

## *Ideological Divergence and Issue Convergence: Explaining Paradiplomacy in Quebec*

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**Abstract** — This article explores the role of nationalism in paradiplomacy, the phenomenon of sub-state entities engaging in international affairs. In regions characterized by strong nationalist movements, paradiplomacy is utilized by regional actors to project a minority identity distinct from that of the majority centre. Quebec has sustained the world's most advanced case of paradiplomacy, despite wholesale alternation between two ideologically divergent parties, the sovereigntist Parti Québécois (PQ) and the federalist Quebec Liberal Party (QLP). This article proposes party competition for issue ownership as a causal explanation of this convergence. The central argument put forth is that regional parties are galvanized by a nationalist electorate to take stances on international relations which promote their electoral competitiveness to voters vis-à-vis rival parties. The greater the emphasis a party places on itself as the most capable “owner” of the issue of the region's international interests, the greater its commitment to paradiplomacy will be.

**Keywords:** Quebec; paradiplomacy; nationalism; Parti Québécois; Quebec Liberal Party; valence theory

**Résumé** — Cette article explore le rôle du nationalisme dans la paradiplomatie, le phénomène des entités sub-étatiques qui s'engagent dans les affaires internationales. Dans les régions caractérisées par des mouvements nationalistes forts, la paradiplomatie est utilisée par les acteurs régionaux pour projeter une identité minoritaire distincte de celle du centre majoritaire. Le Québec offre le cas de paradiplomatie le plus avancé au monde, malgré l'alternance au pouvoir de deux partis idéologiquement divergents, le souverainiste Parti québécois (PQ) et le fédéraliste Parti libéral du Québec (PLQ). Cet article propose la compétition électorale pour la possession d'enjeu comme une explication causale de cette convergence des partis. L'argument central de cette thèse est que les partis régionaux sont galvanisés par un électorat nationaliste à prendre des positions sur les relations internationales qui favorisent leur compétitivité électorale vis-à-vis les partis rivaux. Plus un parti met l'accent sur lui-même comme “propriétaire” le plus apte à s'occuper de l'enjeu des intérêts internationaux du Québec, le plus son engagement envers la paradiplomatie sera intense.

**Mots-clés :** Québec; paradiplomatie; nationalisme; Parti québécois; Parti libéral du Québec; théorie de valence

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## Introduction

For over fifty years, Quebec has distinguished itself as the most internationally active sub-state region\* in the world (Keating, 1997; Balthazar, 1999; Balthazar, 2004; Michaud, 2006; Crikemans, 2010; Nossal, Roussel, & Paquin, 2015; etc.). Its Ministry of International Relations and La Francophonie oversees dozens of offices abroad, with staff and budgetary resources surpassing all nine other Canadian provinces or fifty American states combined (Bélanger, 2002). Quebec's international engagement — having begun with a “momentum it would never really lose” (Duran, 2016, p. 21) — is particularly striking considering that it has been sustained and expanded upon by both pro-sovereignty and pro-federalism regional parties.

*Paradiplomacy*,<sup>†</sup> the practice of sub-state entities engaging in international affairs (Kuznetsov, 2015), is an understudied phenomenon at the intersection of international relations and regional politics. In an international system increasingly characterized by the diffusion of power from state to non-state actors, regions are an example of the latter while possessing more characteristics of the former. Paradiplomacy may equally be conceptualized as the international dimension of regional politics. A correlation between sub-state nationalism and paradiplomacy is widely acknowledged (Lecours & Moreno, 2003; Kirkey, Paquin, & Roussel, 2016), with the most advanced cases being minority nations in multinational Western states, namely Quebec, Catalonia, the Basque Country, Flanders and Wallonia (Bélanger, 2002; Lecours & Moreno, 2003). Keating (1999, p. 13) notes that “in those cases where regions encapsulate a sense of distinct national identity and a nation-building project, external projection is qualitatively different from those cases where it is motivated only by functional considerations.”

## Research Puzzle

The observed correlation between the strength of a region's nationalist movement and its international engagement has not developed into causal explanations. Nationalism is the single most important variable in paradiplomacy (Lecours & Moreno, 2003) and paradoxically, the literature's most neglected (Paquin & Lachapelle, 2005). We know very little about the domestic parties, elites and institutions actually responsible for the formulation and execution of regions' international affairs. As a consequence of this gap, it remains unclear how nationalism is operationalized to provide political support for paradiplomacy (Kuznetsov, 2015). Aldecoa & Keating (1999, introduction) emphasize the “need to add political explanations [for paradiplomacy] derived from the goals and strategies of substate elites, building to promoting their region or, in some cases, preparing the way for national independence.” It has been argued even more forcefully that “paradiplomacy, at least in its most developed form, needs to be re-conceptualized through a theoretical linkage with substate nationalism” (Lecours & Moreno, 2003, p. 267).

