

Making polycentrism: governance innovation in small and medium-sized cities in the West Midlands and Barcelona Metropolitan Regions

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City regions have become key economic and policy-making spaces in the restructuring and rescaling of nation-states, promoting regional competitiveness (Brenner, 2004). The analysis of these transformations reveals that there are increasing efforts to constitute forms of metropolitan governance and coordination between local actors to be able to compete in the global arena (Jonas and Ward, 2007; Nelles, 2013; Savitch and Kantor, 2010), through vertical and horizontal collaboration between them. The consolidation of these forms of governance becomes more complex as the classic model of a core city and its periphery has given way to more diverse forms of metropolitan regions, including networks of urban centres like the Randstad or cross-border metropolitan regions like the Örestad region in Sweden and Denmark (Crouch and Le Galès, 2012; Nelles and Durand, 2014).

Trends towards the concentration of economic activity and greater density are empowering small and medium-sized cities as metropolitan sub-centres fostering polycentrism in metropolitan regions around the world (Storper, 2013). Some authors have defined these emerging forms as the rise of post-suburbia, as suburbs are gaining economic weight in the metropolitan arena (Phelps and Wood, 2011) and becoming new spaces for economic centrality (Keil, 2013). Other authors (Soja, 2000; Storper and Manville, 2006; Storper, 2011, 2013; Trigilia, 2004) have stressed that many peripheral areas of metropolitan regions concentrate industrial production, which continues to be relevant in the European context, and that they are becoming central places for new processes of agglomeration based on innovation activities.

In this context the central questions are how is polycentrism being shaped, to what extent

metropolitan regions with growing polycentrism can constitute a collective actor, and how the interests of different municipalities are converging or not into a single metropolitan agenda.

In dealing with metropolitan governance, research has primarily addressed the forms of organisation of the main cities in metropolitan regions as metropolitan leaders (Buck and Gordon, 2005; Salet et al., 2003; Savitch and Kantor, 2010) or has analysed metropolitan regions as a whole. The analysis of the dynamics between local governments in the formation of a metropolitan government has also been explored, focusing on the use of normative discourses on governance to justify certain scales (Tomàs, 2012), or the elements showing governance capacity to develop intermunicipal partnerships at a metropolitan scale (Nelles, 2013).

Nevertheless, the role of small and medium-sized cities in reinforcing polycentrism has received less attention. In this article I focus on such cities, their strategies, and their social and political organisation to foster their role as sub-centres of the metropolitan region through local economic development and policies for social cohesion. In fact, polycentrism is not only the result of decisions of individual firms and workers to locate in certain places, but also the result of the collective organisation of small and medium-sized cities to promote economic development and social cohesion.

In the EU, European programmes for territorial cohesion have meant new possibilities for establishing policies and programmes for economic development at the local level, especially for those areas under industrial reconversion (Geddes and Bennington, 2001), creating new opportunities for non-central cities. One of the emerging strategies promoted is the creation of partnerships and other forms of collaboration between municipalities in order to implement strategies for economic development, employment, and social cohesion.

Following a sociology of governance perspective (Le Galès, 1998, 2002), this article analyses the emergence of these partnerships in the configuration of polycentrism. In fact, the small

and medium-sized municipalities trying to avoid being mere peripheries of the central city can use these kinds of intermunicipal partnerships as tools to foster sub-centrality rather than using them only to improve policy delivery. The objective is to evaluate to what extent these kinds of partnerships can bring about greater coordination, fostering polycentrism by creating new political actors and new economic growth patterns. To do so, the article will focus on how these partnerships promote governance innovation towards these objectives, analysing how they enforce new forms of policy coordination, to what extent a common agenda for all municipalities involved is created, and how far these practices reinforce them as a collective actor relative to the central city.

The article analyses two case studies in Barcelona and the West Midlands conurbations¹, focusing on two areas grouping small and medium-sized cities: the Black Country in the West Midlands conurbation, formed by 20 towns grouped into four metropolitan districts, and the Vallès Occidental County, formed by 23 municipalities led by the medium-sized cities of Sabadell and Terrassa in the Barcelona metropolitan region. These towns, with a long history as industrial districts, have generated intermunicipal partnerships to reinforce their position as economic and political actors within their metropolitan region, proposing economic development approaches that differ from those of the central city. This analysis will allow for a better understanding of to what extent and in which sense intermunicipal partnerships are shaping polycentrism through governance innovations.

