Final Report on ESRC Grant L219252007: ‘Devolution and Decentralisation in Wales and Brittany’.

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This final report is organised into eight parts: background, aims and objectives, methods, results, activities, outputs, impacts and future research priorities. It should be read in conjunction with the original proposal and refers to that proposal where necessary to avoid repetition and facilitate evaluation. We include several essential appendices containing an indicative bibliography, lists of interviews, statistical tables, sample surveys and evidence of esteem.

1). Background

We set out to investigate the politics, policies and polity-building potential of devolution in Wales and decentralisation in the French region of Brittany. Building upon the expertise and the dense network of contacts gathered in a previous ESRC project (L311253047), the principal researcher sought to extend and deepen the analysis (centred around the comparative governance of institutions, policies, functions and places) to the meso-level, broadly consistent with debates on the new regionalism in Europe (Keating, Loughlin and Deschouwer, 2003). The project design responded to a dual intellectual and political challenge. The intellectual questions posed and the criteria for comparison are outlined in the original proposal. There was also a political rationale for the Wales-Brittany comparison. Our project focuses upon the operation of new meso-level institutions and upon policy dynamics in two policy issue-areas (training and regional languages) which have specific ramifications for regional governance in both territories and where Wales and Brittany can learn from each other.

2). Aims and Objectives

The original research proposal set out five precise aims and objectives, which have been each been addressed throughout the project. Theory building has involved developing a framework for analysing comparative regional governance (Loughlin, 2000, Cole, 2003b). We understand governance as a meso-level concept, not as an overarching transforming theory (‘policy convergence’), as a normative prescription (‘good governance’) or as a global alternative to government. We do understand governance as wider than government, however, encompassing institutions, actors, authoritative processes and policy outputs. In contemporary European societies, the classic institutions of government have had to adapt to new types of endogenous and exogenous demand, to the emergence of new stakeholders and changing political agendas. We are primarily interested in regional governance, defined as the interaction of institutions and actors engaged in policy-making in distinct sectors, territories and nation-states. We believe that governance is contextual, mediated by national, functional and place specific variables. The real value of governance is that it facilitates the formulation of precise research questions that can be investigated comparatively.
We have collected a new body of inherently important information. We conducted around 200 face to face interviews in Wales and Brittany, convened a Welsh language focus group, carried out a path-breaking comparative opinion survey and developed and distributed an elite questionnaire in four languages (English, Welsh, French and Breton). Together, these sources provide an incomparable richness of empirical data and represent excellent value for money for the ESRC, allowing us to develop four datasets in SPSS format for the ESRC data archive. Our research methodology in turn allowed us to highlight lessons from policy practice, a theme we develop under 'results'. International academic collaboration has been greatly enhanced. Alistair Cole spent a fruitful six months in 2001 at the CRAPE, Institute of Political Studies in Rennes. Alistair Cole also spent three months from April to June 2002 at the prestigious Observatoire Interregional du Politique (OIP), part of the Institute of Political Studies in Paris. John Loughlin was invited Professor at the EUI in Florence during the academic year 2001-2002. Colin Williams combined fieldwork in Wales with an international presence in Canada and Slovenia and a visiting fellowship in Oxford.

3). Methods

We applied a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies designed to elucidate different aspects of the study.

Qualitative approaches were the most suited to the in-depth comparative research that best characterises this project. Focused comparisons, using semi-structured interview techniques, are the most convincing method for examining similar political and policy challenges in contextually specific policy contexts. In total, we undertook 99 interviews in Wales (as well as convening a formal focus group of 33 actors) and 101 interviews in Brittany. We transcribed or summarised each interview. We are still engaged in the lengthy process of thematically coding our transcribed interview data. We identified three types of actor; isolated three priority themes emerging from the interview; specified the level of contacts (local, regional, national or European); investigated the existence or otherwise of foreign models, and summarised the three main policy challenges for the future. Through the creation of three sub-groups within our samples (generic, education and training and language advocacy) we sought explicitly to establish comparative equivalence between the two regions. We did not use a statistical package for this exercise, though we would do in the future.

The interview method allowed us to penetrate to the heart of the policy communities, identify real lessons and develop genuine contacts between policy stakeholders on a cross-national basis. There is a value-added quotient that is lacking from purely statistical studies; bringing together policy stakeholders across national boundaries requires permanent and personal interaction. This type of user engagement is only feasible on the basis of long periods of fieldwork of the type undertaken in ESRC L217252009.

