to and feed into each other – fuel smuggling is a typical example of this – but they are still two different sociological axes.

There may also be cross-border-region overlaps in one single territory, in particular, in zones in which there is high border complexity. One such case is Arica, in Chile (Dilla, 2019; Dilla and Álvarez 2018), where two modalities of cross-border regionalization

have emerged in connection with Arica's port. The relation with Tacna, in Peru, has generated an intertwined web of contacts that has made the zone become one of the most intense urban cross-border complexes in the hemisphere. At the same time, the relationship with Bolivia has generated a corridor nurtured by Bolivian merchandise seeking the Pacific Ocean and establishing few links with the local society. In other words, they are two scenarios connected by history and the present, but they have originated two different territorialities in one same city.

In these and other cases, overlapping scales represent a heuristic challenge that must be sorted out through actual field research, to answer the question of how scales relate to one another and how they provide reciprocal feedback. Field research is also necessary to find out how the economic scale and its derived political economy condition different modalities of political and social relationships. In this article we can only give a partial and provisional answer to this question.

Despite acknowledging these scale and dimension complexities and juxtapositions, we assume that there are fundamental purposes that organize the systemic whole. Ultimately, these purposes are related to how the structured coherence of the regional political economy is manifested, as well as to how the different dimensions of cross-border linkages get sorted, according to the way in which a region performs its function as filter and sorting mechanism of such factors and processes as human mobility, merchandise traffic, relations between states and cultural exchanges.

These perspectives make it possible to derive four types of regional cross-border situations which, we insist, prioritize their place in the processes of capitalist accumulation as classification variables.

Consuetudinary Regions

The first type of situation corresponds to what we call consuetudinary regions, understood as those spatial/temporal spaces underpinned by shared ancestral values and family and ethnic relations. These regions are crisscrossed by flows that have different scales. In some cases, they are minor flows that have no significant impacts beyond the life of the community and in which, occasionally, money plays no part. However, they may also be used by major activities of illicit trading that exploit for their own benefit some traditional ethics resources such as loyalty and solidarity with the community and use these regions as crossing points. As these regions do not have a large population and are peripheral in geopolitical terms, they also have very low levels of formal institutionalization although the repressive presence of the state can be high when there are local conflicts – particularly when the subordinate identities challenge the nationalist priorities. These are regions with a strong identity level, where different ancestral links persist and facilitate particular forms of governance.

Such is the case of situations of ethnic identities abused by nationalist impositions, as happens in the Mapuche (Chile/Argentina) and Aymará (Peru/Chile/Bolivia) cultural regions. The spatial dimension of the latter, for example, has a trinational connotation and houses 1.7 million inhabitants (Albó 2000). In the early years of this century, it produced an original paradiplomatic agreement attempt known as *Aymarás sin Fronteras* (Rouvière 2009). Another case of this nature is described in the exhaustive study by Zárata, Aponte, and Victorino (2017) on the Amazonian border of Colombia with Peru

and Brazil, where the authors found minor trade flows, a significant part of which consisted in the non-monetary bartering of goods extracted from the immediate environment – fish from the river, fruit from the jungle – and thus did not appear in the statistics records. Therefore, even when these amounts are very relevant for the local contexts, they are “of little significance in relation to the magnitudes and productive apparatuses of each country or those of the South American region as a whole” (76). A key element of regional cohesion is “the intensity of social and familial relations” (69) stemming from ethnic ones (ticunas, muruis, etc).

There is no doubt that these regions represent an interesting invitation to carry out more permanent research. A possible crucial subject would be to find out how they organize a governance system that observes both ancestral uses and customs and Westphalian prescriptions; another, to see how from here paradiplomatic relations that contribute to the regional coherence are articulated.

Self-Contained Regions

A second situation is one in which the economic exchanges are solved locally, which we have called *self-contained regions*. They are not necessarily dying regions – in the sense posited by Jessop (2001). In fact, some of them show very dynamic flows that surpass by far the scant trade of consuetudinary regions. Neither are they autarchic, given that all of them have entries and exits in relation to other scales – international and global – but they do so in an indirect way and have little relevance for those other scales. Thus, they are mainly characterized by their articulation to short value chains of little value, which configures an unstable and fragmented political economy.