The article has the following structure: first I propose an institutionalist perspective to analyse the role of small and medium-sized cities in relation to the configuration of polycentric

1 The analysis presented is based on a PhD research that included 50 in-depth interviews to policy-makers, economic actors (economic development departments of city councils, chambers of commerce, entrepreneurs' associations and trade unions) and civil society actors (third sector associations) in Barcelona and West Midlands driven between October 2009 and May 2011. The research included also historical and economic analysis of both metropolitan regions.

metropolitan regions. Following this perspective, the second part of the article includes a brief historical analysis of the two areas focusing on their historical configuration as sub-centres of the metropolitan regions, their economic development, and their decline with post-Fordism. Section three analyses the formation of intermunicipal partnerships for economic development to overcome the decline, and their consequences in terms of the formation of a collective actor, examining their forms of governance and the relations with multi-level governance. Finally, the last section proposes some conclusions on how small and medium-sized cities play a role in metropolitan regions focusing on their economic organisation and their participation as collective actors in emerging forms of governance.

Multi-level governance, centralities, and metropolitan regions

Analysing the role of small cities in the configuration of polycentrism in metropolitan regions requires a previous reflection on territories in the metropolitan context. Rather than static geographical units, 'territories' are the result of social processes that are made rather than being a given (Cochrane, 2012). They are the result of social, political, and economic relations between actors in a given geographical space (Keating, 2001) that bring about local forms of regulation; with reciprocity, market, and redistribution mechanisms grounded on these social relations (Le Galès, 2002; Ghezzi and Mingione, 2007; Mingione, 1994; Polanyi, 2001).

Despite being analysed often as a single unit playing a role in the global economy, metropolitan regions are formed by a compound of cities and towns that maintain forms of local regulation to a lesser or greater degree, with some forms of regulation taking place at metropolitan, regional, and national scales. The configuration of a metropolitan region as a territory, with its own forms of regulation, is complex because local forms of regulation, shaped during the long historical process of industrialisation, continue to exist. Cities and groups of cities can form a 'territory' in which there are local economic exchanges and common feelings of identity, rooted in their common

history of modernisation and industrialisation. The emergence of polycentrism in metropolitan regions can be read as the attempt of these local identities to prevail when facing a metropolitan identity in which the central city is the main element.

In this context, small and medium-sized cities, as well as central cities, have tried to promote their own policies for economic growth relying on their main actors and institutions such as chambers of commerce, guilds, technical schools, universities, business associations, and so on (Trigilia, 2004). This has often brought about diverging interests between municipalities within the metropolitan region and has contributed to the reinforcement of polycentrism. The existence of long-term patterns of industrialisation and the formation of local production systems and industrial districts also means that small and medium-sized municipalities with these trajectories have often found common interests and promoted forms of collaboration in opposition to the central city. The local continues to be a place for social relations, regulations, and the construction of strong and weak ties between individuals, private companies, and public and societal actors (Ghezzi and Mingione, 2007; Granovetter, 1973, 2005; Trigilia, 2002, 2004), while at the same time being affected by other scales in a multi-level governance framework.

Besides, current trends on decentralisation promoted by national governments are reinforcing the role of these local identities rather than the metropolitan region as a single actor. Processes of state restructuring are making the consolidation of metropolitan regions as single territories more complex. From a political economy perspective, various authors (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Brenner, 2003, 2011; Jessop, 2002; Jessop et al., 2008) have underlined that the increasing role of local and regional scales is the result of the selective adaptation of the nation-state to the needs of capitalist growth. The once central administrative power is being redistributed to the different tiers of government and new actors are being invited to intervene in decision-making (Brenner, 2003, 2004, 2011; Jessop, 2002, 2004). Metropolitan governments, which were created in the seventies to

make the delivery of national policies more efficient (Salet et al., 2003), have been dismantled since the eighties, increasing competitiveness between municipalities within metropolitan regions, bringing tensions and the search for new forms of ‘metropolitan governance’.

Nevertheless, this process has been extremely uneven with strong differences between countries. Historical processes of the development of nation-state formation shaping the degree and the form of decentralisation explain these differences. In the United Kingdom, decentralisation and territorialisation in England was reversed after ten years of the implementation of regions due to the lack of historical tradition in regionalism (Cochrane, 2012), whereas the devolution of certain powers to Scotland and Northern Ireland remained. In Spain, as in Italy, there has been a strong process of decentralisation since the seventies, but without a comparable redistribution of public resources from central to local administrations (Eizaguirre et al., 2012; Wollmann, 2009), causing conflicts and low levels of integration among levels of government and a certain concentration of power at the regional level at the expense of the local level (Rosetti et al., 2002).

Despite these national pressures and the strong role of local path dependency, small and medium-sized cities have developed innovative approaches to economic development, partly due to the influence of the EU framework. As Le Galès has stressed (2002), the process of EU integration has increased opportunities for the development of local policies and strengthened ties between local actors. Structural and cohesion programmes have encouraged governance approaches promoting the inclusion of local actors in economic development policies. With the aim of promoting local production systems and agglomerations, the EU has also recommended and fostered the development of coalitions and partnerships between municipalities and local actors through EU funded programmes for employment, local economic development, neighbourhood improvement, or urban renewal, among others (Geddes and Bennington, 2001; Trigilia, 2004).