We accompanied our interviews with a detailed questionnaire, containing many of the same questions as those asked in our public opinion poll surveys (see 'results').

Quantitative approaches Quantitative methods elucidate a different dimension of reality to those uncovered by qualitative approaches. Where it is possible to identify a clear outcome variable, corresponding to a precise research question and a range of possible predictors, the quantitative approach can work well. Simple frequencies, cross-
tabulations, correlations and more complex methods such as logistic regression allowed us to compare varied facets of public opinion in our two regions and, to some extent, to draw contrasts between political and policy communities therein (Cole and Baudewyns, 2003; Cole, Jones, Loughlin, Williams and Storer, 2003).

4). Results

The Wales-Brittany comparison played itself out at various levels, each of which had a rather different intellectual rationale. We were primarily interested in the analytically separate dimensions of national context, national and regional identities, public policy and public opinion. We now present our findings across the three dimensions we identified in the original proposal: polity building, policy learning and political process.

4.1) Polity Building

How best can we comprehend differential attitudes towards regional political institutions and identities in Wales and Brittany? This question was the focus of a comparative opinion poll carried out by two professional polling companies - Market Research Wales and Efficience 3 - in July 2001. The survey schedules are appended to this report. We interviewed a representative sample of 1008 in Wales (1007 in Brittany), selected by quotas of age, gender, socio-economic group and locality.

We developed a formal model (‘Identity and instrumentalism’) of logistic regression to distinguish between devolution and decentralisation in Wales and Brittany (Cole and Baudewyns, 2003). In our logistic regression analysis, we treated support for regional political institutions (Q.7) as our principal dependent variable. We identified a series of independent variables, selected on the basis of the existing literature and in accordance with our theoretical framework. These included classic independent variables such as age, gender, education and place of birth. We also integrated attitudinal and opinion variables such as identity, language aptitude, attitude towards devolution in Wales, preferred level of decision for policies and voting behaviour. The logistic regression is presented in tables 12-15.

We observed a number of similarities between Wales and Brittany. There is a relationship between politicised identities and institutional choices in both regions, especially relating to support for independence. Multiple identities (regional and national) are more easily assumed in Brittany than in Wales: a far higher proportion of the Welsh survey - over one-third - considered itself to be exclusively or primarily Welsh than was the case in Brittany (table 7). There are some other interesting contrasts between Wales and Brittany, notably concerning the role of language and voting choice. In Wales, there was a clear linkage between language competency and institutional choices. Those who speak or understand Welsh well or fairly well are more inclined to support enhanced devolution. In Brittany, there is a slight negative relationship between language competency and support for independence or for enhanced forms of devolution. There is a lingering sense of shame amongst native Breton speakers (concentrated in the oldest age categories) and an over-compensation of loyalty to France and the French state. With regards to voting choice, we observed a strong relationship between intended vote in a
There were significant contrasts between the regions according to our socio-demographic criteria. In Wales, there were no clear patterns for most of the socio-demographic variables (age, education, gender or place of birth), suggesting regional governance preferences are derived from polarised attitudes rather than demographic attributes. In the case of Brittany, support for independence was strongly correlated with age, gender, education and, to a lesser extent, place of birth. The youngest Bretons, especially those born in Brittany, the most educated people and women are the most inclined to support regional autonomy. These findings suggest a firm bedrock of support for enhanced regional governance amongst the most dynamic social groups.

Our regression findings confirm our differentiation of processes of regional governance in Wales and Brittany. In the Welsh case, cleavages are deeply embedded and there is a real debate between independentists, devolutionists and unionists. Support for enhanced devolution (and even more so independence) is party political, with a powerful regionalist party mobilising support for more enhanced devolutionary solutions and maintaining pressure on the other parties. Voting choice clearly influences attitudes towards independence, as does competency in the Welsh language. Unlike in Wales, Breton identity is not a diacritical political marker of difference (Table 8). There is a latent Breton consciousness, but this is not a political resource that can be mobilised by regionalist political parties and we observe no significant relationships between regional voting choice and attitude to autonomy. On balance, regional governance in Wales is driven more by the force of identity politics and the dynamic of polity building, whereas regional capacity in Brittany prospers because the prevalent mode of regional advocacy has proved to be very effective and because the political opportunity structure has preempted the development of a regionalist party (Cole and Loughlin, 2003). Identity foci, institutional demands, instrumental incentives and political opportunity structures thus all produce substantive differences between Wales and Brittany.