Conventional logic would suggest that paradiplomatic activities are pursued most intensely by ruling parties in favour of sovereignty, and comparatively less so by those which are opposed. This assumption is empirically false. Pro-federalist regional parties have at times been observed to demonstrate a similar or even *greater* commitment to international relations than their independence-seeking rivals (Balthazar, 1999; Keating, 1999; Michaud, 2006; McHugh, 2015; Jeyabalaratnam & Paquin, 2016). This paradox is exemplified in Quebec, where a highly developed international presence has been sustained despite five decades of wholesale alternation between two ideologically divergent parties, the sovereigntist Parti Québécois (PQ) and the federalist Quebec Liberal Party (QLP).

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\* Kuznetsov (2015, 22) defines a *region* as “the territorial and administrative unit on the first level of authority after the central government in both federal and unitary state systems.”

<sup>†</sup> How best to conceptualize sub-state international engagement has been controversial since the 1980s, when the term *paradiplomacy* first entered the literature. Scholars have consistently acknowledged the difficulty in agreeing on a term applicable to all cases (Duchacek, 1984, 13), given their often highly divergent characteristics across time and place. Whether a sub-state entity's international engagement runs parallel, complimentary, or conflictual to that of the central state (Crikemans, 2009, 1) is one such consideration among multiple others. As a full overview of the advantages and disadvantages of each proposed term falls outside the focus of this article, the following terms will be used interchangeably: *paradiplomacy*, *paradiplomatic activities*, *sub-state international relations*, *sub-state international engagement*, and *sub-state international affairs*. For the most comprehensive analysis of paradiplomacy's terminology debate, see Aguirre (1999).

## Research Contributions, Questions, and Arguments

This article therefore seeks to address two of the most fundamental limitations to our understanding of why regions go abroad: theory building and units of analysis. Scholars have been far more successful in conceptualizing paradiplomacy's descriptive qualities than providing theoretical *explanations* for its development (Bursens & Deforche, 2010; Cornago, 2010; Kuznetsov, 2015). We lack a general understanding of the conditions which determine a region's choice of international activities (Bursens & Deforche, 2010).

Cross-national studies overlook domestic actors entirely, preferring instead to treat regions as macro-level units of analysis (see Blatter, Kreutzer, Rentol, & Thiele, 2008; Crikemans, 2009; Crikemans, 2010). A lack of micro-level analysis has two negative impacts. First, it perpetuates the incorrect impression that a region's international motives, goals and strategies are stagnant rather than dynamic. Second and most importantly, *why* regions engage in paradiplomacy can only be fully understood if the domestic actors responsible for its formulation and execution are analyzed. Kuznetsov (2015, p. 107) argues that "it is reasonable to assume that a political shift on the regional level can accelerate or hamper the international activity of constituent units [...] Consequently, we need to scrutinize the impact of the subnational ruling elite on regions' aspirations and self-identification in international relations domain."

Three interrelated research questions therefore underline this article: (1) What role does nationalism play in the paradiplomacy positions and strategies adopted by regional parties? (2) Why do ideologically divergent regional parties converge on the issue of paradiplomacy? (3) Is a greater commitment to paradiplomacy demonstrated by regional parties ideologically in favour of, or opposed to sovereignty?

I propose party competition for issue ownership as a causal explanation of Quebec's paradiplomacy. In Quebec and other regions characterized by strong nationalist movements, paradiplomacy is utilized by regional actors to project a minority identity distinct from that of the majority centre (Conversi, 1997). The central argument I put forth is that regional parties are galvanized by a nationalist electorate to take stances on international relations which promote their electoral competitiveness to voters *vis-à-vis* rival parties. The greater the emphasis a party places on itself as the most capable "owner" of the region's international interests, the greater its commitment to paradiplomacy will be. This article is therefore less interested in how regional parties converge or diverge in their *execution* of paradiplomacy *per se*, and more so in how they *compete* over it as a policy issue.