Summarising, both state restructuring and local historical development paths are affecting the

consolidation of metropolitan regions as single territories and the emergence of polycentrism, and these elements set the scene for the action and organisation of local actors. In this framework, the actors are developing their strategies and shaping metropolitan regions. As Le Galès (2002, 2005) and Keil (2011) have pointed out, even though pressures for capitalist growth exist, actors at local and regional scales play a role in shaping these structures and transforming them into specific practices. The existence of regions and subregions can be understood as the result of these processes of institutionalisation and the existence of social relations (Paasi, 2010).

Departing from this analytical framework, the analysis of strategies for polycentrism in both case studies follows two steps. Firstly, we will analyse the historical development of each territory, paying special attention to its integration into the metropolitan context during the second half of the twentieth century. Once the institutional context is set, the analysis focuses on the creation of new forms of governance in relation to three different dimensions: a) the capacity of changing relations between actors involved in economic development through greater collaboration; b) the reinforcement of a collective identity, including external and internal representations of the actors; and c) the promotion of new forms of collective decision-making and policy implementation. This analysis will show to what extent these partnerships are innovative and to what extent are reinforcing these groups of cities as territories.

The Black Country and Vallès Occidental as territories: from industrial districts to economic decline

The Black Country and Vallès Occidental are important parts of the West Midlands conurbation and Barcelona Metropolitan Region respectively, both in economic and population terms. They are currently the most important industrial areas of their conurbations, with a relevant concentration of industrial companies and jobs. Thus, they are industrial sub-centres concentrating

population and companies which are relatively autonomous from the central city².

Nowadays Barcelona metropolitan region (figure 1) comprises 3,240 square kilometres and 164 municipalities and several sub-centres (Trullén and Boix, 2003). The county of Vallès Occidental, led by the two adjacent cities of Sabadell and Terrassa, includes 23 municipalities and is one of the most relevant industrial areas of the region. The county has 583 square kilometres and includes roughly 900 thousand inhabitants (half of them in Sabadell and Terrassa) with 25 per cent of employment in the industrial sector (in some small municipalities of the county such as Rubí, industrial employment rises to the 50 per cent).

[FIGURE 1: The Barcelona Metropolitan Region and Vallès Occidental]

The West Midlands conurbation (Figure 2) is smaller and more centralised, with 902 square kilometres and seven metropolitan districts: Coventry, Solihull, Birmingham, Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton³. The Black Country area is formed by the four districts of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton⁴, accounting for 357 square kilometres and one million inhabitants, the same number as the city of Birmingham. Black Country has 17 % of working population employed in the industrial sector⁵.

[FIGURE 2: The West Midlands and the Black Country area HERE]

Apart from economic sub-centres, both Vallès Occidental and the Black Country have a strong identity as the result of their long historical development paths that go back to the 18th century. In

2 In both areas the majority of the population lives and work in the same or in a neighbouring municipality. In the Black Country local population is employed mainly in the Black Country despite the skilled jobs are held by people living outside the four districts (interview to a policy-maker from Dudley). In Vallès Occidental, the majority lives and works in the county, except the southern municipalities, which are closer and more integrated to Barcelona (following data from www.diba.cat, last accessed 27 march 2014).

3 Even though there is a large number of towns, 1974 reform of local administration in England merged municipalities into these seven districts to gain efficiency in policy-making.

4 Nevertheless not all the municipalities of the Black Country area were grouped into the four districts. Some towns were excluded as they fell into other jurisdictions. Nevertheless, until the creation of the four districts, there was no clear limits of the Black Country area.

5 In both cases the number of population working in the industrial sectors is considerably higher than the national average. Data from Black Country observatory, <http://www.the-blackcountry.com/intelligence>, last accessed 15 october 2013, and Idescat, www.idescat.cat last accessed on the same date.

fact, the relevance of the Black Country and Vallès Occidental as subregions comes from their role during industrialisation processes, when they became important centres of economic activity (Spencer et al., 1986; Trullén and Boix, 2003). They were unevenly successful in maintaining their centrality, but their relevance in the past fosters the development of policy approaches for economic development.

During the second half of the nineteenth century the nowadays capitals of Vallès Occidental Sabadell and Terrassa developed prosperous local economic production systems based on wool textile industries. By the end of that century both cities controlled the Spanish wool market and increased their economic and political relevance. Besides, both cities promoted industrialisation of neighbouring villages, transforming some of them into industrial municipalities in which to locate factories. This influence brought to the birth of Vallès Occidental, which became recognized as a county under the Spanish Second Republic (1931-1939). This administrative unit was abolished after the francoist victory in the Spanish civil war in 1939, and returned after the Spanish transition (1976), even though it has no competences or resources for policy-making.

