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Metropolitan and city-regional politics in the urban age: why does “(smart) devolution” matter?

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ABSTRACT In recent years, two apparently contradictory but, in fact, complementary socio-political phenomena have reinforced each other in the European urban realm: the re-scaling of nation-states through “devolution” and the emergence of two opposed versions of “nationalism” (that is, ethnic, non-metropolitanised, state-centric, exclusive, and right-wing populist nationalism and civic, metropolitanized, stateless, inclusive and progressivist-emancipatory-social democratic nationalism). In light of these intertwined phenomena, this article shows how an ongoing, pervasive and uneven “metropolitanisation effect” is increasingly shaping city-regional political responses by overlapping metropolitan, city-regional, and national political scales and agendas. This effect is clear in three European cases driven by “civic nationalism” that are altering their referential nation-states’ uniformity through “devolution”. This article compares three metropolitan (and city-regional) cases in the United Kingdom and in Spain, namely, Glasgow (Scotland), Barcelona (Catalonia) and Bilbao (Basque Country), by benchmarking their policy implementation and the tensions produced in reference to their nation-states. Fieldwork was conducted from January 2015 to June 2017 through in-depth interviews with stakeholders in the three locations. Despite the so-called *pluri*-national and federal dilemmas, this article contributes to the examination of the side effects of “metropolitanisation” by considering three arguments based on geo-economics (“prosperous competitiveness”), geo-politics (“smart devolution”), and geo-democratics (“right to decide”). Finally, this article adds to the existing research on metropolitan and city-regional politics by demonstrating why “devolution” matters and why it must be considered seriously. The “metropolitanisation effect” is key to understanding and transforming the current configurations of nation-states, such as the United Kingdom and Spain (as we currently know them), beyond internal discord around *pluri*-nationality and quasi-federalism. This article concludes by suggesting the term “smart devolution” to promote more imaginative and entrepreneurial approaches to metropolitan and city-regional politics, policies, and experimental democracy within these nation-states. These approaches can identify and pursue “smart” avenues of timely, subtle and innovative political strategies for change in the ongoing re-scaling devolution processes occurring in the United Kingdom and in Spain and in the consequent changes in the prospects for the refoundational momentum in the EU.

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Introduction: the metropolitan and city-regional politics that are re-scaling nation-states

While the world has continuously urbanised, it has also rapidly metropolitanised. This metropolitanisation trend is reinforcing the re-scaling of nation-states through multiple interconnected factors (Brenner, 2009; Gleeson and Spiller, 2012; Fricke and Gualini, 2017; Glaeser and Steinberg, 2017).

In the 1990s, many hyper-globalist scholars forecast the imminent demise of national state power because of the purportedly borderless, politically uncontrollable forces of global economic integration (Ohmae, 1995). However, a growing body of literature on state rescaling has provided a strong counter-argument, namely, that nation-states are being qualitatively transformed—not eroded or dismantled—under contemporary capitalist conditions (Brenner, 2004). From a broader historical perspective, Keating (2014b) argues for the re-scaling of nation-states as the politicisation of regional space through claims for devolution from their city-regions (Jonas and Moisiso, 2016). In some cases, this phenomenon coincides with strong historical identities, city-regional articulation engines, metropolitan hubs and national diversity, as in the cases this paper will present: Glasgow in Scotland, Barcelona in Catalonia, and Bilbao in the Basque Country. In connection with this concept, Goodwin *et al.* (2005) examine the devolved structures and strategies for economic development that have been implemented across the United Kingdom in an attempt to increase global economic competitiveness while addressing entrenched social inequalities, recognising cultural and identity politics, and enabling piecemeal democratic rights.

It seems remarkable that the current recentralisation vs. devolution debate (Calzada, 2016a) in the United Kingdom and Spain implies a different starting point from the perspective of political regionalism. However, according to Álvarez Pereira *et al.* (2017: 1), a common pattern is likely to be followed by devolutionist movements in Western Europe insofar as (city-) “regions being relatively richer than the country to which [they belong] is associated with higher electoral support to regionalist parties only to the extent that the region is culturally differentiated”. This understanding is appropriate to the three cases compared in this article, although the context varies with regard to the way the two aforementioned nation-states address devolution (Giordano and Roller, 2003; Burch *et al.*, 2005; Cooke and Clifton, 2005; Conversi, 2007; Allmendinger and Haughton, 2010; Henderson *et al.*, 2013; Convery and Lundberg, 2016; Molina, 2017; Basta, 2017). To some extent, devolution matters insofar as it can be identified as the common driver of “the perpetual fragmentation of territory into ever more (and smaller) units of authority, from empires to nations, nations to provinces, and provinces to cities” (Khanna, 2016b: 63). “Fragmentation” can be seen here as a natural pattern of re-scaling nation-states; in contrast, it can be perceived as a threat to the integrity of the nation-state itself, as is clearly the case for Spain (Colino, 2008; Zabalo *et al.*, 2012; Serrano, 2013; Sanjaume-Calvet and Gagnon, 2014).

Devolution debates were invigorated, albeit in different ways, in 2014 in two *pluri*-national states, the United Kingdom and Spain (Anderson and Keil, 2017). Whereas the United Kingdom witnessed a Scottish Independence referendum in September 2014 that was agreed upon by the then-Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, David Cameron, and the former Scottish First Minister, Alex Salmond, Spain’s central government upheld the territorial unity of the Spanish nation-state and refused any expression of self-determination as demanded by a considerable population in Catalonia (Guibernau *et al.*, 2014; Cramer, 2016). This is once again the case with the announcement made by the

Catalan government of the *illegal* referendum of 1 October 2017 (Herszenhorn and von Der Burchard, 2017). Another important difference is that the political landscape in the Basque Country over the past 40 years has been dominated by attempts to overcome political violence (Zabalo and Saratxo, 2015; Alvarez Berastegi, 2017). At present, an optimistic peace process is being fuelled by civic society, and there is an attempt to avoid confrontational inertia between the ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, or Basque Country and Freedom, the armed Basque nationalist and separatist organisation) and the Spanish state (Mediapro, 2017). To this end, there is some progress or, at least, an interest in leveraging self-government and implementing the “right to decide” in the Basque Country (Barceló *et al.*, 2015; Calzada and Bildarratz, 2015; Geller *et al.*, 2015).

The plebiscite on Scottish independence in 2014 (and a potentially forthcoming one between autumn 2018 and spring 2019), the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom in 2016 (Los *et al.*, 2017), and the ongoing quest for the “right to decide” on statehood for Catalonia and the Basque Country in Spain are key yet diverse examples of the way metropolitanisation has triggered a wider political debate (Cramer, 2015, 2016; Davidson, 2016). Hence, this article argues that within and beyond nation-states, metropolitan politics are shaping the future of city-regions even beyond the loose notion of *pluri*-nationality and the federalism of nation-states (Madgwick, 1982; Moreno, 2001; Wilkins, 2004; Morgan, 2007; Chouinard, 2014; Romaniello, 2014; Requejo, 2015; Sorens, 2017). Remarkably, the most pervasive aftermath seems to be that these unevenly socio-politically divided societies are shaping a new understanding of the centrality of city-regions beyond nation-states’ power, both institutionally and territorially (Calzada, 2015). Metropolitan politics are thus clearly enabling cities and regions to be substantial international actors (Acuto, 2009, 2013; Moreno, 2016b; Therborn, 2017), beyond even their nation-states (Herschel and Newman, 2017), by setting up an urban political international order that supersedes the Westphalian interstate system consisting entirely of sovereign and homogeneous territorial nation-states (Ruacan, 2017). In this city-centric narrative, we should consider that “cities are hugely dependent on and inter-connected with their regional hinterlands, the fuzzy and protean metrolands for which there is no longer an agreed terminology” in the urban age (Morgan, 2014: 297). This understanding suggests another interpretation of the urban politics that increasingly overlap with metropolitan and city-regional politics with reference to their nation-states. This article aims to present this interpretation by discussing three interlinked factors: “prosperous competitiveness” (Sellers and Walks, 2013), “(smart) devolution” (Scott and Copeland, 2016; Calzada, 2017b), and the “right to decide” (Barceló *et al.*, 2015).

