Postindependence in Scotland, Catalonia and the Basque Country: City-Regional Small Nations Beyond Nation-States.

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Book review for http://www.futureukandscotland.ac.uk/
28th August 2014 (Corrected version)
For Prof. Michael Keating & Prof. Nicola McEwen.

The UK and Spain are not depicted as having the same nation-state DNA with regard to their respective histories and political-cultural traditions. A glance at the current European regional comparative context reveals that, while the UK Government has legitimised the Scottish Government and supported the Scottish Independence referendum as being a highly democratic exercise, Spain stands out as remaining normatively inflexible without, so far, even contemplating any dialogue with the presidents of the Catalan and Basque Autonomies.

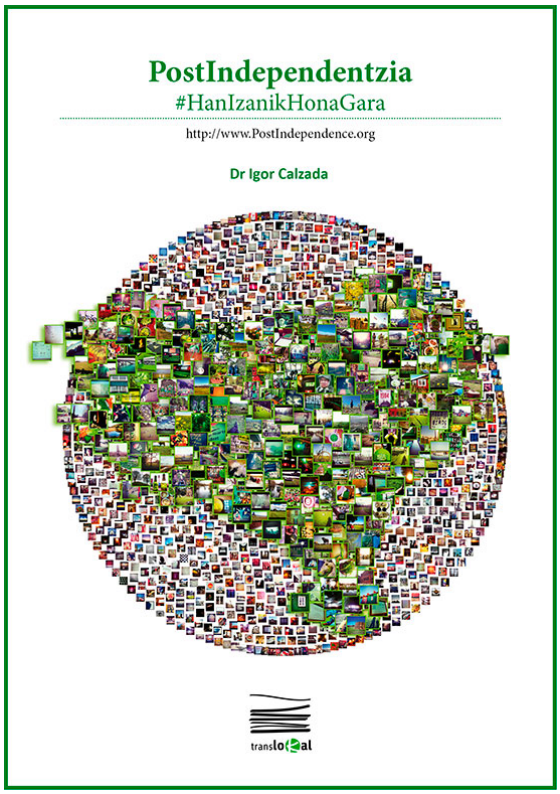
Meanwhile, contemporary EU nation-states are accepting the implementation of the right of a population to decide how it is governed in relation to the UK's inner national diverse context, which is embodied by the current position of Scotland. On the other hand, Spain has been avoiding the demands of the Catalan and Basque institutions and citizens on the basis of both historic and more recent episodes of political unrest. As a result, it seems impossible to open any discussion about the devolution claims of city-regional small nations, particularly in terms of devising an internal, alternative and re-scaled configuration of Spain as a nation-state, which would involve modifying the 1978 Constitution. Moreover, in the case of the Basque Country, this is presented as the least likely outcome as political violence in the region has been both a major obstacle and also a source of inertia. Nevertheless, ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna)[1], announced a 'definitive cessation' of its campaign in 2011 and, therefore, should welcome any kind of democratic implementation that involves devolving powers to the Basque Country.

Hence, can we find any remarkable differences between EU nation-states such as the UK and Spain? Indeed, I think there are plenty of them.

Within the broader global context, established nation-states are facing substantial changes, not only externally in terms of the global geostrategic game but also internally in their relations with their constituent 'city-regions'. These 'city-regions' appear as dynamic, networked, territorial configurations embedded in their referential nation-states and driven by a wide range of diverse, transformative promotional policies that result in very uncertain consequences for both the 'city-regions' and the nation-states. However, clarification of the taxonomy and case-studies involved is required. As Scott (2001) pointed out, 'city-region' is a term that creates confusion, while Morgan (2013) added, "what is true of some city-regions is not true of all city-regions".

Furthermore, Keating has argued (2001, 2005, and 2009) that globalisation and European integration have led to a resurgence of post-nationalism, which goes beyond nation-

states. It is specifically in this context that 'city-regions' are making advances and, as noted by Morgan, each does so in it its own way. To put it simply, some 'city-regions' are promoted by economic renewal policies, while others are driven by national identity demands. In this global trend, political devolution, economic development and nation-state re-scaling processes are merging and becoming intertwined, thereby establishing a new European regional order characterised by the presence of city-regional small nations as new key players beyond their referential nation-states. In this game, the hypothetical strategic scenarios are not clear and they remain uncertain considering, on the one hand, the heterogeneous tradition of the nation-states themselves and, on the other hand, the political histories of these city-regional small nations. Nevertheless, it is clear that this new order must be taken seriously through close attention to its democratic dimension and to the clear territorial and political consequences for the city-regions, their related nation-states and the EU as a whole. I would like to entitle this debate 'Postindependence'.



