

INTRODUCTION

Over a year ago, the editorial board of the Regional Science, Policy and Practice (RSPP) journal thought that the independence movement (or, in a broader sense, the “right to decide” the relationship to be maintained with the rest of the Spanish state), which is happening in Catalonia, was relevant enough to prepare this Special Issue.

The decision to coordinate this Special issue was not easy, since these types of analysis may be affected by personal decisions, opinions and starting points. All efforts have been made to generate an academic Special Issue, based only on scientific rigor. In that sense, its edition was shared between two researchers, one Catalan/Spanish and the other Portuguese, and Editor in Chief of Regional Science, Policy and Practice. Additionally, there was a *call for papers* that was totally open and public, and was announced to researchers coming from all places and disciplines, countries and continents that we thought could contribute with interesting research on the subject, directly analysing the Catalan case or other related cases. Thirteen proposals showed interest, of which only seven were finally completed in a timely manner. All of them were submitted to an external evaluation process, combining referees for each article being authors of the Special Issue with external experts. We sincerely believe that the objectivity of the process has been achieved.

The reasons for addressing this monograph were not only specifically related to the analysis of this developed region of southern Europe, but for being an example of what can happen in other territories. As Wagner and Marin point out in their paper, "the Catalan question has become the EU's most serious territorial integrity crisis in recent years and its effect on the perceptions of the European Union remains largely unstudied."

Catalonia can be an example of the trade-off that is taking place between "local" and "national" interests. The world is moving towards an economic system in which cities and large metropolitan areas are the economic and social engine although the political and institutional power remains at national and international level. There are also other regions in Europe (such as Scotland or Corsica) or in the world (such as Quebec) that, for historical, cultural and / or economic reasons have or may have similar claims. No two cases are the same, and each one has its peculiarities and differential facts, but the final consequences of all of them may be similar as well as the seminal factors that influence them.

In the case of Catalonia, a multitude of interesting factors converge, on which there is no agreement on whether or not they have had an effect on the popular reaction in recent years, asking for the “right to decide” and / or in other cases, directly, requesting the independence. Although it is very difficult to specify percentages, without a specific referendum about that, the population of residents in Catalonia who, according to the surveys, seem to want to exercise the “right to decide” (without necessarily meaning that they are in favour of independence) revolves around 70% -80%, while the supporters of independence are around 45% -55%.

In Catalonia, there is an economic, social, political and cultural movement that is reacting to the passivity of problems pending resolution, which have been dragging for decades. This reaction may have been exploded and manifested more clearly after the ruling of the Spanish Constitutional Court (June 2010), in which some articles of the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia were declared unconstitutional. Take into account that the Statute had been previously approved in the Catalan Parliament (2005) and endorsed at the polls by the Catalans (2006) and also ratified as an organic law by the King of Spain (2006).

Why has there been this reaction? Is it a strictly economic problem in which there is an excess of solidarity between the Spanish regions, being Catalonia one of the most contributing to the Solidarity and Competitiveness Funds? Is it a reaction to the economic crisis of late 2000s, in which the Catalans want to stop contributing substantially for the rest of Spain? Is it a political problem that goes beyond the strictly economic one, and shows that the political system designed during the transition to democracy (in which the institutional and competency model transferred to the Spanish regions is very similar for all of them, whether historical nations or not), was it a mistake? Is it also a cultural and linguistic problem, with a lack of recognition of a territory that is a historical nation and the "Spanish" parties have failed to recognize and confront? Has the political crisis unleashed had negative effects on the Catalan economy? Are we facing a crisis similar to others that have existed in other territories previously, such as in Quebec? ... These questions are some of those that the authors of this Special Issue try to answer in their papers.

This monograph begins with some general context articles, which refer to an area larger than the strictly Catalan one, but which can help explain the general framework of the debate. Among them, we can mention the paper of Bruce Newbold ("Constitutional reform, referendums and sovereignty association: Quebec's search for a distinct society in Canada"), in which Quebec's experience is explained, and its possible similarities and differences with Catalan or Scottish cases. Alberto Dalmazzo and Guido de Blasio's paper ("Till localism do us part: cultural identity and the costs of separation") is also included in the contextual articles in which they reflect on the importance of commercial opening beyond the country itself. Based on an economic model, they explain that in a situation like the current one, with the common European market, in which the international trade barriers are largely removed and the importance of domestic market is lower, the separation costs are lower, which facilitates the desires of secession of certain territories.