To this end, the article proceeds in four parts. First, the rationale underlying Quebec as a case study is discussed. Second, a literature review critically examines existing research approaches to nationalism and regional actors in paradiplomacy. Third, a theoretical framework conceptualizes paradiplomacy as a valence issue<sup>‡</sup> in Quebec and proposes four *prima facie* hypotheses for further research. Finally, the conclusion addresses the validity concerns of this proposed approach, as well as its broader implications for the relevant bodies of literature.

### Case Selection

The selection of Quebec as a case study is grounded in two interrelated considerations: the periodization of its international engagement, and its significance to the broader paradiplomacy literature. Quebec was the first region to develop a coordinated international presence in the late 1960s, which is considered a distinct historic period defined in terms of growth, dynamism, and its repercussions on the international behaviour and activities of sovereign players (Paquin & Lachapelle, 2005). Catalonia and the Basque Country would follow suit in the early 1980s (Segura, 2017), while Flanders' and Wallonia's now extensive international activities did not begin until the mid-1990s (Lecours & Moreno, 2003).

In addition to marking the beginning of the current paradiplomatic era, Quebec was the first case to attract scholarly attention in the 1970s (Kuznetsov, 2015). This outsized focus in the literature continues to endure, with Aguirre (1992, p. 202) observing that:

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<sup>‡</sup> A *valence issue* is characterized by parties and voters demonstrating broad agreement on a desired policy goal. (Stokes, 1963; Petrocik, 1996).

Historically, the case [of] Quebec has played, throughout North American academic literature, the role of a unique and outstanding internationally ‘centrifugal’ [...] paradigm inside the intensively studied field of federal political systems’ foreign policy processes.

Bélanger (2002, p. 197) situates the essence of Quebec’s distinctiveness in a global context:

In spite of certain fluctuations in its priorities [...] Quebec’s paradiplomacy has been sustained for forty years by an institutionalized and coherent policy that contrasts sharply with the instability and contingency that would generally characterize similar experiments carried out elsewhere in the world.

It should be noted that conclusions drawn from this particular case are generalizable to the other minority nation mentioned, as they share key characteristics including strong nationalist movements, sustained paradiplomatic engagement, and multi-party systems composed of parties both opposed to and in favour of sovereignty.

## Literature Review

The fundamentally interdisciplinary nature of paradiplomacy (Kuznetsov, 2015) presents both an opportunity and a challenge to our understanding of why regions go abroad. The most recent and comprehensive synthesis of paradiplomacy research, Kuznetsov’s *Theory and Practice of Paradiplomacy* (2015), identifies eleven distinct — though often interrelated — research discourses on the phenomenon. This breadth across international relations and comparative subfields has unfortunately not been matched by a depth of adequate explanatory frameworks. On the contrary, the existing paradiplomacy literature is frequently self-critical of being far more successful at conceptualizing paradiplomacy’s descriptive qualities than providing theoretical explanations for its development (Bursens & Deforche, 2010; Cornago, 2010; Kuznetsov, 2015).

Of greatest relevance to this article is the nationalism dimension of paradiplomacy discourse. According to Kuznetsov (2015, p. 50), research falling under this discourse broadly perceives paradiplomacy to be a factor in understanding minority nationalist aspirations in multinational and multilingual states. The following literature review provides an overview of nationalism’s treatment as a variable in paradiplomacy literature. The strengths and weaknesses of research analyzing domestic actors in paradiplomacy is then evaluated.

### Nationalism as a Variable in Paradiplomacy

Macro-level analysis of paradiplomacy distinguishes between its external and internal variables (Duchacek, 1984; Kuznetsov, 2015; Duran, 2016). In his seminal paradiplomacy text *The International Dimension of Subnational Self-Government* (1984), Duchacek originally conceptualizes external factors as *complex interdependence*, a term which has largely come to be replaced by *globalization*. By contrast, internal factors are described merely as *domestic issues*. This highly ambiguous conceptualization provides an early indication of the continued tendency in paradiplomacy research to overlook domestic variables and actors.

Duchacek is correct, though once again rather ambiguous, in his assertion that self-help is the prevailing goal of regions in going abroad, and that “elected subnational leaders perceive trans-border regionalism and/or global micro-diplomacy as appropriate instruments derived from and consistent with their territorial jurisdictional autonomy” (Duchacek, 1984, p. 9). The most prominent example of a regional declaration of international competences is Quebec’s Gérin-Lajoie Doctrine, named after the provincial minister of education who delivered the landmark speech in 1965. Although attributed to a Quebec Liberal Party politician, the Doctrine’s assertion that Quebec has the right to exercise international action on issues pertaining to its provincial jurisdiction has been supported by all major parties since its inception.