As nation-states are no longer able and/or willing to manage the increasing complexity of their cities and regions, cities and regions have sought to develop greater independence and a stronger presence in the global sphere. According to Herschel (2002), Barber (2013) and Corijn (2009), city-regions (Scott, 2002) have been among the first to recognise the declining ability—or inclination—of nation-states to maintain economic cohesion and comparable conditions of life and opportunities for all citizens in their constitutive metropolitan and regional realms. Thus, their diverse city-regional political responses show the path dependency of their metropolitan political choices (Table 3, Factors 7 and 14) (Calzada, 2017a). The ongoing evolution of stateless nationalist parties’ strategies highlights an increasing city-ness and metropolitan approach to their policy, in contrast to populist right-wing protectionist choices (Masseti, 2009; Massetti and Schakel, 2013; Iraola, 2015; McAngus, 2015; Massetti and Schakel, 2016, 2017; Mylonas and Shelef, 2017; Winlow *et al.*, 2017; Woertz, 2017). This clearly suggests the co-existence of

diverse “nationalistic” approaches (Zamorano, 2017). For instance, in the United Kingdom, city-regional political responses under devolution have been researched extensively by Keating (2005: 453), who concludes that “Scotland is more committed than England to the traditional public sector model, emphasizing egalitarianism and cooperation with the public service professionals. This contrasts with the English emphasis on consumer choice and competition”. In the following section, this article will shed light on the diverse city-regional political responses (Morgan, 1999; Giordano and Roller, 2003; Agnew, 2016; Flinders *et al.*, 2016; Harris and Moffat, 2016; Scottish Government, 2016; Casebourne, 2017) that have flourished as a consequence of the political re-scaling of the nation-state and the way these responses have been embodied in two opposite versions of “nationalism” (Anderson, 1991; Hutchinson and Smith, 1994): “ethnic” versus “civic”.

Distinguishing diverse city-regional political responses: civic vs. ethnic nationalisms?

Brexit and the imminent end of the UK’s continued membership in the EU have triggered a much wider devolution debate. This debate involves not only the organisation and legitimisation of nation-state power, both institutionally and territorially, but also the way in which metropolitanisation has influenced inclusive/exclusive migratory political positions regarding welfare state provisions by fuelling two types of “nationalistic” responses, which are the causes of a deep re-scaling process regarding the United Kingdom as a nation-state (Burch *et al.*, 2005; Sato, 2014; McGrattan and Williams, 2017). As the *Guardian* noted, the Brexit vote could have triggered article 50, but it could also be seen as a vote for “English independence at the price of English dominance” (Moore, 2017; Overman, 2017).

According to the newest Governance Report 2017 (Hertie School of Governance, 2017: 165), current liberal democracies, such as the United Kingdom and Spain, owe much of their resilience to an ongoing balancing of two leading sources of internal opposition: populism (or popular sovereignty) versus radical pluralism (or minority rights). Thus, the notion of an oppositional momentum in the United Kingdom (at least so far) seems to be clear with regard to making political decisions based on the metropolitan circumstances in which one lives. Research findings on the Brexit vote have confirmed that the voting patterns of “Brexiters” have in common “their age and education profiles as well as the historical importance of manufacturing employment, low income and high unemployment” (Becker *et al.*, 2016: 1), which makes clear the non-metropolitan condition of these “left behind” voters. The outcome of this situation has been a growing sense of disempowerment and alienation among those who are not “in the system” (Walker, 2010).

This issue establishes notions of community, place, and state territory by forcing diverse metropolitan political positions and city-regional political responses (Mumford, 1938). Claims such as “I want my country back” (Penny, 2016; Airey and Booth-Smith,

2017) (as voiced during the Brexit debates in the United Kingdom) or, by contrast, the “right to the city for all” (in reference to refugees, newcomers, and immigrants) are expressions of a growing awareness of metropolitan and spatial differentiation between “winners” and “losers”, which undermines the notion of the cohesive nation-state (Hirschman, 1970; Calzada, 2015; Ariño and Romero, 2016). Particularly in England, where territorial regionalisation has become politically eschewed, a subdivision between metropolitan areas and the “rest” has become an alternative approach that relies on patterns of economic performance and relevance (Mitchell, 2002; Sandford, 2002; O’Brien *et al.*, 2004; Bentham, 2007; Leyland, 2011; Keating, 2014c; Headlam and Hepburn, 2015; Willett, 2015; Centre for Cities, 2016; Pike *et al.*, 2016). However, as West (2015: 9) notes, “many people who experience the downsides of diversity simply do not understand why they should be forced to live in alien surroundings as part of some grand social experiment in which they had no say”.

Thus, a main hypothesis of this article is that diverse city-regional political responses are determined by metropolitan or non-metropolitan *modus vivendi* and *operandi* (Etherington and Jones, 2016). The “metropolitanisation effect” stands out as the distinction between a more visible, articulate and dominant “metropolitan class” and those in the more peripheral, less articulated, non-metropolitan areas has developed into a formidable struggle for influence on national politics and policies. Metropolitanisation may thus show that identities and related political agendas are no longer expressed in territorially homogeneous units circumscribed by clearly demarcated boundaries or borders (Brenner, 2003; Sellers and Walks, 2013). The English case is of particular interest here as discussions of “English devolution” and the Northern Powerhouse have moved from conventional, territorially based devolution to discussions focused on stronger voices for metropolitan areas through directly elected mayors (Morgan, 2001, 2002; Pike, 2002; Sandford, 2002; Willett, 2015; House of Lords, 2016; Parr, 2017; Sandford, 2017; Travers, 2017).

Although metropolitanisation depicts rather heterogeneous city-regional responses, it clearly addresses two contrasting political agendas, both based on “nationalism” as a common denominator (Anderson, 1991; Hutchinson and Smith, 1994; Bollens, 2008; Eriksen, 2010; Suszycki *et al.*, 2010; Sutherland, 2012; Zabalo *et al.*, 2013; Conversi, 2014; Keating, 2014a; Economist, 2016; Harari, 2017; Pattie and Johnston, 2017; Winlow *et al.*, 2017). The term “nationalism” is a slippery concept; this is why politicians find it so easy to manipulate. At its best, it unites the country around common values to accomplish things that people could never manage alone. Here, we should distinguish between two “nationalisms” (Table 1): the first is “ethnic”, backwards, xenophobic, right-wing and populist (Simonsen, 2004; Gest, 2016; Judis, 2016; Moffitt, 2016; Müller, 2016; Winlow *et al.*, 2017; Woertz, 2017); the second is “civic”, conciliatory, inclusive, forward-looking and emancipatory (Sage, 2014; Keating, 2014a; Geoghegan, 2015; Macwhirter, 2015;

Table 1 | Non-metropolitanised (Ethnic) vs metropolitanised (Civic) nationalisms (applying the conceptual framework suggested by Keating, 2017a)

| Conceptual frames of (city-)regional politics (adapted from (Keating, 2017a)) | Non-metropolitanised/ethnic nationalism | Metropolitanised/civic nationalism |
|---|---|------------------------------------|
| Region as a refraction of social and economic interests | Internally focused | Externally focused |
| Integrative agenda | Protectionist | Internationalist |
| Identity construction | Populist | Collaborative |
| Welfare provision | Exclusive/Conservative | Inclusive/Progressivist |
| Government focus | Geo-economics | Geo-democratics |
| Competitiveness | Bounded (“Them” versus “Us”) | Entrepreneurial/Experimental |

Gillespie, 2016; Hassan, 2016; Johns and Mitchell, 2016; Jensen *et al.*, 2017; Pattie and Johnston, 2017). “Civic nationalism” appeals to universal values, such as freedom and equality. In contrast, “ethnic nationalism”, which is zero-sum, aggressive and nostalgic, draws on race or history to set the nation apart.

Particularly in Europe, this is the case for three small stateless nations, Scotland, Catalonia, and the Basque Country, whose main metropolitan hubs, Glasgow, Barcelona, and Bilbao, are entirely functioning international actors. This article presents and compares these nations, which are advocating a new, socially progressivist political agenda around “civic nationalism” that appeals to “European” values through collaborative, internationalist, and integrative mechanisms by respecting nations and national communities worldwide. In this context, devolution matters insofar as “devolutionary” claims could increasingly “Europeanise” the regional political agenda through multi-level governance mechanisms (Sellers, 2002; Henderson *et al.*, 2013; Alcantara *et al.*, 2016; Boronska-Hryniewiecka, 2016; Klinke, 2016; Panara and Varney, 2017; Wojan, 2017) in an ongoing push and pull of having “more to say” in the EU, fuelled by an increasing metropolitan drive and bottom-up democratic experimentation regarding the “right to decide”. Despite historic and path dependency differences between each case (Factor 14 in Table 3), these three nations claim the “right to decide” as the democratic experimental right to choose their own future beyond the fixed Westphalian order of established nation-states (Calzada, 2014).