On the other hand, another set of articles more focused on the specific Catalan case are presented. We could differentiate two blocks within them; the first focuses on general issues and political science, while the second block focuses more on economic issues.

Within the first block, more general and political, the first article is that of Andrea Wagner, Jianna Marin and Dorian Kroqi ("The Catalan struggle for independence and the role of the European Union") in which, from a point of view closer to political science analyses the reasons for and against independence. After an exhaustive field work (interviews) and the realization of a binary logistic regression about the support or not for the independence of Catalonia, the paper analyses the key variables of the process and the role that the European Union is playing. A second article is that of Igor Calzada ("Catalonia rescaling Spain: Is it feasible to accommodate its "Stateless Citizenship"), which makes an interesting reflection on the independence process (or rather, the "right to decide") comparing the situation between the metropolitan and the non-metropolitan areas and the impetus that the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona has given to this process. The author analyses the facts of these two areas and emphasizes the hidden idea that metropolitan areas are detaching from non-metropolitan areas of the same regions. The author concludes with "at present, it is not feasible for the Spanish nation-state to accommodate Catalonia's "stateless citizenship".

In the first paper of the second block, more focused on economic issues, Beatriz Benitez-Aurioles ("Transition costs and economic effects of the sovereignty process in Catalonia") analyzes whether the independence process of recent years and the level of associated uncertainty have had economic consequences for the Catalan economy. She concludes that the data does not

confirm the deterioration of the economic performance of the region. Subsequently, and already delving deeper more into the causes of the secessionist process, Germà Bel, Xavier Cuadras-Morató and Toni Rodon (“Crisis? What crisis? Economic recovery and support for independence in Catalonia”) analyze whether there is any relationship between the differential intensity of the economic recovery and support for secessionist or unionist parties. They reject the hypothesis that the separatist movement is linked to the period of economic crisis, trying to show that with the recovery of recent years it has not had any significant impact on the recent evolution of support for independence. They send a message that the problem in Catalonia goes beyond the economic situation. A final study is that of Guillem López Casasnovas and Joan Rosselló Villalonga (“Is regional redistribution harmful for growth? An empirical analysis on the Spanish Autonomous Communities. 2001-2016”) in which a possible reason to justify the independence desires is justified. It is estimated, from an empirical perspective, the relationship between the GDP growth rate of the Spanish regions and the level of regional redistribution, and the implications of regional redistribution in a decentralized union, such as Spain, in which the possibility of secession is not plausible, for political reasons. The results obtained indicate that this redistribution effect negatively affects growth.

This presentation could have been completed with data, both historical from the birth of Catalonia to the present, which especially detail the chronology of what happened in the last decade on the social, political and legal events. It would also have been possible to provide economic information, such as: the per capita financing data received in each autonomous community before and after applying the competitiveness and cooperation funds (and see how the principle of ordinality¹ is not maintained); or present, by autonomous communities, the percentage of total resources received relative to GDP; or the level and evolution of the GDP per capita, by autonomous communities, with respect to the Spanish and the European Union average; etc. And finally, it would also have been possible to present an annex with the electoral results of the last municipal, regional and Spanish elections held. Except for the latter, the information presented (or not) could be considered biased, as well as “interpretable”, so we have finally decided not to include it and focus the information on which each author has presented in each article.

We hope that this monograph contributes to the existing debate, which, due to its complexity, obviously requires the reading of many other investigations already carried out, and also requires future research still pending.

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¹ Breaking the principle of ordinality implies that residents in a region that initially occupy a better position in their level of income per capita, fiscal effort or in the level of financing received per capita, after the application of the financing model becomes below (receive less funding) from another region that were initially worse placed in the ranking. This change occurs, for example, after the application of cooperation and competitiveness funds in the distribution.