Duchacek’s belief that such instruments are used “in response to external opportunities or threats” (ibid.) is both problematic and incorrect, as he overlooks the possibility of sub-state diplomacy being used an international means for an *internal* end. In reality, the most active cases of paradiplomacy suggest that the opportunities and threats alluded to are more internal than external. The most salient example of the former is the need to promote a

minority identity distinct from that of the majority centre. In this sense, one could interpret the centre of a multinational state as a threat which is perceived to be “external” by the regional periphery.

Nationalism is evidently an example of an internal variable. Keating (1999, p. 1) divides paradiplomacy’s internal motives as either economic, political, or cultural, and emphasizes that the interconnected of all three must be stressed more. Kuznetsov (2015) identifies the same three internal motives, but departs from Keating in his assertion that one dominant motive tends to distinguish itself from an otherwise substantial overlap. Furthermore, it has been argued that although nationalism is the main independent variable in the study of paradiplomacy, it is not necessarily the sole or even primary variable in *empirical* cases (Duran, 2016, p. 8).

Instead, we should understand nationalism to be in and of itself a composite of political, cultural and especially economic variables (*ibid.*). Minority nations such as Quebec and Catalonia use paradiplomacy to leverage their internal autonomy (Tavares, 2015), as it facilitates the economic, political and cultural dimensions of stateless nation-building (Paquin & Lachapelle, 2005; Nossal et al., 2015; Duran, 2016). The following section analyzes research concerning the domestic actors responsible for this stateless nation-building.

### **The Limits of Historical Institutionalism**

Historical institutionalism has been the focus of the small body of research dedicated to domestic actors in paradiplomacy (see Lecours, 2002; Bursens & Deforche, 2008; Bursens & Deforche, 2010). The central premise of institutionalist approach is that paradiplomacy outcomes are the result of domestic actors’ preferences. Bursens & Deforche (2008, p. 27) argue these preferences directly determine the nature and intensity of a region’s international engagement, while also noting that a regional actor’s attempts to maximize its preferences may be either constrained or empowered by domestic and international variables. Although commendable in acknowledging the role of domestic actors in what is often analyzed as a purely international phenomenon, institutionalist approaches like Bursens & Deforche’s suffer from several limitations.

First, the “regional actors” referred to are often highly ambiguous, with no illustrative examples. Lecours (2002) provides a superior framework in this regard by applying historical institutionalism to an empirical case study of Wallonia. Yet Lecours still omits specific regional parties from both the theoretical framework and empirical analysis, impeding a truly micro-level analysis. Second, historical institutionalism emphasizes how actor preferences facilitate paradiplomacy, but not *why* actors have particular preferences. The former is useful for providing insights into the extent of a region’s international autonomy and activities, but fails to identify underlying motives for the latter.

Finally, a region’s preferences are usually framed exclusively as a response to the central government. Bursens & Deforche (2008, p. 27) hypothesize that “the more the relations between a region and the federal level are conflictual, the more the regional level will develop particular kinds of far-flung paradiplomatic activities.” While it is certainly reasonable to assume that relations with the central government may either constrain or empower a regional party’s paradiplomacy agenda, the intergovernmental relations angle (Balthazar, 1999; Keating, 1999; Bursens & Deforche, 2008; Albina, 2010; Lequesne & Paquin, 2017) overlooks the more salient dynamics of *intra*-periphery party competition. According to Lecours & Moreno (2003, p. 267), a focus on multi-level politics and federalism also “marginalizes the importance of nationalism in explaining the breadth, scope and intensity of a region’s international activities in [multinational states] and its absence, or lesser prominence, in [nation-states].”

It would be misleading to claim that institutionalization has not played a role in Quebec paradiplomacy. As previously discussed, the Gerin-Lajoie Doctrine legitimizing Quebec’s modern paradiplomacy has become institutionalized by virtue of all major parties adhering to its tenets. According to Bélanger (2002, p. 200), the central argument of the Doctrine and its underlying rationale is that “Quebec is the political instrument of a cultural group, distinct and unique in greater North America [...] the relative consistency with which this dimension of the Doctrine has been repeated by successive governments in Quebec is remarkable.”