Since the 1860s Vallès Occidental formed an industrial district autonomous from Barcelona, that remained untouched until the economic crisis of the 1970s. That was possible thanks to the imposition of Francoism, that defended protectionist policies and allowed for national production. The return of democracy and the openness to international markets meant the demise of textile industries and the diversification of the economy. Democratic governance mechanisms allowed for greater autonomy of the local level in decision-making and the entrance of left-wing governments, trade unions and neighbourhood associations in policy-making. Traditional economic elites lost the political control of city councils and adapted to share power with the new hegemonic actors in Vallès Occidental (left-wing governments, neighbourhood associations, and trade unions) participating in social dialogue mechanisms as entrepreneurs' associations.

The crisis of traditional industries was partially balanced by two elements: the progressive attraction of industries from Barcelona, and the industrial impetus of the eighties thanks to the entrance into the European Union. Industrial companies inside Barcelona moved to areas with better communication networks, and the Vallès Occidental municipalities were suitable as there was already an existing industrial tradition and equipments near the main communication networks. Nevertheless, since the eighties the whole county saw an increase of unemployment that remained higher than the Catalan average even in periods of economic growth. Moreover, the metropolitanization process brought greater integration with Barcelona specially for municipalities in the southern part of the county. These municipalities were integrated into a metropolitan governance mechanism promoted by Barcelona city council that includes the 35 municipalities of the metropolitan region nearest to Barcelona, splitting the county in two parts. That meant a certain weakening of Sabadell and Terrassa as sub-centres and changes in the relations between municipalities.

The Black Country shows stronger patterns of agglomeration and creation a common identity (even though, by contrast, it has never formed a single administrative unit). Municipalities of the Black Country where the epicentre of industrial revolution since 1760s, as they formed one of the main areas of extraction of metal and carbon of England. In the West Midlands industrialisation was based on metallurgy, and its eastern small towns, rich in coal and iron were transformed into suppliers of resources to Birmingham, which became a hub for craftsmanship in metal and jewellery. Birmingham and 'its district' formed one of the first industrial districts of the world with skilled work concentrated in the main city.

Despite these economic links, there was a specific sense of belonging in these towns related with the way of life and the different production specialisation. Inhabitants combined subsistence farming with mining in small workshops, and developed their own dialect and way of life. The

close interactions between local actors created a strong sense of identity, which, from 1840 onwards, gave rise to the idea of the area as 'the Black Country', a territory with a specific way of life and economic production linked to but different from that of Birmingham (Allen, 1929).

Nevertheless, Black Country municipalities were shadowed by the growing relevance of Birmingham. Since the last quarter of the nineteenth century the Black Country area and the West Midlands as a whole underwent a process of vertical integration of production stimulated by expanding markets and the participation of the country in two world wars (Leach and Percy-Smith, 2001). The production of metal goods was progressively orientated towards car manufacturing generating the birth of the British car industry. After the second world war the Birmingham-Black Country area became one of the main contributors to the economic growth of the country, providing materials for reconstruction and motorized vehicles (Bryson, Daniels, & Henry, 1996). This strong specialisation was parallel to increasing administrative centralisation and the creation of the West Midlands County Council, a metropolitan authority that meant the weakening of local decision-making capacity and the black country identity as well.

Fordist crisis meant the destruction of the economic basis of the Birmingham-Black Country district and the diverging paths between Birmingham and the Black Country. The main companies guiding the economic activity disappeared or were absorbed by international groups who delocated industrial production. The Thatcherite approach to economic development, based on competition between municipalities for the attraction of companies and capital, brought the dissolution of the metropolitan authority and the transfer of part of its competences to seven smaller metropolitan districts forming the conurbation. The four metropolitan districts of the Black Country, mainly controlled by labour and suffering huge unemployment, enforced local measures to countervail this trend, but they were not coordinated. By the beginning of the eighties the whole conurbation became one of the most deprived areas of England. In this context, Birmingham local actors

(including real estate sector, financial actors and the city council) started an entrepreneurial approach to shift the economic basis of the city towards services, whereas the Black Country districts remained declining looking for an alternative model of growth (Burfitt, 1996).

However, in Black Country and Vallès Occidental despite huge economic transformations territorial identities prevailed. These identities are still present in the strategies of workers to find a job, their collective organisation as well as in the views and approaches of policy-makers, private companies and other actors on economic development and social cohesion. Current strategies for growth in both territories are framed by these identities and the development path followed.