Border controls vary in intensity from one case to another, according to the intensity of the exchanges. However, they always imply a high level of permissiveness, inasmuch as in these regions, the economic circuits take the shape of flows of human mobility and, consequently, as already mentioned, social practices become “organizing practices” (Certeau 2008) of the urban spaces and their spheres of cross-border relationships. It goes without saying that here, too, ethnic and family links play a very important role as guarantors of loyalty in businesses carried out without formal contracts, although they are not determinant and are strongly mediated by the national relation proper. This is the reason why we can find social and political networks that underprop commercial and cultural contacts and facilitate specific agreements between the local authorities. In short, they are systemic incoherencies, but cannot be interpreted as peripheral anomalies as they are inherent to their functioning.

This regional situation is the most frequent in continental borders. Such is the case of cross-border urban complexes that are small in size and adjoining like Chuy and Chui on the Brazil/Paraguay border (Domínguez 2010); Dionisio Cerqueira, Barracao and Bernardo Irigoyen in Argentina/Brazil (Ferrari 2013); Leticia and Tabatinga on the Amazonian border of Colombia and Brazil (Noriega 2008); Huaquillas and Aguas Verdes on the Ecuador/Peru border (Dammert and Bensús 2017), and the Monte Caseros/Barra de Quaraí/Bella Unión trio (Oddone and Galantini 2015).

Ruiz and Martínez (2015) have studied the situation of Ciudad Hidalgo and Tecún Umán, on the Guatemala/Mexico border. These authors present a vivid description of the exchange processes between the two cities which combined, do not exceed 70 thousand

inhabitants, but have developed an intense commercial relation that caters for their urban population and their immediate surroundings. The main flow originates in the purchases that Guatemalan traders make in Ciudad Hidalgo to supply the shops in Tecún Umán and feed minor flows to other locations. This traffic – along the Suchiate River – involves the daily participation of hundreds of people including traders, loaders, rowers of rustic rafts, exchange dealers, etc., implying successive negotiations and agreements on prices and services. Given that the traffic affects both sides of the border, the actors involved – small entrepreneurs, municipal authorities, workers – have reached agreements to take turns for the provision of services. According to the authors, “... the Ciudad Hidalgo-Tecún Umán conurbation constitutes an integrated space of economic and social exchanges, fundamentally based on the axis constituted by informal cross-border trade” (Ruiz and Martínez 2015, 152).

It is also possible to find self-contained regions in more populated and dynamic spaces, as the Tacna-Arica cross-border urban complex on the Chilean-Peruvian border (with a total population of a little over half a million inhabitants) whose economic relationship induces some 6.5 million annual crossings of the border (Dilla and Álvarez 2018; Tapia, Liberona, and Contreras 2019). Although this region feeds on imports supplied by free trade zones and the relationship between the two cities implies numerous circuits – Peruvian workers in Arica, use of Tacna as leisure resort and bazaar by the people of Arica, use of the port of Arica by Tacna business owners, etc., the weight of this activity on the respective national spaces is limited and its global relevance is non-existent.

Corridor Regions

A third situation is that of regions articulated into international corridors,⁶ fundamentally defined as such. Any cross-border region implies some sort of corridor that regularly channels the flows of goods through some kind of infrastructure that serves this purpose. It is worth noting that binational trade corridors do not necessarily form regions or can do so in very limited way.

On occasion, the corridors go across borders located on barren wasteland, as in the case of Los Libertadores mountain pass, the main connection between Chile and Argentina by land. According to the Chilean Customs Office (2017) the breakdown of the two-way border crossings at Los Libertadores was 600 thousand vehicles, 2.9 million persons and 4.5 million tons of cargo. One part of the cargo corresponded to binational trade; the other, to Argentine goods making their way to the Chilean ports of San Antonio and Valparaíso. As for two-way crossings of people, these were mainly tourists. Obviously this intense and long-distance traffic affects a large area of either country, but no cross-border region has been constituted because the whole zone next to the border is wild mountain land where there are only border checkpoints and a few seasonal motels.