Table 1 presents two conceptual frames of (city-)regional politics by distinguishing between the non-metropolitanised or “ethnic nationalistic” and the metropolitanised or “civic nationalistic” versions.

In the following section, amidst the metropolitanisation debate, we will discuss why devolution matters in the broad context of nation-states re-scaling themselves. According to Moisiu and Paasi (2013a: 258), “the transformation of the state is impregnated with conflicts, negotiations and compromises between city-regions and national governments and is characterised by self-serving actions and trade-offs”. A nation-state’s transformation, or re-scaling process, is a multi-scalar process that overlaps metropolitan and city-regional politics in the urban age, as shown in Table 3. A “multi-scalar” reading of the changing nature of statehood has become a widely used approach for nation-state spatiality over the past decade. In light of the continuous re-composition of the nation-state, the term “smart devolution” is used in this article to capture this new dynamic, which goes beyond notions of *pluri*-nationality and quasi-federalism in the nation-states in the United Kingdom and Spain that this article comparatively interprets (Moreno, 1986; Ohmae, 1993; Keating, 2001; Conversi, 2007; Colino, 2008; Stiglitz, 2015; Paun *et al.*, 2016; Randall and Casebourne, 2016; Scott and Copeland, 2016; Strategy, 2017; Park, 2017; Travers, 2017).

Why does “(smart) devolution” matter? from the “right to the city” to the “right to decide”

This section discusses the need to consider devolution as a constitutive element of the politics of the urban age in Western nation-states. We present the hypothesis that the “right to decide” can be seen as a new version of a metropolitan-based “right to the city” beyond nation-states. Thus, a *demos*-driven, self-determination 2.0 version, empowered by a wide range of political ideologies around a “civic nationalist” movement, activates a bottom-up and progressivist city-regional political response. According to Harvey (2008: 40), “Lefebvre was right to insist that the revolution has to be urban in the broadest sense of that term”. However, in the urban age, the economic sphere is not

automatically congruent with the political sphere. Therefore, it remains to be seen whether metropolitan standing and capacity will provide extra agency to small, city-regional, stateless nations (Kay, 2009). On this basis, the strategic “civic nationalistic” ambitions of the three cases presented in this article can be considered an updated or expanded version of a metropolitan-based “right to the city”, in Lefebvre’s phrase (Purcell, 2014; Steele, 2017). Are the two “rights”, the “right to the city” and the “right to decide”, comparable in both their conventionally projected sub-national state and subordination to the nation-states and their scope to produce new trans-scalar political dynamics and relations (as shown in Table 3) that challenge that hierarchical state structure?

As the main argument of this paper, two intertwined explanations are offered for why “(smart) devolution” matters as the ongoing political expression of the urban age in the context of some Western nation-states, such as the United Kingdom and Spain.

First, new metropolitan and diverse city-regional political responses are emerging, fuelled by devolution (Goodwin *et al.*, 2012; Khanna, 2016b) and self-determination claims (Guibernau, 2013). These claims are expressed and embodied unevenly via geo-democratic practices such as the “right to decide” through referenda. In 2014, a referendum was held in Scotland and “bilaterally” agreed upon with the United Kingdom, whereas in Catalonia, the Catalan parliament and government recently “unilaterally” disobeyed Spanish constitutional imperatives (Factor 15 in Table 3) (Qvortrup, 2014; Barceló *et al.*, 2015; Qvortrup, 2015; Cagiao y Conde, 2016; Cagiao y Conde and Ferraiuolo, 2016; Keating, 2017b).

Second, “metropolitanisation” could be driving these changes (OECD, 2012; Katz and Bradley, 2013; Ahrend and Schumann, 2014; Ortiz, 2014; European Metropolitan Authorities, 2015; OECD, 2015; Clark and Moonen, 2016; Fricke, 2016; OECD, 2016) insofar as these small stateless nations are advocating a new, socially progressivist political agenda around “civic nationalism” by appealing to European values in contrast to “ethnic nationalism”.

A broad stream of literature about the metropolitan “revolution” and its socio-economic consequences for ordinary citizens has been produced in the last decade. Whereas Cox (2010) emphasises the metropolitan fragmentation and its political consequences in the United States, Bentham (2007) noted in 1983 that urban problems and public dissatisfaction in the metropolitan areas in England were based on objective rather than subjective indicators. However, these indicators did not necessarily align with the general public’s view of which areas had the greatest problems. Similarly, Clark and Moonen (2013) observe the remarkable relevance of dealing with metropolitan “fuzzy” devolution. Clark and Moonen argue that “metropolitan politics are complex but not ungovernable entities that should be put at the heart of international and national macroeconomic policy” (2016: 54). Regarding the post-devolution implemented by the UK government in 1997, Allmendinger and Haughton conclude instead that “conflicts remain and the geographical variability [of] this, not least in the context of devolution” (2010: 816). Given the complexity of metropolitan governance, a straightforward means of addressing the devolution issue at the nation-state level cannot be identified. Moreover, as observed in the section that compares the three cases, the overlapping political scales in the urban agenda provoke a net of multi-directional strategies in the three cases by scaling up from the metropolitan level to the city-regional and national levels and, vice versa, uniquely scaling down through devolution. Hence, this article suggests that insofar as the devolution trend accelerates this overlap, another interpretation of urban politics is required. Table 3 presents an

empirical policy analysis given that smart city policies are invigorating devolution through metropolitanisation processes in Glasgow, Barcelona and Bilbao because of direct socio-economic consequences (for their metropolitan prosperous competitiveness levels; the geo-economic metropolitan argument) as well as the political (for updating their political status; the geo-political metropolitan argument) and democratic (for deciding their future; geo-democratic metropolitan argument) aftermath (Table 2).

The meaning of devolution is the decentralisation of power. Devolution matters because complex processes of city-regional metropolitanisation are altering the nature of the relationship between the centre and the periphery (Khanna, 2014; Gillespie, 2015; Convery and Lundberg, 2016). These city-regions are pursuing greater devolution deals, whereas their respective nation-states are obsessed with maintaining territorial unity (Rodríguez-Pose and Gill, 2005). However, the established and simplistic state-centric vision that focuses on geo-economic processes no longer suffices (Harrison and Hoyler, 2014; Jonas and Moisiso, 2016). Instead, geo-political and geo-democratic dynamics must be included to articulate and enrich a systematic analysis of devolution that goes beyond a focus on re-territorialising and existing nation-states to match relationally defined, diversifying (regional) ideas of nationality, identity, representation and devolutionary ambitions as new geo-political global “connectographies” (Khanna, 2016b). Maps of sovereign states betray the far fuzzier “metropolitan” reality of hundreds of relatively autonomous nodes. These autonomous nodes, which, in the aftermath of the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco, were forced to be integrated in a single national “personality” through language in an “odious homogenisation” (Khanna, 2016b: 64), inevitably resulted in a backlash from the Catalan and Basque national and linguistic communities. Thus, “smart” devolution requires infrastructure investment and the mutually beneficial exploitation of resources. The more peripheral areas witness—but do not partake in—the success of the centre, the more they will push to seize control of their own affairs or claim their “right to decide” their home rule.

In Europe, this post-Brexit era has reinforced two main drivers. First, metropolitanization stands out as the distinction between a more visible, articulate and dominant “metropolitan class” and those living in the more peripheral, less articulated, non-metropolitan areas has developed into a formidable struggle for influence on national politics and policies. Second, consequently, devolution has become a healthy form of competitive arbitrage through multi-level governance *instrumentarium*—a perpetual negotiation to obtain maximum freedom from under-performing national governments so that over-performing city-regions can accomplish their own priorities (Gray, 2015; Boronska-Hryniewiecka, 2016; Gray, 2016).