Contemporary policies for (sub)centrality and new geographical scales for development

Given their historical development, one of the main problems of the two territories since the eighties was unemployment and economic decline. Policies to overcome this situation in the nineties brought increasing integration and coordination between municipalities. Two elements have reinforced the trend. In the first place, the long tradition of economic and social networks based on industrial production generate similar and compatible approaches to economic development, as well as similar conceptions on social cohesion based on the same policy problems. In second place, specially in the case of Vallès Occidental, the EU incentives have been key to promote greater integration, as EU programs foster wide partnerships beyond the local level, specially in employment and economic development issues (Geddes and Bennington, 2001). The combination of these two elements has meant the development of partnerships and the creation of common strategies for growth and implementation of policies in both areas.

During the second half of the nineties, Black Country authorities as well as municipalities of Vallès Occidental started to promote economic development with the support of EU funds, developing

programs against unemployment based on coordination between municipalities to develop joint approaches and strategies. The objectives in the two territories are similar, that is, fostering economic development and social cohesion promoting innovation and modernisation of existing economic activity. Nevertheless, policy-making capacity and the openness of decision-making processes differ greatly between the two countries giving different forms of partnership and strategies.

Integration of active employment policies in Vallès Occidental

In Spain, the local level is very fragmented, which means not only a large number of municipalities but also strong differences among them in terms of population, financial resources and policy-making capacity. Since the return of democracy, municipalities have been reluctant to lose autonomy in policy-making, aiming to develop their own responses to different policy problems, including economic development. In Catalonia this trend has been reinforced by the huge differences in size amongst municipalities and the tendency of the Catalan government to assume competences and resources in a process of regional recentralisation (Rosetti and Gomà Cardona, 2007).

Nevertheless, in Vallès Occidental, the participation in the 1997-1998 EU pilot program for Territorial Employment Pacts (TEPs) brought the opportunity to overcome great territorial fragmentation and bring the 23 municipalities to work together increasing coordination in economic development and employment policies. Following EU guidelines the TEP of Vallès Occidental was based on social dialogue, involving the main trade unions and entrepreneurs associations of the county. The experience meant a shift generating agreements between municipalities, trade unions and entrepreneurs' associations and measures on active employment policies and economic development, allowing these actors to have an active role in a policy field which is normally developed by the Catalan government. The structure of social dialogue prevented other actors being

involved in the Pact as active members; they could only participate in the implementation phase.

When the TEP was launched, municipalities of Vallès Occidental had experience on promoting social dialogue. Spanish constitution promotes social dialogue as a tool for economic development and employment policies, following a corporatist model. Although this model has been weakened in the last years, city councils, specially those with social-democratic orientation, have promoted social dialogue agreements for employment and economic development policies. These practices have been common in the municipalities of Vallès Occidental since the eighties, when leftist parties took control of city councils⁶.

Thus, most of these municipalities have developed local policies for economic development and employment involving local branches of the two main trade unions in Spain: Comisiones Obreras and UGT⁷ and local entrepreneurs' associations CECOT (in Terrassa) and CIESC (in Sabadell). As these social actors are involved in local policies in most of the 23 municipalities, they have pushed for greater integration of local policies on economic development despite the initial aversion of city councils to collaborate.

The participation of Vallès Occidental in the Pilot Program was considered a success by all participants and the European Commission (Mosley, 2004), and the experience continued with two programs in 2000-2003 and 2003-2006. The collaboration went a step further in 2006 when the 23 municipalities of Vallès Occidental, the main trade unions and entrepreneurs' associations created a consortium for the management of active employment policies and economic development in the

6 In 2013, 10 of the 23 municipalities are controlled by the socialist or the post-communist parties (or both in coalition), including the two cities of Sabadell and Terrassa and the most important industrial municipalities in the county. The conservative party *Convergència i Unió* controls only 4 municipalities.

7 Comisiones Obreras is the largest trade union in Spain, linked to the communist party, whereas UGT is the oldest trade union in Spain and linked to the Socialist Party.

county in agreement with the Catalan government. Instead of centralised design and implementation of active employment policies, the Consortium for Employment and Economic Development of Vallès Occidental (CEDEVO) receives funds from the Catalan Government, and is the responsible of designing and implementing these policies in the 23 municipalities of the county. The CEDEVO has public responsibility, going beyond the voluntary partnership amongst actors, and its main aims are the development of active employment policies, the application for funds at other levels and the coordination of economic development policies. The main guidelines of the CEDEVO are fixed in a five years strategic plan agreed by all participants that includes only employment and economic development issues agreed by the actors involved.