We also endeavoured to uncover the dynamics of devolution in Wales (especially) and devolution in Brittany through extensive face to face interviews. These interviews were semi-structured, combining a small number of routine questions with a range of institutional and policy specific questions aimed at attaining a maximum of information in areas of great technical complexity and institutional uncertainty. This method was especially pertinent in Wales, due to the new institutional framework put into place by devolution. We reported these findings in several publications and we refer the reader to these (Cole and Storer, 2002; Cole, Jones, Loughlin, Williams and Storer, 2003; Cole, Jones and Storer, 2003). We concluded from our extensive survey that a consensus is emerging within Wales for a Scottish-style Parliament and tax-varying powers. In Brittany, there was also widespread support from all parties for enhanced regional powers, a position confirmed in our public opinion survey (Cole and Loughlin, 2003). In both regions, we discovered a remarkable consistency of viewpoints between informed and popular opinions. We compared responses to our public opinion question on regional expenditure priorities with the same question asked in our elite surveys. In both cases, the elite sample gave the same order of priorities as public opinion (health in Wales; environment in Brittany). On the specifics of the Wales-Brittany comparison, finally, we observed a certain asymmetry, following logically from the more enhanced form of regional governance in Wales. Regional actors in Brittany were more likely to
refer to Wales as a model of devolution than were those in Wales to advocate adopting lessons from Brittany.

4.2) Policy learning

The second dimension we identified in our original proposal was that of policy learning. Comparative public policy analysis is increasingly focussed upon how public policies can be improved by observing practice elsewhere (Rose, 1993; Evans and Davies, 1999; Dolowitz and Marsh, 2000; James and Lodge, 2003). Rejecting ‘hard’ policy transfer as inappropriate to our research focus, we preferred an approach based on reflexive learning, whereby actors reflect upon their own practices as they accumulate experience, learn how to identify weaknesses and interact with others. We pursued the theme of lesson drawing both in interviews and in our elite questionnaire, where we asked our respondents in an open-ended question to identify lessons from practice elsewhere. The main conclusion we draw for Wales and Brittany is that the policy communities are not epistemic communities. The reference frames are primarily national (referring to practice in other regions in France or in other parts of the UK in Wales). A small number of strong models in third party countries do exist. In both regions, when the ‘lessons’ related to training policy, the most popular model was that of the German Dual system. In both regions also, when the ‘lessons’ related to language policy, the Spanish region of Catalonia was the most cited. In Wales and Brittany, however, precise lessons were much less important than aspirational comparisons. In Wales in particular, we observed a manifest disassociation between idealised comparisons of where Wales ought to be (the aspirational comparisons of Wales with, in order of frequency, Ireland, Catalonia or the Scandinavian democracies) and limited knowledge of policy programmes elsewhere.

The comparative survey and elite interviews revealed the limitations of the policy learning approach amongst meso-level policy communities. In the light of the weakness of actual knowledge and contacts within the policy communities, the role of the investigator is to highlight lessons from in-depth knowledge from both regions and policy sectors.

From Wales to Brittany: the Limits of Linguistic Mainstreaming

Our initial hypothesis was that, in the issue-area of language policy, any lesson-drawing would run from Wales to Brittany, on account of the greater Welsh experience in managing language policy. We evoked the possibility of a narrowing of the very distinctive ideational and institutional frames in the two countries. This convergence has not occurred. If anything, the regulatory framework has become less propitious for lesser-used languages in France since 2001. We observe many differences (and some similarities) at the level of policy communities and public opinion. In Wales, as language issues have become mainstreamed, it is difficult to identify a specific language policy community. In the case of Brittany, the embattled status of the Breton language gave the language ‘policy community’ an extraordinary cohesion in adversity, but there is no comparable mainstreaming of the Breton language. Policy actors operate within distinctive institutional and ideational contexts. For most Bretons, the Welsh model is beyond the pale in the French context. Even fervent Breton supporters of bilingualism in Wales or Catalonia were much less sanguine when it came to France itself. Differences amongst policy stakeholders are reinforced in public opinion. There is more support in
Wales than in Brittany for interventionist public policies, which we can attribute to the relative success of active public policies in setting the agenda in Wales during the past decade (Tables 16 and 17). The rise in the numbers of Welsh speakers in the 2001 census is testament to the efficacy of public policy in Wales (Williams, 2003). In Brittany, the parameters for public policy action are more narrowly prescribed. These important findings suggest the limits of lesson drawing in the sphere of lesser-used languages, where the regulatory environments are so different.