These tensions, driven by metropolitan and diverse city-regional politics within nation-states, have been evident not only since the Scottish Independence referendum in 2014 and, recently, the Brexit plebiscite in the United Kingdom (especially in Scotland and Northern Ireland) but also in Spain, where

Catalonia has already begun the unilateral secession process (Moore, 1998; Rovira and Martínez, 2016). This is also the case in the Basque Country, where a completely disarmed ETA has opened new horizons for devolutionary policy-making beyond the “devo-max” deal the Basques achieved by gaining complete fiscal autonomy, with no taxes paid to the central government (Colino, 2012; Zabalo and Saratxo, 2015). However, the Spanish constitution forbids secession. Theresa May recently announced that it was not “the right time” for a second Scottish Independence referendum despite Nicola Sturgeon seeking a place between the United Kingdom and the EU (Financial Times, 2016).

In the following section, three metropolitan arguments will be presented.

Three metropolitan arguments for “(smart) devolution”: geo-economics, geo-politics and geo-democratics

To establish the context for how “(smart) devolution” is taking place, it is first important to understand how the Westphalian interstate system, which consists of sovereign territorial nation-states, is being re-scaled in the aforementioned cases by a “civic nationalism”. This is particularly relevant in a European context that is increasingly characterised by multi-level governance (Benson, 2015; Alcántara *et al.*, 2016; Jones, 2016; Klinke, 2016; Mulholland and Berger, 2017; Panara and Varney, 2017) and a polymorphic political and geographic recognition that city-regions are becoming increasingly important “sub-national”, “third” or “meso”-level political actors. Specifically, as we will discuss later, this article reinforces the “Europe of regions” thesis (Keating, 2014c) by adding two new dimensions: first, “metropolitanisation” as the geo-economic (Harrison, 2012) and geo-political (Moisiso and Paasi, 2013b) basis for emergent small, stateless city-regional nations; second, the “right to decide” as the geo-democratic basis to transcend the former ethno-political nationalistic argument towards a more experimental democratic notion of city-ness (Calzada, 2017c). These dimensions demonstrate the connection among the devolution claims, metropolitan inclusiveness as a social value and a politically and socially progressivist agenda, as shown in the political programmes of the main “civic nationalist” parties (Sage, 2014; Gillespie, 2016). A reinforcement of this connection is currently occurring in Barcelona, Glasgow, and Bilbao because of transitions towards further bottom-up, participatory, and experimental smart city discourses (Factor 6 in Table 3). To different degrees, these transitions reflect the connection between the empirical analysis in the following section and the aforementioned theoretical argumentation and demonstrate the central role of devolution on urban political scales. It should be noted that these transitions occur in cities where nationalist parties are not in power, as is the case of “Barcelona in Common” with Ada Colau, which clearly depicts metropolitanisation as a new brand, entitled “municipalism” (Shea Baird, 2017). Moreover, this geo-democratic metropolitan argument is being directly confronted in the national-state political arena with the announced referendum of 1 October 2017 (Rovira and Martínez, 2016).

Table 2 | Three metropolitan arguments for “(smart) devolution”: geo-economics, geo-politics and geo-democratics

| Arguments | Scales and Drivers | Main references |
|-----------------|---|--|
| Geo-economics | Metropolitan: “Prosperous Competitiveness” | (Jones <i>et al.</i> , 2005; Goodwin <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Katz and Bradley, 2013; Ortiz, 2014; Centre for Cities, 2016; Clark, 2016; OECD/KIPF, 2016; Khanna, 2016a; Harrison <i>et al.</i> , 2017) |
| Geo-politics | City-region: “(Smart) devolution” | (Moreno, 2001, 2002; Keating and McEwen, 2005; Khanna, 2016b) |
| Geo-democratics | Nation-state: from the “Right to the City” to the “Right to Decide” | (Purcell, 2013; Calzada, 2014; Barceló <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Crameri, 2016; Cagiao y Conde and Ferraiuolo, 2016) |

Moreno argues that interdependence on the old continent goes beyond internal boundary building and the establishment of self-centred compartments of governance, as occurred with the old Westphalian nation-states (Moreno, 2015). Catalonians, like Scots and Basques, have reiterated their support for further Europeanisation, a process that many aim to make congruent with territorial subsidiarity and home rule. Three metropolitan-civic nationalistic cases embrace the European social model while representing the opposite of the position of the pro-Brexit and Eurosceptics, who are driven by state-centric “ethnic nationalism”. The three cases underpin the debate about multi-level governance, the changing nature of the nation-state in the EU, and the relative power of central state governments. This theme is often presented as a debate about whether the nation-state’s political authority and capacity to act are being eroded “from below” by the demands of territorially based city-regions or “from above” by the logic of economic and political integration among European nation-states (Caramani, 2004). However, we can also observe in these three cases how the United Kingdom and Spain, as nation-states, are eroding their “particular” sovereignty by disempowering their endogenous capacity for democracy and implementing multi-level governance in the following ways: a) in post-Brexit Scotland, diminishing the “right to decide” to remain part of the EU or to be present in the negotiations (Financial Times, 2016); b) in Catalonia, prosecuting the president of the Catalan parliament for allowing debate on a potential referendum (Cramer, 2016); and c) in the Basque Country, permanently attacking the agreement in the *concierto económico*, the economic framework agreement with Spain, which includes the contemporary political and symbolic taxation devolution formulae used as the principal asset for Basque self-government (Bourne, 2008; Uriarte, 2015; İrepoğlu Carreras, 2016).

As shown in Table 2, three metropolitan arguments are presented to link the political scales in the urban age from the metropolitan to the city-region and from the city-region to the nation-state. In fact, politics in the urban age has re-scaled nation-states (Sellers and Walks, 2013) by evolving from the initial metropolitan scale defined by the “prosperous competitiveness” agenda (the geo-economic argument (Harrison, 2007)) towards an articulation of quests for self-determination through “(smart) devolution” mechanisms (the geo-political argument (Regelmann, 2016)) and reaching the “right to decide” on their own futures (the geo-democratic argument (Harvey, 2008; Geoghegan, 2015)).

Consequently, three arguments overlap among the metropolitan, city-region and nation-state scales, driven by devolution.

1. The *geo-economic argument* refers to new forms of city-suburban cooperation, regional coordination, region-wide spatial planning and metropolitan institutional organisation promoted in Western European city-regions (Brenner, 2003; Harrison, 2017). Growing tensions between nation-states and “their” city-regions have resulted in either political rescaling through pervasive devolution (Khanna, 2016b: 63–78) or resistance to such centrifugal pressures (Kyriacou and Morral-Palacín, 2015). The financial crisis of 2008 called into question the suitability of the “one-size-fits-all” orchestration of state territoriality through hierarchical, top-down, asymmetric relationships between the centre and subordinated, peripheral spaces (González-Alegre, 2017). Does this mean the political dissolution of nation-states *per se* (Stanic, 2016)? The increasing visibility and dominant economic position of the main cities (and regions) *vis-à-vis* the state (Acuto, 2013; Barber, 2013; Herrschel and Newman, 2017; Therborn, 2017) have yielded headlines about “cities going independent”, such

as the provocatively titled “Devo Met” (Economist, 2014). In conventional “realist” international relations debates, this is heresy; nation-states are fixed and whole geographic entities. However, the growing focus on the economic dimension of statehood (the geo-economic argument) and its territorial and institutional manifestation questions the validity of such familiar assumptions as overly simplistic.