Soft coordination mechanisms in the Black Country

In the English context the negation of the conflict between capital and work and the openness to participation of a wide range of actors has meant the increasing role of the private sector in local policy-making and the entrance of third-sector organisations to include a social dimension in policies. At the same time, there is a blurring of responsibilities and norms of participation in policy-making (Swyngedouw, 2005). The promotion of participation through Local Strategic Partnerships and other forms of governance has meant the inclusion of private interests both individually represented and collectively through associations and chambers of commerce. In the Black Country that has meant a relevance of private actors and the exclusion of trade unions to intervene in policy-making, despite the majority of labour governments in the Black Country districts.

Since the crisis of fordism the metropolitan districts forming the Black Country have been forced to promote employment and economic development policies in a situation of scarcity of resources and weak private actors, strongly affected by the industrial crisis. During the eighties the districts of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton strengthened their collaboration through a voluntary

association: the Association of Black Country Authorities (ABCA). The objective was to coordinate strategies for economic development and to avoid competition of the four metropolitan districts in obtaining EU funds. Instead of influencing through a specific program like the TEPs, the EU has influenced black country bringing greater coordination for EU funds, specially to face Birmingham competitiveness in a context of strong local competition for resources⁸. Despite the ABCA, we there was competition to attract resources and investments and a lack of common planning. A salient case is the transformation of a former metallurgic factory into a commercial complex in Dudley, which brought new economic activity to this district, but affected negatively commercial activity in the inner centres of the rest of the towns in the Black Country impoverishing other Black Country areas (Murie et al., 2003).

The collaboration has increased since the second half of the nineties, when regionalism was deployed as a new strategy for growth in England. The creation of the West Midlands region, that included the Birmingham-Black Country conurbation and a large rural hinterland, brought the development of a regional plan, summarized in a Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) that promoted the role of the central area of the region as a cornerstone for growth (Murie et al., 2003). During the development of the RPG, led by the Regional Development Agency but in which local authorities were invited to participate, the local authorities of the four districts in the Black Country, together with private actors, created the *Black Country Joint Core Strategy*⁹ that was integrated later into the overall West Midlands strategy. With this integration, the Black Country as a whole was recognized as a *subregion* and received primary attention for development together with Birmingham. This recognition meant that regional agencies developed local policies understanding the Black Country as a whole, and opened Black Country offices. The new governance framework also increased

8 In fact the Black Country participated together with Birmingham in a Territorial Employment Pact, but it had no effects in terms of collaboration between Birmingham and the Black Country and finished in 1998.

9 The Strategy was based on an exhaustive study with the participation of more than 150 actors of the area on the needs and priorities for the Black Country: the Black Country Study.

convergence of private interests in the Black Country, and the four chambers of commerce of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton integrated into a single Black Country Chamber of Commerce in 2002.

The Black Country Strategy defines a 30-year plan with measures in different fields including environment, education, economic development and urban regeneration in order to change the downward path of the area and reversing a seemingly unavoidable path dependent trajectory. The BCJS focuses on to economic regeneration through industrial activity. As a director of economic policy in the West Midlands underlined, the BCJCS is broader than spatial planning and housing as it also involves social issues such as education and training, or employment needs (Black Country Consortium, 2004).

To develop and promote this strategy, the four districts transformed the ABCA into the Black Country Consortium (BCC), a flexible, voluntary, public-private partnership funded by the four districts and the regional government. The partnership involves private actors and third sector organisations of the four districts. Given the country's strong centrist tendencies, the consortium had to remain flexible in order to adapt to the changing demands of national government and since 1999 has seen continuous changes in its composition, with different actors being part of the consortium at different moments, but with a core formed by the four metropolitan authorities.

Two path-dependent forms of governance innovation

Both case studies show innovative initiatives framed in path-dependent contexts. Despite being influenced by the institutional context, the resulting governance arrangements of these initiatives are innovative as they have transformed relations between the actors involved, created new mechanisms of coordination and policy making, and they have reinforced and reshaped the collective identity of the territory in order to foster the area as a geographical scale for development. These innovations have led to different prospects for subcentrality as the cities involved have

gained a common approach to economic development and a common discourse on the relevance of the area within the metropolitan region, even though these results differ from one case to the next.

In Vallès Occidental, the involvement of trade unions and entrepreneurs' associations in the Consortium has led to the assumption of new roles in policy-making for these actors and the strengthening of their collaboration at county level, which has reinforced Vallès Occidental as a geographical scale for development. The Consortium has also brought about increasing collaboration between city councils, overcoming the distance between small and large municipalities, and collaboration between city councils and social agents. In the Black Country, the creation of the Consortium meant the involvement of a wide array of actors from the four districts in the elaboration of the overall strategy for economic development and its inclusion in the Consortium in order to implement different programmes, fostering integration between the four districts through closer collaboration under a single strategy for economic development. Furthermore, it has allowed for a change in the relations between local administrations and the national government, as the four districts have a single platform of representation when addressing other levels of government.