From Brittany to Wales: building human capital

Our initial hypothesis was that in matters of human capital, lesson drawing was likely to run from Brittany to Wales. What post-devolution Wales aspires to is well captured by aspects of the French model, namely a long-term approach to educational provision, a broad-based school curriculum, synergy between higher education, research and industry, opportunities for lifelong learning, partnership between strategic regional authorities and further education providers vested with real autonomy, and the implementation of new vocational paths. In terms of specific policies and policy instruments, we would suggest four main lessons.

Adopting a more broad-based approach to pre- and post-16 educational provision is fundamental. The Welsh Baccalaureat should be justified in terms of raising the level of generic skills for everybody, rather than by the ‘parity of esteem’ argument. No system manages a genuine ‘parity of esteem’, but the French (and German) systems are very good at inculcating generic skills within vocational streams, ensuring adaptability to changing employment environments while instilling valuable employment skills.

Taking Training seriously. The Brittany region has benefited from decades of public and private investment in human capital and can boast one of the best-trained and educated workforces in France, though it started the post-war period from a similar GDP base to Wales. The French model strongly suggests that investment in training can improve productivity. There needs to be a more balanced policy mix between viewing training as a public and a private good. Skills development plans, obligatory workplace training, greater workplace consultation and a higher degree of investment in training are all responses that might help Wales to escape the low-skills trap, to embed a learning culture and to encouraging lifelong learning.

Appropriate Scalar responses Wales and Brittany are both ‘regions’ of around 3,000,000 inhabitants. There are many scalar similarities between the two. We would argue that the natural clientele of meso-level authorities lies between obligatory schooling and higher education: apprenticeships, further education colleges, lifelong learning, work-based training. In Brittany, the 20 ‘training and employment areas’ that exist at a sub-regional level are rather equivalent in size to a Welsh local authority area, the level at which it is the easiest to predict micro-linkage between training courses and future employment needs. The Wales-Brittany comparison pleads in favour of maintaining the CCET level in some shape or form.
New policy instruments? The Brittany region undertakes an annual evidence-based, strategic and statistical overview of training needs (ARGOS). New policy instruments similar to the ARGOS programme in Brittany would allow a closer match between training supply and the requirements of local labour markets for vocational training.

4.3) Political Process

Our project also set out to deepen our understanding of processes of comparative regional governance. We offer a framework for analysis that combines criteria drawn from institutions, relationships, political opportunity structures, identities and regulation (Cole, 2003b). In sum, if Welsh devolution is above all shaped by the institutional avenues opened in the Government of Wales Act of 1998, regional capacity in Brittany is built upon a dense network of relationships and tested forms of horizontal and vertical linkage. Political opportunity structures are vital for understanding comparative regional dynamics, notably the political space available for the development of a regionalist party, the interlocking of regional and social movements and the structure of incentives for regional players to engage in local, regional, national or European games. The linkage between identity, territory and institutions is primordial for comparing regions, the Wales-Brittany comparison suggesting that politicised identities do not necessarily add value to regional political institutions. Understanding regional governance, finally, requires cognisance of the character of regulation: the importance of constitutional rules, mechanisms of financial transfer, inter-institutional linkages, the capacity of central government to intervene in devolved areas, the Europeanisation of specific policy sectors and so on.

Devolution and decentralisation in Wales and Brittany are best understood as two alternative forms of territorial institution building. Devolution in Wales appears focussed on territorial identity and polity building, decentralisation in Brittany on proximity as a response to policy solutions and upon a specific mode of regional advocacy in higher level arenas.