2. This situation leads to the second argument, the *geo-political argument*, which seeks to capture the continuing struggle within nation-states around newly emerging centres of political identity and agency, whether they are metropolitan or based on small nations. At this stage, two substantial differences occur in reference to the (pluri)nation(al)-states’ constitutional arrangements and, thus, their democratic interpretations: (i) bilateralism, understood as a rationalised dialectic and agreed-upon democratic mechanism between nation-states and “their” small, stateless, city-regional nations (in Scotland in 2014); and (ii) unilateralism, understood as the right of a “national” or “metropolitan” community to disobey the constitutional settings when they go against their “right to decide/to the city” through consultations or referenda (in Catalonia now). Owing to the Basque Country’s “unique” fiscal devolutionary status, which was “legally” agreed upon with the nation-state, now in the new era characterized as post-violence politics (Ruiz-Vieitez, 2016a, b), there are intertwined devolution claims beyond geo-economics and geopolitics rooted in the “right to decide” or, simply, the right to vote for a new political status—an option rejected by the Spanish parliament in 2005 with the *Ibarretxe Plan* (Calzada, 2014; Geller *et al.*, 2015). This situation has provoked a more explicit and a more conscious sense of *belonging* for city-regions as well as an update to the propagated “right to the city” as “individual liberty to access urban resources” (Harvey, 2008: 23). Thus, we come to the third argument: geo-democratics.
3. As globalization has intensified questions about the role and purpose of borders and the territorialities of identities and competitiveness, presumed contiguous state territories have become increasingly brittle (Agnew, 1994; Sassen, 2013). State territorial cohesiveness and continuity are no longer a given, which opens the way to new *geo-democratics*. Democratic innovations and experiments, such as direct and deliberative democracy embodied as plebiscites, referenda, and binding consultations, allow city-regional communities to exercise the “right to decide” (Fishkin, 2009; Filibi *et al.*, 2011). Thus, just as urbanisation played a crucial role in the absorption of capital surpluses (Harvey, 2008), metropolitanisation currently favours further devolution towards governing self-responsibility at different urban scales and within different boundaries than the established “nation-states”, whether for cities themselves or for city-regions or regions with strong notions of identity or “self-ness”. New territorialities in democratic representations seem to be a matter of course. This notion can be clearly observed in smart city policies that have evolved from a top-down to a bottom-up perspective in Barcelona, Glasgow, and Bilbao, which represent intertwining metropolitan and city-regional political responses to civic and democratic representational requirements. Further research is required to examine the correlation between political devolution and smart city discourses presented in Table 3.

These three inter-related arguments for “(smart) devolution” affect the construction of the urban sphere in terms of going beyond established notions of the region as a “natural” subdivision of the state. The point to claims by cities for self-rule as they are deemed to no longer require their national

capitals and states to filter their (mainly macro-economic) relations with the world (Sassen, 2001; Acuto, 2009; Barber, 2013; Khanna, 2014; Herrschel and Newman, 2017). Discussions about the “metropolitanisation” of multi-level governance in Europe during the 1990s (Benson, 2015) should thus extend to cities and city-regions as distinct entities in an “age of devolution” (Calzada, 2016a, 2018). This age establishes a new geopolitical relationship with the respective nation-state that entails new ways to agree with and implement geo-democratic experiments connected to the original meaning of the “right to the city” and smartness. In essence, “smart devolution” is the democratic process and outcome in which the centre and periphery update and agree upon their ongoing political status. As such, in this article, the definition of the term “smart devolution” is threefold.

- (i) “(Smart) devolution” should be a required interpretation of devolution as the driving, pervasive, and global metropolitan trend that provokes an increasing overlap among urban political scales from the metropolitan, city-regional, and nation-state as never before. It suggests that cities are actually transforming politics at the regional level—hence the correlation of geo-political power within nation-states. This trend has direct consequences in the political structures of the nation-states analysed in this paper by increasing the claims for democratic representation by any sub-national units within the nation-states.
- (ii) The second meaning of “(smart) devolution” involves the capacity for any nation-state to identify and pursue “smart” avenues of timely, subtle, and innovative political strategies for change in the on-going re-scaling devolution processes occurring in the United Kingdom, Spain and the EU. By using “smart” in parenthesis, the article suggests that this capacity may or may not be attributed to nation-states in reference to their “democratic” *modus operandi*.
- (iii) The third meaning of “(smart) devolution” involves connecting the transitional evolutions of ongoing smart city strategies at the urban scale by examining their effects at the upper levels, such as the metropolitan and city-regional levels. In the three analysed cases, these smart city governance transitions depict bottom-up, participatory, and more democratic representation, which relates closely to our previous theoretical argumentation and preliminary hypothesis (Calzada, 2017b). The working hypothesis is that metropolitanisation processes may reinforce bottom-up smart city practices through devolution at the urban and metropolitan scales (Calzada and Cobo, 2015) by provoking city-regional political responses in favour of further geo-democratic claims and “more to say” in political and urban terms. Not surprisingly, cities such as Glasgow (Jamieson, 2016; STV, 2017), Barcelona (Ríos Fernández, 2017), and Bilbao (Iraola, 2015; Redding, 2015) are fuelling a newly “transformative alliance” around “civic nationalism” by gathering a wide range of “progressivist” civic groups in a new communitarian amalgamation. This idea connects with the distinction between stateless “civic nationalism” and state-centric “ethnic nationalism” (Table 1). It is interesting to note this “metropolitanised/civic nationalism” pattern in cases including Glasgow, Barcelona, and Bilbao that generally connect federalists, former Labour voters, nationalists, secessionists, lefties, and progressivists. In the case of Glasgow, Mann and Fenton argue for “the need to acknowledge both the distinct role of interests of the Scottish middle classes in sustaining Scottish nationhood as well as working class whose support for a British Labour Party has changed significantly as a consequence of

deindustrialisation”. This information is also applicable to Barcelona and Bilbao (2017: 139).

This resulting “fused” “civic nationalism” with the city as its centre may suggest that strategic nationalist ambitions in small, stateless city-regional nations could be considered an updated and expanded version of a metropolitan-based “right to the city”, in Lefebvre words (Purcell, 2014). Are the two “rights” comparable? Based on their sub-national scale and from a conventional international relations perspective, are they mutually subordinate to established nation-states? Is the “right to decide” a potential “democratic” extension of the “right to the city”?

Comparative “(Smart) devolution” policy analysis of three metropolitan and city-regional political cases in Europe: Barcelona (Catalonia), Bilbao (Basque country), and Glasgow (Scotland)

Much of the question about “(smart) devolution” is closely linked to economic opportunity, actual and/or perceived (Guibernau, 2013; Khanna, 2016b: 68). There is an evaluation of “costs” and “benefits” and a desire to self-manage and use such perceived opportunities to one’s own advantage (Sage, 2014): “can we afford full independence economically?” and “which way are we better off—independently or as part of the United Kingdom or Spain?” (Rezvani, 2016). In each case, these questions produce very different city-regional political responses at every scale (Moisio and Jonas, 2017). At first glance, the geo-economic argument resonates as the driver (Table 3). However, smart city transitional discourses indicate that, at the metropolitan scale, the claim for more voice for the people (“People Make Glasgow”, as the slogan of one city) is clearly an attempt to call for “smart citizens”, a notion that could be inevitably scaled up to the city-regional level to request the “right to decide” on self-determination, regardless of the limitations of the constitutional settings (Fig. 3).

To capture the way geo-democratics occurs differently based on the way each city-regional political response sets its “(smart) devolution” agenda, this section compares three cases by conducting a policy analysis that scales up from metropolitan to city-regional and state-national politics to show how the political scales overlap (Cox, 2013; Clark and Clark, 2014).

This trend towards devolution increasingly affects the formulation and implementation of smart city strategies and policies at the city, metropolitan, city-regional, and national scales. These strategies and policies provoke a new understanding of urban politics in which democratic deliberation and experimentation occur (Keating and McEwen, 2005; Economist, 2014; Hazell, 2015; Polverari, 2015; Paun *et al.*, 2016; Randall and Casebourne, 2016; Scott and Copeland, 2016; Shaw and Tewdwr-Jones, 2017).