## Free Trade and Quebec Paradiplomacy

The connection between minority nationalism, paradiplomacy and regional party politics is most effectively explored in research concerning Quebec's cross-party support of free trade (Martin, 1995; Meadwell & Martin, 1996; Shulman, 2000). The ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1993 was greatly facilitated by Quebec's political parties demonstrating unanimous endorsement (Paquin & Lachapelle, 2005, p. 84). Martin (1995, p. 3) goes so far as to note that "a consensus on free trade between Quebec political parties has endured since 1988."

Shulman (2000, p. 375) reinforces this evaluation, writing that "only in the 1980s and 1990s have free trade and continental integration become dominant themes of separatist and autonomist nationalism in Quebec." According to both Martin and Shulman, this cross-party commitment to free trade is not coincidental. On the contrary, it is the direct result of both the PQ and QLP promoting themselves as nationalist parties, albeit with distinctively different visions of what this should entail for Quebec. Martin (1995, p. 2) provides a convincing explanation for this party convergence:

Quebec did not embrace free trade in spite of its nationalism; it endorsed free trade largely because of its nationalism. Because nationalism is the core issue of party competition in Quebec, parties define their position on secondary issues in terms of how outcomes can affect their nationalist goals [...] thus, the bipartisan consensus and the high level of support for free trade in Quebec was a consequence of the partisan pursuit of nationalist goals.

The underlying premise of Martin's argument is that both the PQ and QLP are nationalist parties, in the sense that both promote themselves as the legitimate defenders of Quebec's "national" interests. The parties differ mainly in whether this would be achieved through eventual sovereignty or continued autonomy, a dichotomy which he aptly characterizes as "the 'two faces' of Quebec nationalism" (Martin, 1995, p. 2). Shulman's (2000, p. 369) definition of nationalism as "the promotion of the autonomy, unity and identity of the nation" is particularly beneficial because it caters to both the sovereigntist and federalist visions of Quebec nationalism. Economic integration enjoys bipartisan support in Quebec due to the perceived benefits it offers the province's autonomy (Shulman, 2000, p. 375). Free trade is therefore a policy which exemplifies the political and economic motives of paradiplomacy. Balthazar (2004, p. 470) has characterized Quebec's international relations as "the perpetual rediscovery of the economy by each succeeding government."

Meadwell & Martin (1996) expand on the relationship between nationalism and free trade by analyzing how support for the latter leads to nationalist mobilization. The authors postulate a theoretical explanation for the same bipartisan consensus on free trade identified by Shulman. They argue that economic integration includes elements of identity formation and institution building, both of which act as 'enabling conditions' for nationalist movements to mobilize (Meadwell & Martin, 1996, p. 69). For this reason, both major parties in Quebec have supported free trade to advance their respective nationalist agendas, with the main distinction being the PQ's belief that current economic interdependence would ease a future transition to independence. Meadwell & Martin's theoretical explanation is somewhat constrained by their lack of clarity in explicitly stating whether bipartisan consensus for free trade predates public support, or vice versa.

## Theoretical Framework

Although primarily concerned with disproving the assumed incompatibility between nationalism and free trade, Shulman, Martin and Meadwell's contributions provide valuable insights into how and why internationally oriented issues tend to enjoy a high degree of cross-party support in Quebec; the essential importance of paradiplomacy to Quebec and its regional parties has been likened by some to "oxygen" (Nossal et al., 2015, p. 372). We are therefore presented with a strong rationale for treating paradiplomacy not simply as an international phenomenon, but as a policy issue in regional party competition.

## Valence Issues and Party Competition

Valence theory postulates that certain decisive political issues are consensual, meaning that parties and voters demonstrate broad agreement over desirable policy goals (Stokes, 1963; Petrocik, 1996). Egan (2013, p. 18) stresses that *goals* and *issues* must be treated as distinct concepts in valence theory, defining an *issue* as “a related set of public debates about a goal — including the extent to which the goal is desirable, the policies best suited for achieving it, and the performance of the goal on those running the government, as well as how much the goal should be prioritized compared to others.” In this sense, it is not *issues* themselves which enjoy consensus, but their underlying *goals*.

Identifying the goal at the centre of the issue is the first step in determining whether an issue may be characterized as valence (Egan, 2013, p. 20). The second step involves the application of what Egan (*ibid.*) terms the *ceteris paribus* criterion: “Is there a consensus that the goal is (1) desirable and (2) the responsibility of government, all other things being equal?”