Another case is that of Jimaní, a city located on the border of the Dominican Republic and Haiti. It is estimated to have a population of only slightly over 10 thousand inhabitants, 70% of whom are ranked as poor. However, 60% of the binational trade amounting to some 500 million dollars per year moves along this area, although due to the scant distance between both capitals the vehicles only stop there just long enough to go through the customs. The city is just a passageway for the convoys of trucks that leave behind them all kinds of pollution, with very few formal jobs and a few isolated roadside vendors that have

never been able to join forces and become a cross-border open air market, as has happened in other territories. Jimaní incubates the contrast of being the most commercially active port next to the border and at the same time, the poorest main city in the whole of the Dominican border strip, where poverty is a fact of daily life (Dilla 2016).

Nevertheless, it may well happen that on account of its magnitude and itineraries a corridor may involve the local provision of services and goods, and that, in turn, this may prompt other local exchange activities. Such appears to be the case of the region articulated around Corumbá in Brazil and Puerto Suárez in Bolivia, which was studied by Silva (2013). Apart from other goods that seek access to the ocean, 95% of the binational trade moves along this corridor. With the exception of some mining products from Corumbá, the Brazilian flows originate in large cities like Sao Paulo, Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte. However, according to Silva, P., (157) the magnitude of the traffic “... demands structures for the storage, transport or dispatch of the merchandise,” and this generates investments, employment and fiscal revenue that is vital for the local society. It is also usual that some zones of informal retail may prosper under the wing of these binational economic contacts, as is the case of the small free street markets studied by Anderson, Da Costa, and Benedetti (2017). In short, it is a regions traversed by long trade chains with origins and destinations outside the region itself, but involving minor added value through contact with it.

Corridors regions subordinate the local scale and get organized from accumulation strategies of more concentrated capitalist groups. Given the magnitude of the formal trade, these CBRs undergo strong bureaucratic and police controls and are spaces exposed to intense conflicts, either because of trade union demands, contradictions that get generated by the informal flows or the proliferation of crime-related traffic.

Globalized Regions

Finally, there is a fourth type of situation in which the economic spaces generated are determined by productive relationships and services defined by their strong contributions to and from the global economy and, consequently, containing fragments of long and complex value chains.⁷ It is not difficult to notice marked inequalities between the national societies – which increase differential profits – as well as differences in demographic and road densities and suitable supply of services. Given the complex nature of these economic spaces, they coexist with very high levels of conflictivity. They are highly institutionalized CBRs, but at the same time, much disrupted by informal and illegal activities that benefit from the spillover of formal flows.

The prototypical case of this situation is the extensive Mexico/United States border, in which the Mexican strip operates as a place of high profitability for investments on productive activities and services, which has been exhaustively studied from an economic perspective by Mendoza (2007). Precisely on our continent, another situation that is particularly complex but less known is that of the cross-border region located in the department of Alto Paraná in Paraguay and the states of Matto Grosso do Sur and Paraná in Brazil. An active economic region has been configured here, in which Brazilian capital exploits the comparative advantages of Paraguay – deregulation, low costs, permissiveness – for the sake of its own links with the global economy. Although the best-known media image of this phenomenon is Ciudad del Este with its shopping centers and

multiple manifestations of contraband, there are also other more complex processes such as soybean cultivation and its incipient processing, as well as free industrial zones (maquilas). All of this has been catalogued by Masi and Falabella (2005) as “disaggregated development” which is expressed at the local level is as parts that do not manage to harmonize virtuously despite their many achievements and large potential (346).