In an attempt to shed some light on this debate, recently, in June 2014, I presented, in the Basque Country, Spain, a book (in its Basque version) entitled 'Postindependence' (www.postindependence.org) in which I compare eight 'city-regions' from the social innovation perspective that I am researching under the umbrella of the project, 'Benchmarking City-Regions beyond Nation-States' (www.cityregions.org), which is funded by the Regional Studies Association (RSA) and Ikerbasque (Basque Science Foundation) and developed through the Future of Cities Programme, University of Oxford (UK).

The book sets out to capture the different natures of the social innovation processes of these eight city-regions. It suggests a benchmarking between the eight 'city-region' cases beyond their referential 'nation-states', which are the Basque Country (Spain and France), Dublin (Ireland), Portland (Oregon), Oresund (Denmark and Sweden), Iceland, Liverpool/Manchester (UK), Scotland (UK) and Catalonia (Spain). Among these cases, there are two groups of 'city-regions': those that are fuelled merely by economic renewal and those driven by national identity factors. In the first group, I include Dublin, Portland, Oresund and Liverpool/Manchester; in the second group are the Basque Country, Iceland, Scotland and Catalonia. The unit of analysis is the 'city-region', in which a complex networked dimension could account for different currently established socio-territorial structures, such as small nations (the Basque Country, Scotland and Catalonia), metropolitan cities (Dublin, Portland, Liverpool and Manchester), cross-border regions (Oresund) and small states (Iceland).

The book suggests a methodological systemic framework, the 5-System Framework, to benchmark the different 'city-region' cases. The framework tries to capture the social innovation processes affecting the implementation of different territorial policies and strategies. The updated English version will be published in November 2014.

For the purposes of illustration, I will extract from the book some brief conclusions for each of the three city-regional small nation cases, the Basque Country, Catalonia and Scotland, in relation to their referential nation-states, which are Spain and France, in the case of the Basque Country, and the UK, in the case of Scotland. These are presented, respectively, in the table below.

City-regional small nation	Population in Millions (Nation-State %)	GDP contribution related to Nation-State (%)
Scotland	5.3 (8)	9
Catalonia	7.5 (16)	19
Basque Country[2]	2.2 (5.5)	6

Table 1: City-regional small nations' populations and GDP. Source: The New York Times[3]

The conclusions could lead us to coin 'Postindependence' as a new term, referring to the democratic process that each case portrays. In these final remarks, I will characterise each case from the social innovation perspective by highlighting the pervasive differences between them:

1. Scotland currently represents the first relevant case in which a hypothetical independence option has been agreed on by both the regional Scottish government and institutions (Holyrood) and the British nation-state government and institutions (Westminster). As a consequence, due to its substantial citizen engagement and the way in which the independence referendum has been managed democratically by both sides, this case demonstrates very good practices—efficient governance, social media usage and a rationalised dialectic. The outcome is not yet clear although there is an increasing trend pointing towards a YES option.
2. Catalonia is a case that should be understood in the context of the significant level of social support that has been gained (70%) for independence, which has prompted planning for a potential consultation event on 9th November and also pushed the Catalan Regional Government to accept this possibility, even against the will of the Spanish Central Government. However, it remains unclear what the socio-economic proposals of each side will be. The main debate is focused on the real controversy regarding whether or not to honour the consultation without having any information about the content. It thus seems that the confrontative and antagonistic dialectic adopted does not, in the short term, help to achieve a democratic outcome.
3. Finally, the Basque Country presents a new and positive context, which has evolved very quickly and has created an environment in which a demand for a referendum is bound to occur sooner or later as a consequence of the overcoming of the political violence that dominated the previous era. The main issue for any such referendum is the continued lack of preparation for the democratic content of the debate. Furthermore, the region may have the same difficulties as those faced by Catalonia regarding Spain's inflexible position.

[1] Basque separatist group.

[2] Data relate to the Basque Country side in Spain. The French side is not represented in these figures.

[3] http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/06/world/europe/catalan-vote-seen-as-test-for-separatists-in-europe.html