The case of Wales suggests that divided identities are less propitious to collective social ownership than harmonious ones. The real achievements of devolution in Wales are obscured not only by an obfuscated and unworkable settlement, but also by the persistence of crosscutting identities based on linguistic, geographic and cultural differences. There is some evidence that the first term of devolution has provided the mobilising project necessary to embed the Welsh polity and to build Welsh civil society, in the long run potentially overcoming an important social capital deficit. There is a more cohesive party system, the equilibrium of which is favourable to making the devolved institutions work. There is the ‘team Wales’ approach, signifying the building of new institutions as part of the devolved family (ELWa) and the diffusion of emerging referential frames. There are much closer contacts between Welsh Assembly government officials and Assembly sponsored public bodies than in the pre-devolution era (Cole, Jones and Storer, 2003). There is the appearance, finally, of all-Wales organisations within civil society and the gradual recognition by professional organisations (the CBI and TUC notably) of the need to take devolution into account in their own organisation. Here, the emphasis on the temporal dimension is vital; relationships need to be developed over time, a scarce resource for new institutions such as the National Assembly for Wales.
What, if anything, can Wales learn from observing Brittany? Even though Brittany is in the forefront of French regions, calling for enhanced regulatory powers (‘pouvoir normatif régional’) in its September 2002 Manifesto, it is not a model in narrow institutional terms. The institutions of devolution in Wales are weightier than those of decentralisation in Brittany, whether measured in terms of budgets, personnel or legal powers. Close observation of the Brittany region does suggest some positive lessons beyond those identified above in relation to education and training. In important respects, Brittany has a denser governance capacity than Wales, on account of the absence of major divisions, the tightly knit nature of Breton networks within and beyond Brittany, the cross-partisan tradition and even the weakness of an autonomist movement, though its regional institutions are undoubtedly weaker. Brittany builds upon a deeply rooted territorial solidarity to promote institutional interconnectivity and to enmesh institutions within civil society. Brittany scores highly in terms of institutional interconnectivity, embodied by traditions of inter-communal co-operation, normally harmonious relationships between regional politicians and representatives of the state field services, and high levels of social capital, measured by an active associative life, high electoral participation and strong social networks acting as a barrier to the extreme right (Le Coadic, 1998). In terms of linkage between institutions, territory and identity, Brittany appears more ‘joined up’ than Wales, with a more effective outreach to civil society and a less divisive identity. Wales needs to continue to embed institutions within civil society; to engage in positive value-added mobilisation, rather than the defensive affirmation of difference with England; to engage a longer-term investment in human capital, and to mobilise opinion around unifying cultural symbols.

5). Activities

ESRC L219252007 has been an extremely active project that has placed engagement with non-academic research users at the core of its philosophy. We have involved users at the various stages of the project, from research design to implementation. The Welsh language board helped with the design of the language policy part of our survey. The Office of the Presiding Officer (the DPO) offered valuable advice on our Welsh interview schedule. In the case of Brittany, our mass and elite surveys were usefully improved upon the advice of the Brittany Cultural Institute and the Breton Language Office. We benefited in Wales and Brittany from the sound academic advice of leading experts in the field (Ben Seyd, Daffyd Trystan, Elizabeth Dupoirier, Joseph Fontaine, Eve Fouilleux, John Walter Jones, Jeremy Evas, David Egan, Peter John, Jonathon Bradbury, Philippe Leroy, Ronan Le Coadic, and Christian Demeure-Vallée). The National Assembly for Wales and the Brittany Regional Council both followed the project with interest and became directly involved in conferences at the later stages. Many other individuals and organisations have been involved in one way or another, not least all of those which agreed to an interview (see appendix 3).

Two major back-to-back conferences were organised by the project and supported by the ESRC Devolution and Constitutional Change programme. In November -December 2001, the ESRC project team was involved with the Forum of Federations and the National Assembly ‘Roundtable on Language Governance’, 29-30 November 2001 and then organised a follow-on conference on ‘Lesser-Used Languages: Lessons from Comparative Experience’, on 1st December 2001. Speakers included language policy officials from the Canadian and Quebec governments, as well as from Scotland, Ireland,
Wales and Brittany. The three speakers from Brittany represented the three most important organisations involved in the Breton linguistic revival (DIWAN, Ofis ar Brezhoneg, TV Breizh). A second back-to-back conference was organised by Alistair Cole in March 2003. On 14th March 2003, we held a one-day conference on ‘Regional Governance in Wales, Brittany and Beyond’, at which findings from the project were presented to a mixed audience of academics and policy-makers. The conference brought together for the first time leading politicians from the Brittany Region and the Welsh Assembly Government. Josselin de Rohan, President of the Brittany Region, spent all day with First Minister Rhodri Morgan. The two leaders concluded their day by jointly addressing the conference. The Regional Governance conference was followed-up on March 15 by a one-day Devolution programme event on the ‘Dynamics of Devolution in Wales’, which brought together most of the Welsh projects for an intensive meeting.