On a more discrete but qualitatively similar dimension, there is another CBR on the northern portion of the Haiti/Dominican Republic border, which includes the second largest cities in either country (Cabo Haitiano and Santiago de los Caballeros) and is known as the Dajabón/Ouanaminthe cross-border urban complex. Here also the best-known media image is a cross-border market that twice a week attracts several thousands of people from both countries and has a regional impact. This CBR is the main corridor for Dominican farm produce going to Haiti and is in turn used by Haitians to sell re-exports of used fabrics, perfumes and alcoholic beverages. But what makes it very special is that it has served as the location to establish a zone of industrial outsourcing (maquilas) for the world market, which exploits the Haitian advantages (deregulation, low fiscal pressure, very cheap labor, privileged access to the US market) and at the same time takes advantage of the services and more qualified workforce of the Dominican Republic (Traub-Werner 2008; Dilla 2016).

Conclusion: What Questions Arise from Cross-Borders Regions?

The notion of borders has become a heuristic resource to explain many of the contemporary social contingencies. We are living in times of proliferation of “analytical border zones” (Sassen 2010) that account for the emergence of new spatial/temporal dynamics in which the traditional conception of territoriality and its scale hierarchies is challenged by new material, organizational and discourse practices. The territorialities, that we have called cross-border regions here, are an example of this and have constituted scenarios par excellence of capital appreciation on different scales. In particular, their cities, in the words of Brenner and Theodore (2002, 386) are “geographical objectives and institutional laboratories for a variety of neoliberal policies,” and consequently highly conflictive spaces for the optimization of capital profitability and disciplinarization of *the others*.

In this article we have attempted to discuss some of these challenges from this perspective and propose a preliminary typology for Latin American CBRs in terms of the scales of these processes. Thus, we have suggested four CBR types ranging from customary regions, extremely parochial and with limited economic implications beyond those of the daily life of its inhabitants, to regions defined by their strong links with the global economy.

What is common to all these regions is that they do not go beyond the primary level of the *geo-economic* model posited by Sohn (2014, 597), which is oriented to capturing value from differential benefits. In the absence of integrationist political mediations, contrary to the European case studied previously by Jessop (2001) and Topaloglou et al. (2005), they rely on economic disparities and increase them to larger degree via sustained processes of unequal exchanges. Following Dahrendorf (1979), we can say that they are greenhouses for a pluralism of oppositions and conflicts expressed both at a formal level, in everyday life, and in the social practices that pervade them.

In addition to the controversial points mentioned above, there are three questions regarding Latin American CBRs which we would like to go into now.

The first issue refers to CBR spatiality. Almost every Latin American state has border areas where some activities – for instance, foreign-owned property – may be restricted. These zones are generally defined by longitudinal lines measured from the borders, so they are unsuitable to determine the spatiality of a CBR in the terms defined by us. For obvious reasons, the cultural/identity dimension of a CBR (where symbiotic density may produce a glimpse of what Tarrus (2000) called “mestizo identity”) will not coincide with the aforementioned political definition, or with the scope of economic transactions. This forces us to provide a more comprehensive description of the decisive variables that define cross-border spatiality, taking into account the variety of dimensions that make it up, as well as the roles played by its component parts. This would probably result in a more sophisticated staggered spatiality than that of our approach – for example, zones of cross-border contiguity and zones of more relaxed coexistence.

Another problem has to do with the issue of development. In the cases studied, there were practically no experiences of inclusive local economic development. Cross-border regions are lavish in survival modalities, but very skimpy in the materialization of sustained social mobility opportunities. And this happens not only in CBRs that remain relatively disconnected from the global and national dynamics – the cases of customary and self-contained regions – but also in regions highly exposed to these dynamics, and where the result is what Masi and Falabella (2005) describe as *disaggregated development*. Even if we accept the existence of systemic determination in this result – cross-border regions are sacrifice zones for the reproduction of economic neoliberalism – it is reasonable to believe that there may be room for actions that drive these societies in another direction.