This analysis was conducted through in-depth interviews from January 2015 to June 2017 in Glasgow, Barcelona, and Bilbao. In each location, the author interviewed 45 people representing politicians, policymakers, academics, activists/entrepreneurs and citizens. The fieldwork was conducted from two diverse but complementary perspectives. First, it focused on the deconstruction of the transitional smart city governance strategic pathway analysis of the three cases funded by the EU Marie Curie “SmartCityRegions” project. Second, given the remarkable socio-political transformation that has occurred in Glasgow, Barcelona, and Bilbao, a summer school on “Political Innovation: Constitutional Change, Self-Government, the Right to Decide, and Independence” was organised to benchmark the three stateless city-regional national contexts (Calzada and Bildarratz, 2015). The summer school was crowdfunded by a wide range of Basque regional institutions and with the support of the RSA (Regional

Table 3 | Comparative “(smart) devolution” policy analysis of three metropolitan and city-regional political cases in Europe: scaling down/up through 15 factors in Barcelona (Catalonia), Bilbao (Basque Country) and Glasgow (Scotland)

| Comparative “(smart) devolution” policy analysis | Barcelona (Vallbé et al, 2015; Tomàs, 2016) Catalonia (Catalonia’s Government, 2014) | Bilbao (González, 2004) Basque Country (Calzada, 2011) | Glasgow (Scottish Cities Alliance, 2017) Scotland (Scottish Government, 2013) |
|---|--|--|--|
| <i>Metropolitan Politics Source: (European Metropolitan Authorities, 2015)</i> | | | |
| 1. Municipalities | 36 | 35 | 5 |
| 2. Surface (km ²) | 636 | 500 | 368 |
| 3. Density (Inhabit/km ²) | 5,060 | 1,820 | 3,171 |
| 4. Population | 3,218,223 | 910,480 | 1,166,928 |
| 5. GDP per Capita (\$) | 36,157 | 38,708 | 37,753 |
| 6. Smart city governance paradigm and ongoing transitions (Calzada, 2017b) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-corporate-uncertain • From the private-sector-driven smart city “iBarcelona” (Adler, 2016) to “Barcelona initiatives in technological sovereignty” (BITS). • After a large investment in the “smart city strategy” (iBarcelona) (Walt, 2015; Font Monté, 2016), BITS has recently been launched (Morozov and Bria, 2017). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate-in-transition • From the corporate/post-Guggenheim effect to Industry 4.0 district in Zorrozaurre. • After a long time without any comprehensive implementation, “As Fabrik” is presented as the flagship project now. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban-governance-transformative • From Glasgow smart city to Scottish smart city-region. • Two entirely different city-regional political networks has been established: stateless-nationalist Scottish cities Alliance and state-centric-unionist core cities. |
| <i>Scaling from Metropolitan to city-regional politics</i> | | | |
| 7. “(Smart) devolution” scales’ overlaps and contradictions: urban, metropolitan, and city-regional (Fricke and Gualini, 2017: 6) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1998: Municipal charter. At the municipal level, evolving from top down to bottom up. Still an inherent conflict/mismatch between the metropolitan (MAB) (Jones, 2015), the regional (<i>Generalitat</i>) with SmartCat brand (Calzada, 2016b), and the local authority (city council led by Ms. Ada Colau with the new brand, BITS, based on the new “Municipalism”) (Shea Baird, 2017). • 2010: Law of the metropolitan area of Barcelona (MAB). • In 2010, a Statute aproved by the Catalan parliament was banned by the constitutional court of Spain. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bottom up by Bilbao metropolitan agency and top down by Biscay province council/Basque regional government focuses on Industry 4.0 smart policy and devolution agreement with Madrid. Wider sectorial long-term vision and openness to citizenship is required (Holston and Appadurai, 2008). • 1979: Established full fiscal devolution since the 1979: Statute of Autonomy and the <i>concierto económico</i> (economic agreement with the nation-state) (Larrea Angulo, 1992; Serrano-Gaztelurrutia, 2012; Uriarte, 2015; Spanish Government, 2017). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to Clark et al (2016: 14), fiscal devolution “should provide sustained resources for cities to enable them to make major investments in city-regional infrastructure and housing investment, for example via locally levied revenues”. • 1998: Scotland Act by New Labour government and first Scottish parliament in 1999 (Cairney, 2014; Clark et al, 2016; Cairney, 2017). |
| 8. Degrees of devolution, <i>per se</i> | In progress | High | In progress |
| 9. Degrees of civic engagement | Very high (After 1 million person demonstration) (Cuadras-Morató, 2016) | Settled down (After post-violence era) (Calzada and Bildarratz, 2015) | Higher (After 2014 referendum) (Pike, 2014; Geoghegan, 2015) |
| <i>Scaling from city-regional to state-national politics</i> | | | |
| 10. Population in millions (city-regional contribution to the nation-state %) | 7.5 (16%) | 2.2 (5.50%) | 5.3 (8%) |
| 11. GDP (city-regional contribution related to nation-states %) | 19% | 6% | 9% |
| 12. Paradiplomatic branding | Olympic games Football club Barcelona | Guggenheim Bilbao Museum Self-government | Commonwealth games Independence referendum |
| 13. City-network composition | Barcelona, Tarragona, Girona, Lleida and Països Catalans* | Bilbao, San Sebastian, Vitoria, Pamplona and BAB [†] | Glasgow, Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Inverness, Perth and Stirling |
| 14. Strategic drivers of “(smart) devolution” and path-dependency of “metropolitanised/civic nationalisms” (Table 1) | Driven by civic society: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • November 9, 2014: A non-binding self-determination referendum was organised. • September 27, 2015: A plebiscitary election with a unity list in favour of “YES” was announced. | Fixed by institutions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2017: A new political status update requires the articulation of the “right to decide” beyond constitutional instruments. • Fiscal autonomy via economic agreement and “right to decide” binding consultation or | Facilitated by government: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2016: EU referendum and the potential second independence referendum. • Devo-max, Brexit and second independence referendum in 2018-2019? |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| <p>referendum to establish the New Political Status in 2018-2019?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geo-economic established bilateralism and an aborted long-run geo-politic and geo-democratic unilateral expression/claim. • Post-violence politics characterised by bilateralism based on the Economic agreement as a geo-economic argument. • The Spanish parliament rejected the Ibarretxe "Right to Decide" Plan in 2005, interpreted as geo-politic and geo-democratic unilateral expression (New York Times, 2005; Turp and Sanjaume-Calvet, 2016). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From rationalised dialectic based on bilateralism to post-Brexit unilateralism? • Independence referendum on 18 September 2014 (Keating and Harvey, 2014; Geoghegan, 2015). • In 2014, a rationalised dialectic based on bilateralism turned into a negative because of the PM arguing it was not "the right time now". |
| <p>15. "Right to decide": unilateralism vs. bilateralism?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 October 2017, "illegal" referendum and, if "YES" won, unilateral independence declaration. • Structural and antagonistic dialectic with the nation-state since the Statute rejection period 2006-2010: Unilateralism. • No binding consultation on 9 November 2014 and the Plebiscitary Elections on 27 September 2015 (Martí and Cetrà, 2016). • "Illegal" and unilateral referendum announced by 1 October 2017. | <p>referendum to establish the New Political Status in 2018-2019?</p> |

*Països Catalans refers to those territories where the Catalan language, or a variant of it, is spoken. It is commonly used for the Spanish regions of Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands, and for the French region of Perpignan. iBAB is the Biarritz-Anglet-Bayonne metropolitan conurbation, which can be considered part of the Eurocity cross-border multilevel governance instrumentarium. Bayonne and Biarritz are its chief towns, included in the Basque Eurocity Bayonne-San Sebastián.

Studies Association) "Smart City-Regional Governance for Sustainability" research network (Dierwechter *et al.*, 2017).

In Catalonia, the 27 September 2015 Catalan regional election was framed as a proxy for an independence referendum by the "devolutionist" parties. These parties were understood to be not only the pro-independence parties but also the federalist state-centric parties that were in favour of the "right to decide", though not necessarily in favour of independence at that stage (Martí and Cetrà, 2016). Since then, the new government has explicitly expressed the goal of holding a referendum in 2017, specifically on 1 October. The controversial turning point occurred in 2006, when a new Statute of Autonomy was approved by the Catalan parliament and was supported by 74% of votes cast in a referendum. However, it was banned in 2010 by the Spanish Constitutional Court. This event led to massive demonstrations in Catalonia calling for the "right to decide" their own future as a "nation" (Rokkan *et al.*, 2007). This phenomenon has been studied by scholars from diverse ideologies who advocate various solutions to the territorial tension from either the federalist or secessionist side of the debate (Coppieters, 2010; Guibernau, 2013; Barceló *et al.*, 2015; Requejo, 2015; Moreno, 2016a; Caglio y Conde and Ferraiuolo, 2016). The hegemonic Catalan feeling that was previously driven by pragmatism has turned secessionist because of a lack of faith in a federal agreement given the re-centralist, defensive, uncommunicative strategy of the Spanish government (Serrano, 2013). The "right to decide" thus became the motto (Calzada, 2014).