Secondly, the creation of policy-making mechanisms has been much more developed in the case of Vallès Occidental, in which the Consortium assumes the decision-making and implementation of active employment policies for the county, than in the Black Country, where the Consortium has no formal competences for policy development. Nevertheless, in the case of Vallès Occidental, coordination mechanisms are weaker in terms of economic development policies and the overall strategy for growth. Although based on a voluntary basis, in the Black Country the coordination has led to a long-term 30-year overall strategy to overcome economic and social decline, whereas in Vallès Occidental the strategy was based on a five-year agreement on measures for employment and economic development, giving discretion on policies to the local level. In both cases strategic

planning mechanisms bring together economic growth and social cohesion. In this regard, economic development is linked to improving social cohesion, ensuring better inclusion in the labour market, better education opportunities, gender equality, or better working hours. How the link between economic development and social cohesion is understood depends on the different correlation of forces between capital and labour in the two countries, even though in both cases the notion of social cohesion is strongly linked to labour market insertion rather than more emancipatory perspectives.

Consortiums in both cases have developed mechanisms for policy coordination at a supra-local level, including mechanisms to bid jointly for national and European resources. Instead of competing, municipalities send their proposals to the Consortium, which gives technical support and creates a common bid for those municipalities interested, when possible. In this way, municipalities avoid spending human resources, as technical staff of the supra-local institutions are taking care of the bid, and improve their possibilities of success. Moreover, different municipalities negotiate and lobby as a single actor when addressing higher administrations. Other measures for coordination include the promotion of services and products of the subregion among local actors to foster agglomeration, the creation of a single catalogue of economic spaces in order to attract companies and to avoid competitiveness between municipalities, or the creation of a single catalogue of activation policies for unemployed people, avoiding the creation of the same training activity in two neighbouring municipalities. To a certain extent, these mechanisms have led to the reduction of internal competition, but the capacity of the partnerships to develop a single and coherent policy is limited, as local authorities continue taking decisions individually and competing to attract investments. In both cases we can find forms of competition for resources between municipalities as the result of the lack of funds of city councils due to the distribution of funds between levels of government in both countries.

Thirdly, these initiatives have reinforced and reshaped historical collective identities, strengthening a sense of belonging to the subregion. In the Black Country, the coordination of policies has been based to a great extent on enhancing the collective identity in opposition to Birmingham, and promoting the creation of actors operating at Black Country scale, such as the Black Country chamber of commerce. This strategy has also consisted of rebranding the name of the Black Country, taking advantage of the strong sense of belonging of the people in the area. This identity building has been possible thanks to the weak attachment of the population to the identity of the four metropolitan districts established in the seventies, and the feelings of attachment to the Black Country identity. Conversely, in Vallès Occidental, identity building has been weaker as local identities remain stronger, especially those attached to the large cities of Sabadell and Terrassa.

In both cases, identity building is being based to a large extent on the industrial tradition of the areas, an element influencing the contents of the strategic plans, which refer to the modernisation of already existing industrial economic activity and the definition of specific industrial activities for economic growth to be privileged by economic development policies. This approach shows that local actors work toward linking the existing development path of the territory with innovation and knowledge-intensive activities, reversing the decline of industrial activity.

Interviews with policy-makers, technical staff of city administrations, and other actors involved in the partnerships show that for all the actors interviewed in the Black Country, the strong industrial specialisation of the past is seen as an advantage for the territory. Thus, even though there are prospects for diversifying the economy, industrial activities must be at the forefront of the overall strategy, as the Black Country cannot compete in services sectors with Birmingham. Besides, the strategic plan includes measures to reverse the consequences of previous industrial development such as derelict land and low skills among the population, which hinder possibilities for modernising already existing industries. In Vallès Occidental, despite the increasing tertiarisation of

Sabadell and Terrassa, policy-makers from both city councils, trade unions, and entrepreneurs' associations agreed on the need to reinvigorate industry. Moreover, one of the main elements of identity building is to emphasise that Vallès Occidental is the main industrial area of the Barcelona Metropolitan Region and that to a large extent services in the Barcelona Metropolitan Region are dependent on the demand of industrial sectors (Soy, 2008)□.