Thirdly, there is the problem of regional governance. As we noted earlier, there is no integrationist project in Latin America that proposes a post-Westphalian change to the current border regime. The most advanced project in this direction is the Andean Community of Nations, but there have been limited practical results. Therefore, public issues in cross-border regions are governed by “topocratic” institutional frameworks and normativities (Leresche and Saez 2001), at best connected by promissory social or paradiplomatic practices that are insufficient to account for the special complexity of these “overlapping territorialities” (Agnew and Oslender 2010). This is particularly valid in connection with the fragility of regional associations that facilitate human mobility under conditions of equality of rights. “What it boils down to, wrote Balibar (2013, 114), is that the fundamental epistemological fact of spatial categories such as territory, residence, land ownership, but simultaneously traveling, nomadism and sedentary lifestyle, are also the constitutive determining factors of citizenship.”

Finally, we would like to emphasize that this article is not a theoretical proposal intended to settle the discussion on the reservoir of reflection. On the contrary, it is a preliminary proposal designed to open the space to debate – and thus to theoretical and methodological construction – based on three heuristic conditions: the first one, more sustained empirical research to promote new comparative studies on border situations; the second, increased interdisciplinary engagement to delve into every aspect of human activity – from the subjectivities to the macroeconomic processes underpinning cross-border regions; the third one, nurturing our theoretical construction with the dialogic input of aspects particular to the Latin American reality, and those to be found in border regions all over the world.

Notes

1. Neoliberalism is understood as a type of accumulation and social regulation regime (according to a conceptual *regulationist* apparatus) articulated around the idea that markets that are deregulated and free from interference by the State and social control are the optimum mechanism for development and wellbeing. Neoliberalism implies intense processes of spatial partitions and assemblies that articulate new power relations (Agnew 2018). Regions are an accurate example of this. However, given the high capability for movement of capital, as opposed to that of the more territorialized elements, despite the orthodoxy of its doctrine, “real-life” neoliberalism is capable of parasiting diverse sociopolitical and cultural structures (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Harvey 1996; Harvey 2014) and adopting different forms. This appears clearly in the case of borderland regions: although borders become spaces for the appreciation of capital, they do so according to their own historical itineraries. As we shall see, the situations that we describe in terms of economic scale determined by the regions, do not necessarily imply a greater or lesser distance from the neoliberal accumulation processes but have to do with linkage modalities between them.
2. As noted by Harvey (2014), it refers to the space where capital can circulate and prevent the cost and time of movement from exceeding the benefits of the socially necessary turnover time.
3. The book edited by Sum and Perkman is a work of high merit as it paved the way for further reflection on cross-border regions mainly in Asia and Europe, and generated theoretical inferences that have served as the framework for other regions. It includes a first attempt at a taxonomy of CBRs, differentiating between what they called “Euro-regions” and Asian “growth triangles,” and presenting interesting analyses of border cases and issues. Particularly noteworthy are Jessop’s study on European cross-border regionalism and Leresche & Sáez’s study on political regimes. This article is indebted to their effort, which shall be properly acknowledged where due throughout the article.
4. In this article we refer to CBRs as ontological units. Another type of analysis, not envisaged here, would discover horizontal networks and complex urban hierarchical structures. In general, within them, we can distinguish hegemonic cities and others that play complementary roles and finally what Dilla (2015) has called cross-border urban complexes. For reasons of space this dissection is not addressed in this article.
5. Agnew and Oslender (2010) coined this concept to describe “... the intersection of sources of territorial authority, other than the nation-state, with that of states” (193) and regarding another of their theoretical constructions: “regimes of sovereignty.” Here, we extend the concept to explain the coexistence of different space-time articulations defined by their own hierarchical codes in different the areas of economy, social relations, politics and daily life, including the interaction of two states regimes.
6. For the purposes of this paper, the terms cross-border or international corridors are understood as a hierarchical spatial linkage for the circulation of goods, services, currency and information between neighboring economies and national societies, which are regularly made viable by means of physical communication and transport vectors. Usually, these corridors articulate urban networks that contribute to their operations (Félix 1997).
7. Globalized regions are exponents of the opportunistic fragmentation of global value chains and consequently, they contain segments of these chains the commands of which are generally to be found elsewhere. All this impedes the deployment of governance strategies. Because of its complexity, this issue is beyond the scope and purposes of this paper. There is an enlightening discussion of global value chains and governance in Gereffi, Sturgen, and Humphrey (2005).

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