Since then, the goals in Catalonia have been to reinforce the majority of votes in parliament and to design an operative plan to "disconnect" from Spain after the referendum in 2017. This has recently provoked a negative response from the central government, which is prosecuting Catalan MPs. In these tumultuous events, Barcelona plays a unique, pivotal role insofar as the elected activist mayor, Ada Colau, representing the new radical left party "Barcelona In Common", has revitalised her municipal powers by embracing global initiatives of cities in exactly the way Barber (2013), Corijn (2009), Harvey (1997), and Sassen (2002), among many others, suggest. As such, Colau shows an ambivalent "urban/metropolitan"-based strategy regarding the tension between Catalonia's claim for the "right to decide" and Spain's (re-)centralist approach. Although Colau does not favour secession as influenced by municipally devolution-based federal political principles, she ambivalently supports the referendum and the application of the "right to decide", not only as the representative of the internationalised capital city of the city-region, Barcelona, but also as a relevant part of Catalonia. The Municipal Charter and Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (MAB) provides the framework for the devolution of institutional powers in smart city projects regarding urban planning, infrastructure, education, social services and culture, and it offers greater financial resources to cover those responsibilities. Thus, as Serrano (2013: 541) argues, "Opposition by the Spanish central government to delivering greater fiscal powers to Catalonia as a region has effectively been bypassed". The independence scenario has gained "realness" and more political acceptability, paralleling a bottom-up smart city re-activation founded as "Technological Sovereignty" (Fig. 1).

In the case of Bilbao and the Basque Country, after suffering from the spiral of political violence between the ETA organisation and the Spanish state, the recent official announcement of the full disarmament of the ETA suggests that this era is being left behind (Jeram and Conversi, 2014). After the ceasefire announced by the ETA organisation in 2011, political parties have been pursuing a normalised context in which they can express support for projects (including independence) without the threat of political unrest and violence, which puts further "(smart) devolution" at stake. There has been an intensive and committed effort by

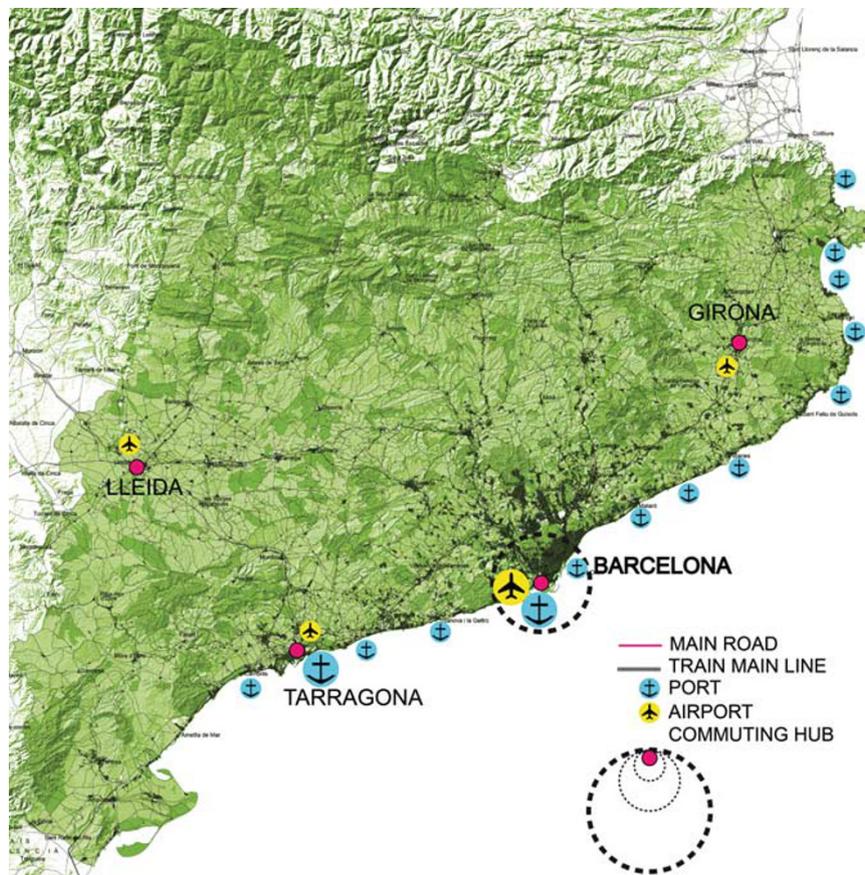


Figure 1 | Barcelona as the metropolitan political hub and Catalonia as the city-regional political response in reference to Spain. [Permission granted to be published under an Open Access license (CC-BY)]. Source: <http://cityregions.org/comparative-territorial-connection/empirical-approach/catalonia>. This figure is covered by the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. Reproduced with permission of Dr Igor Calzada, MBA (www.cityregions.org); copyright © Dr Igor Calzada, MBA (www.cityregions.org), all rights reserved.

metropolitan and city-regional institutions and from the broader civic society to cure wounds. In this context, devolution claims may not be radicalised insofar as the self-government policy driven by the Economic Agreement (Gray, 2015; Uriarte, 2015) has wide support from Basque society as a source of social and economic well-being in the last 30 years, which has been actively capitalised on by “civic nationalistic” policymaker advocates (Zabalo *et al.*, 2012). Self-government, which is understood as total tax policy devolution and some capacity to act on policy and political devolution, is legitimised both in the Basque Autonomous Community and in the Statutory Community of Navarra. These are the only two regions in Spain with this unique “historic devolved privilege” (for those Spanish “ethnic nationalists” against it) or “responsibility” (for the entire Basque society, according to surveys) (Ruiz and Fernández, 2003; Joumard and Giorno, 2005; Zabalo *et al.*, 2016). A key role has been played by Bilbao’s smart city corporate-in-transition transformation in just a few decades (since the late 1980s/early 1990s); it has changed from a city of iron, symbolised by large, polluting steel furnaces, to an international place of culture and urbanity that is characterised by the iconic and world-renowned Guggenheim Museum, which opened in 1997 (González, 2004; Keating and Frantz, 2004; González, 2011). Although the smart city policy has been entirely corporate thus far, a metropolitan push towards a democratic approach is occurring in several niche experiments, such as Zorrozaurre (Calzada, 2017b). (Fig. 2).

Finally, Scotland is recognised as a constituent nation of the United Kingdom, unlike Catalonia and the Basque Country, which are simply called “nationalities” in the Spanish Constitution. This issue of “nation” versus “nationality” reinforces the “indivisib[le] unity of the Spanish nation” and is the principal source of conflict with Spain in the case of Catalonia and the Basque Country (Colino, 2008; Calzada, 2016a). Scottish autonomy was newly conferred in a referendum in 1997. It was established by the Scotland Act and passed by the New Labour government in 1998, which led to the election of the first Scottish parliament in May 1999 and the formation of a new Scottish devolved government in charge of wide-ranging policy fields, including healthcare, education and energy (McLean, 2001; Heald and McLeod, 2005; Jones *et al.*, 2005; Keating, 2005; McGregor and Swales, 2005; Leyland, 2011; Cairney, 2014; Hazell, 2015; Polverari, 2015; ICE, 2016). Thus, Scotland has been gaining political and policy devolution fuelled by the new Scottish Government (Scottish Government, 2013), which has established a smart city-regional strategic vision through the Scottish Cities Alliance (2017) to foster a bottom-up, participatory, and geodemocratic culture within city-regional stakeholders. This is the same government that held the independence referendum in 2014 and obtained votes from 56 of 59 MPs from Scotland in 2015 and lost 21 MPs in the 2017 UK General Elections. The Scottish public has greater levels of trust in Holyrood than in Westminster and, arguably, in the SNP than in the Labour Party (at least in Glasgow), and the SNP’s sentiments go beyond the claim for



Figure 2 | Bilbao as the metropolitan political hub and the Basque Country as the city-regional political response in reference to Spain. [Permission granted to be published under an Open Access license (CC-BY)]. Source: <http://cityregions.org/comparative-territorial-connection/empirical-approach/basque>. This figure is covered by the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. Reproduced with permission of Dr Igor Calzada, MBA (www.cityregions.org); copyright © Dr Igor Calzada, MBA (www.cityregions.org), all rights reserved.

further fiscal devolution (Devine, 2001; Burn-Murdoch, 2017; Scottish Cities Alliance, 2017). Glasgow has gained metropolitan and international visibility that accompanies a sharper political profile and distinct democratic standing (Geoghegan, 2015; Clark *et al.*, 2016). In both referenda for independence and Brexit, Glasgow set the main trend (Macwhirter, 2015; Clark, 2016; Hassan, 2016; Calzada, 2017b). Thus, even though independence/secessionists were defeated by the small margin of 45% vs. 55%, the rational way in which the independence debate occurred demonstrated constructive pros and cons that were not seen in Catalonia (BBC News, 2014; Basta, 2015; BBC Radio, 2015). However, after the Brexit vote, in the “age of devolution”, there is the question of how to respect the people of Scotland’s vote to remain part of the EU.