In summary, we find two different forms of governance innovations that promote new relations between actors, reinforce collective identity, and develop new tools for policy-making in order to reinforce an area as a geographical scale and as a collective actor. These different strategies also bring different outcomes in the configuration of polycentrism and metropolitan governance. In the Black Country, the strengthening of collective identity and the creation of a long-term strategy was initially linked to a regional agenda. The inclusion of the Black Country as a subregion meant that it was receiving a similar status to Birmingham in a top-down metropolitan strategy for growth. Nevertheless, the cancellation of the UK regionalist project by the liberal-conservative government since 2011, the elimination of the West Midlands strategy, and the creation of a new nationally-led framework for growth based on Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) has forced the Black Country to adapt. But instead of integrating into a common strategy with Birmingham, the Black Country districts have developed their own LEP to foster the Black Country as a new geographical scale (Bentley et al., 2010). Conversely, in Vallès Occidental municipalities have agreed on collaboration but collective identity is weaker as is the common strategy for growth. In this case, municipalities and social agents focus on developing a common position in the negotiation of a metropolitan agenda, making sure that the interests of the industrial territories are taken into consideration.

Conclusions

The analysis presented in this article shows that intermunicipal partnerships for economic

development are relevant in terms of shaping polycentrism as they are used as tools for policy integration and coordination among municipalities and local actors to defend the economic interests of areas that could be considered as peripheries of the central city. The two case studies show that despite differences in the outcomes of these strategies, there is an aim to strengthen identities and forms of regulation creating or reinforcing a territory within the metropolitan context. This has clear effects on the organisation of metropolitan governance, as new collective actors can emerge and modify the existing constellation of actors and the willingness to collaborate at the metropolitan scale, what Nelles conceptualises as civic capital (Nelles and Durand, 2012; Nelles, 2013). In some cases the strategies can promote polycentrism and metropolitan integration, whereas in other cases they can lead to attempts at isolation from the central city and the negation of metropolitan links. How these strategies to foster polycentrism affect the metropolitan scale and the governance capacity may vary, depending on the historical development path of cities and the multi-level governance context. Rather than empty contents or suburbs without soul, subcentral cities of European metropolitan regions have long histories in industrial production, an element that influences the current constellation of actors, their willingness to promote industrial activity with added-value rather than the service economy and their relations with the central city.

These kinds of decisions are not only the result of rational choices but also the outcome of a complex set of practices and discourses embedded in institutional contexts (Ghezzi & Mingione, 2007). Taking this formation of partnerships as a form of fostering polycentrism also shows the strong complexity of metropolitan regions as aggregates of overlapping local and supra-local identities and historical trajectories that influence economic decisions. It is this complexity that helps to explain why metropolitan regions as a whole do not have a single and coherent strategy for economic growth, and the existence of intraregional competitiveness dynamics combined with certain forms of coordination and collaboration at a metropolitan scale.

These dynamics are clearly influenced by the multi-level governance framework, as it defines the conditions for collaboration and competition. In a framework of growing global competitiveness, we find forms of competition between municipalities and territories in different scales of metropolitan regions, despite the goal of stronger integration due to the need of city councils to obtain funds and investments. As we have seen in the UK, strong vertical integration between levels of government and strong competitiveness between local administrations has brought about competition between the Black Country and Birmingham, with independent economic development agendas. In Vallès Occidental, with less vertical integration and less competition between municipalities, peripheral municipalities promote their own strategies for agglomeration trying at the same time to take advantage of the central city branding, collaborating in the promotion of the metropolitan region, and trying to include their views on economic development in the metropolitan agenda. Thus, in this context we can find selective uses of scales by local actors, which try to reinforce their centrality operating at different scales.

EU programmes have meant a new framework of opportunities for these small and medium-sized cities as they have found resources, expertise, and legitimation to develop new approaches to economic development. It is necessary to pay attention to the role of the EU programmes, especially those based on restructuring deprived industrial areas, and their effects in terms of polycentrism and spreading economic activity to different centres. EU programmes have made governance innovations possible in this direction as there are new resources that do not depend on the central government and that foster the involvement of local actors.

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the dynamics of change in the central cities, focusing on the impact of policy paradigms such as 'the creative economy' and urban regeneration to create social conditions for economic growth. Nevertheless, we need to focus much more attention on the spaces in metropolitan peripheries, which also contribute to the configuration of

metropolitan strategies for growth. In the context of the current economic crisis where re-industrialisation has been included as an element for economic recovery, how different forms of governance (pacts, consortiums, agreements etc.) and policies (strategic plans, coordination policies, etc.) have led to specific forms of industrial local development is key. Besides, in a context of crisis and growing centralisation trends, this kind of analysis also shows how local actors shape different forms of resistance and adaptation to face scarcity of resources and shrinking competences.

If local actors are shaping structural processes of maximisation of capitalist growth (Keil, 2011), we need to analyse the complex interactions between local actors in the metropolitan context, paying attention to which collective actors emerge, which geographical scales are being promoted for economic development, and the conflict inherent in those decisions. With this analysis we will be able to understand the complexity of metropolitan governance.

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