6). Outputs

The project has been very thoroughly disseminated. By the end of the project (June 2003) the team had over 40 separate entries in the REGARD database, excluding an important number of forthcoming and planned publications. We aim to complete an overarching project book by end-December 2003. In addition, Colin Williams is editing a volume on Language Governance (University of Wales Press) that stems from the November-December 2001 conferences. We have presented the project in many varied arenas and professional fora, details of which are contained in the REGARD database. These have included: the PSA (2002, 2003), the IBG (2002), the ECPR (2003), the ECPR Standing Group on Regionalism (2002), the French Political Science Association (2002) and ASMCF (2001, 2002). In addition, the project has been presented to non-academic users in conferences in Pau, Lorient, Lille, Reims, Marly-le-Roi in France, as well as to the National Assembly for Wales and at one-day conferences in Glamorgan and Aberystwyth. The project has organised two major conferences, in December 2001 and March 2003. Barry Jones organised a series of seminars in 2002 that brought together academics, Assembly members and Welsh Assembly Government officials. The project has been extensively covered in the Welsh and French Press, with references in the Independent, the Economist, the Western Mail, the South Wales Echo, Ouest-France, the Télégramme de Brest, the Gazette des Communes, and Réforme. We have also been solicited frequently by the media and members of the team have given interviews on BBC Wales, HTV, Real Radio, S4C, FR3 (the French third channel) and others. Barry Jones represented the project in various media outlets during the 2001 (general) and 2003 (Assembly) elections.

7). Impacts

The project has made a major impact, well above the average for an ESRC project. We have brought policy-makers in Wales and Brittany together in innovative ways that would not have occurred without the project. We have influenced public policy formation in Wales and Brittany. We have contributed in an expert capacity to debates about the future of devolution in Wales and decentralisation in France (especially Brittany) and promoted cross-national learning.

A few examples, amongst many, demonstrate our impact.
• Williams acted as an advisor to ELWa on Welsh language issues and, in November 2001, organised a focus group that collectively debated ELWa's Welsh Language Scheme.

• Williams gave evidence to the National Assembly Culture Committee in its review of the Welsh Language.

• Jones gave evidence to the House of Lords committee on constitutional reform.

• In August 2001, we published our Welsh poll findings in the Western Mail, making the front page and lead editorial.

• In November 2001, we published our Breton poll findings in Ouest-France, making the front page and lead editorial. The poll was widely commented upon by the key actors in Brittany.

• In December 2001, Cole and Williams organised the path-breaking Lesser-Used Languages conference.

• In March 2002, Cole presented interim findings from the project to the National Assembly.

• In July 2002, Cole advised the Brittany Regional Council on language policy in Wales.

• From September to October 2002, Cole advised the French government on aspects of the UK Devolution programme, in advance of the Raffarin government’s decentralisation reforms. Cole wrote a detailed 8,000 word consultancy report on Devolution in Wales for the French Interior Ministry.

• In March 2003, Cole (and the ESRC) hosted a conference at which First Minister Morgan and President de Rohan met for the first time, presaging future meetings (the first in June 2003).

• In March 2003, Cole was awarded the Brittany Regional Council’s gold medal for services to Brittany.

8). Future Research Priorities

L215292007 has attracted very considerable interest from academic teams within and beyond the UK. Alistair Cole is now the chief UK contact point for the framework programme six project bid on ‘governance, territory and public policy’, headed by the French CNRS. This project bid has been formally submitted to the Commission, and, if successful, will run from 2004-2008. This bid, and others, will pursue the themes investigated in this project, namely the comparative governance of institutions, policies, functions and places. Our comparators are principally France and the United Kingdom, but we propose to extend our general analysis to include Spain, Germany and the accession countries (especially Slovenia). The contacts made during this project will facilitate the task.