To conclude the comparative analysis, the empirics articulate the theory by arguing that “(smart) devolution” (i) is presented as a novel and pervasive metropolitan trend as shown in the three cases and (ii) is characterised by high levels of overlapping and scaling down/up among the urban, metropolitan, city-regional, and nation-state levels (iii) by subtly establishing an intertwined reciprocal relationship between political devolution and transitional smart city discourses and practices (iv) to explore another interpretation of the politics in the urban age, (v) even provoking contradictions between political scales (vi) but ultimately fostering more imaginative and entrepreneurial approaches towards devolution between the growing interdependent relationship of cities, small stateless city-regional nations, and nation-states.

Final remark: is the Urban age redefining “devolved” politics in the UK and Spain and, ultimately, in the EU?

This article presented a comparative description of three cases to better understand why “devolution” matters and how “smart devolution” should be implemented between metropolitan and city-regional political responses within two specific nation-states, namely, the United Kingdom (Cooke and Clifton, 2005) and Spain (Costa-Font and Rico, 2006).

In doing so, this article has noted the distinction between “ethnic” and “civic” “nationalisms” in the context of three particular cases in Europe, Scotland, Catalonia, and the Basque Country, which are advocating the “right to decide” as a new version of a metropolitan-based “right to the city” mechanism, led by their metropolitan hubs, Glasgow, Barcelona, and Bilbao, in coherence with inclusive European values.

Considering the eventful years for “devolutionist” movements in both the United Kingdom and Spain since 2014, we can conclude that Glasgow, Barcelona, and Bilbao are strongly fuelling the democratic debate between the community-based city-regions and their respective nation-states (Coppieters, 2010; Turp and Sanjaume-Calvet, 2016; Anderson and Keil, 2017). “Devolution” matters more than ever before because of geo-economic arguments that claim that the devolved powers could be substantial. However, in the event of permission to hold a referendum by nation-states, however likely or unlikely, geo-political and geo-democratic manifestations count even more.

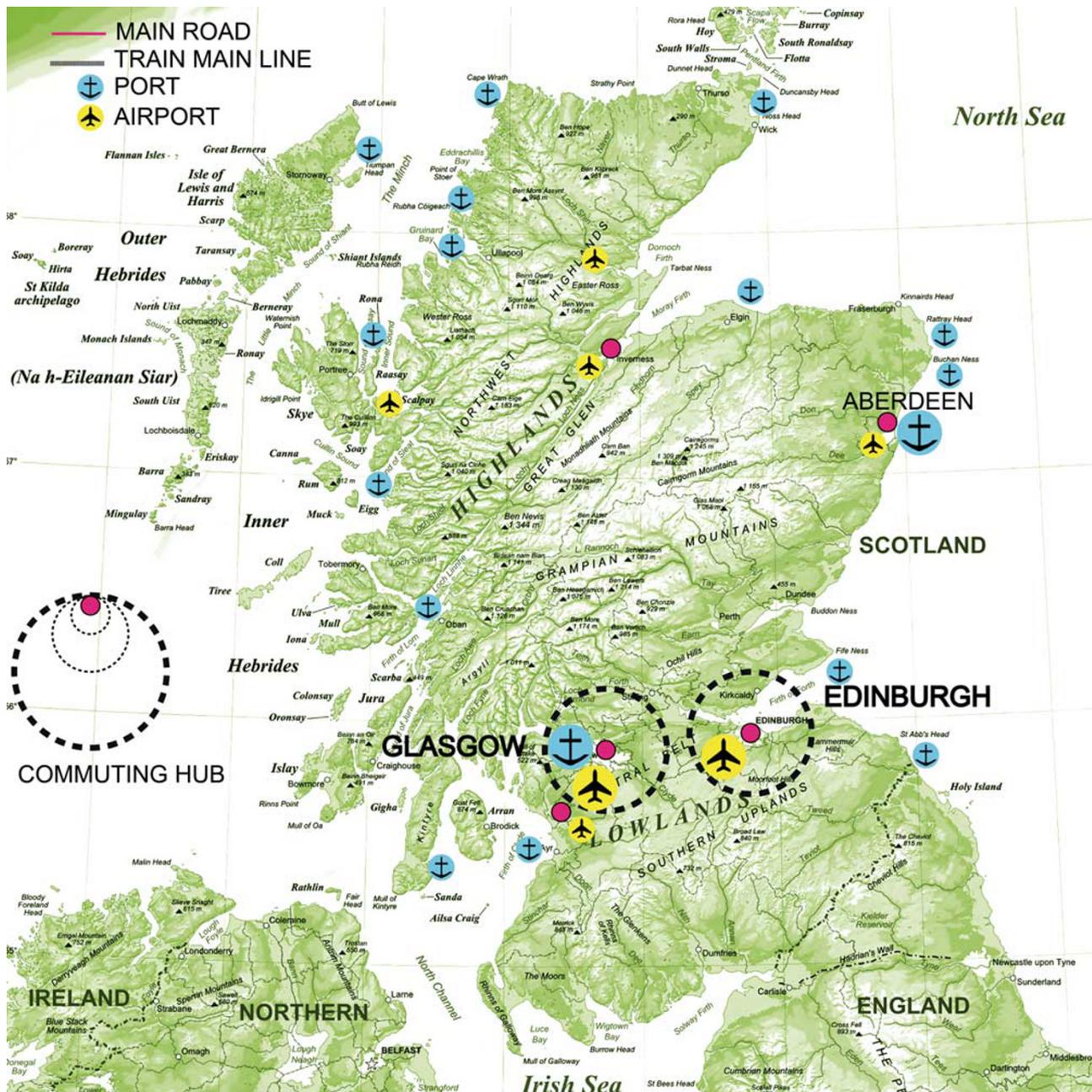


Figure 3 | Glasgow as the metropolitan political hub and Scotland as the city-regional political response in reference to the United Kingdom. [Permission granted to be published under an Open Access license (CC-BY)]. Source: <http://cityregions.org/comparative-territorial-connection/empirical-approach/scotland>. This figure is covered by the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. Reproduced with permission of Dr Igor Calzada, MBA (www.cityregions.org); copyright © Dr Igor Calzada, MBA (www.cityregions.org), all rights reserved.

The EU’s regional policy and multi-level governance provide an important *instrumentarium* and a platform for international outreach by sub-national actors in the pursuit of their own increasingly well-articulated interests and priorities (Bourne, 2008, 2014; Eising, 2017; Plangger, 2017; Royles, 2017). This is the case for Scotland, Catalonia and the Basque Country, whose strategic positions within the regional political arena have been empowered by the EU through their active economic sectorial leadership, their influential “lobbying” and networking, and their construction of “metropolitan” spaces with a clear European dimension.

Whereas the domestic argument of legitimacy often works to mobilise the support base, the international dimension seems

crucial to those who want to join a “society of states” in the EU. In this respect, the current context requires the adoption of an anticipatory and active role for the EU (Friend, 2012; Augustad Knudsen, 2013; Avery, 2014). In this sense, Connolly argues (2013: 12) that “devolution” and the “right to decide”, currently understood as the right to self-determination or secession in international law, “provide little guidance for addressing separatist claims of stateless nations in Europe or other parts of the world”.

To conclude, in Europe, “devolution” claims will increasingly be shaped by the institutions of the EU as part of the ongoing push and pull of having “more say” in the EU. Current interactions between member states and their

“constitutive” small, stateless city-regional nations are fuelled by an increasing “metropolitan” drive, a bottom-up exercise towards smart and experimental democratic practices for the “right to decide” and, ultimately, an urgency to adopt not only policy and fiscal schemes but also political and democratic “(smart) devolution” schemes.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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