Cross-party consensus on an end goal does not necessarily mean that competing parties will demonstrate identical levels of commitment, strategies, or most importantly, policy positions (Bélanger, Nadeau, Henderson, & Hepburn, 2018, p. 20). On the contrary, a party will manipulate its positioning on the issue in an effort to differentiate itself from rival parties. This deliberate manipulation serves the purpose of demonstrating to voters that it is the most capable and legitimate defender of a particular issue — *that it owns the issue* (Petrocik, 1996). Green & Jennings (2017, p. 13) add that:

[...] for a party to gain ‘ownership’ of an issue, it should be closer to the preferences of a particular issue public that cares about this issue, it should take (or have taken) a greater interests in the issue than another party and it should be recognized as the party most likely to handle the issue well and deliver on it.

The sources of pressure in issue competition may therefore be conceptualized along two distinct but interrelated dimensions: (1) *the vertical dimension*, in which pressure from voters forces a party to assume a stance, and (2) *the horizontal dimension*, in which pressure from other parties forces issue positioning.<sup>§</sup>

### Paradiplomacy: A Valence Issue in Quebec Politics?

The National Question is evidently the main valence issue in Quebec politics. Although parties diverge in their preferences regarding Quebec’s constitutional future, they converge on the central objective of defending Quebec’s interests as a distinct nation (Bélanger et al., 2018, p. 24). This objective involves a complex mix of interrelated policy issues, including the economy, culture and language rights (Bélanger et al., 2018, p. 21). The National Question may therefore be considered a policy *theme* of issues (Guinaudeau & Persico, 2014), and given its outsized importance in Quebec politics, a *super-issue* (Green & Jennings, 2017).

It is reasonable to assume that paradiplomacy is a valence issue in Quebec, by virtue of its inclusion in the National Question theme. International relations has historically borne little electoral salience to Quebec’s voters or its parties (Michaud, 2006), as provincial elections tend to focus exclusively on domestic rather than international issues (Michaud, 2006, p. 380; Lecours, 2008, p. 13). A case in point, the QLP’s 1960 platform did not include international issues (Payette, 2011), despite marking the beginning of Quebec’s paradiplomatic era (Paquin & Lachapelle, 2005, p. 78). Bélanger et al. (2018, p. 74) likewise observe that international issues such as supranationalism receive comparatively little attention from Quebec parties.

However, these parties do perceive international activities positively as a means of developing more regional autonomy (*ibid.*). Bélanger et al.’s conclusion is nearly identical to Tavares’ (2016) observation of paradiplomacy’s utility in developing and projecting an autonomous minority identity. Paradiplomacy may therefore be conceptualized as *the international dimension of minority nationalism*. Like the broader National

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<sup>§</sup> Given the lack of precedent in applying valence theory to paradiplomacy, this article will limit its focus to the horizontal party dimension, rather than the vertical voter dimension.

Question, paradiplomacy is a multidimensional composite of economic, cultural and political motives (Keating, 1999; Kuznetsov, 2015). In Quebec, it encompasses policies as diverse as free trade and foreign investment, the protection and promotion of Quebec's unique culture and French language, educational exchanges, and environmental protection.

Crucially, paradiplomacy meets Egan's (2013) two criteria for valence issues: (1) desirability of a goal, and (2) responsibility of a government. The utility of paradiplomacy for stateless nation-building holds wide appeal to Quebec's nationalist electorate, and cuts across their divergent constitutional preferences. Voters also perceive the provincial government to be both more capable and more willing to advance Quebec's "national" interests abroad (Paquin & Lachapelle, 2005), compared to a federal government which accounts much less for Quebec's distinctiveness.

### **Prima Facie Hypotheses**

Four hypotheses may be extrapolated from applying valence theory to paradiplomacy:

#### *H1: Both parties take pro-paradiplomacy positions*

Although paradiplomacy receives relatively little electoral attention on its own, it becomes highly salient when conceptualized as the international dimension of the National Question. Given that the latter is a "super issue" composed of multiple policy dimensions, parties must compete on them all in order to be perceived by voters as the most legitimate "owner" of the broader National Question.

Parties converge around the most competitive position to assume: more paradiplomacy. This "ideal" position is determined by voters. Quebec's nationalist electorate demonstrates a preference for an ever increasing international presence, due to the perception of paradiplomacy promoting Quebec's unique interests abroad. A party must take competitive stances on these constituent issues — including paradiplomacy — as *not* doing so would result in the party being out-bid by rival parties (Guinaudeau & Persico, 2014; Green & Jennings, 2017). The status quo or decreasing Quebec's international presence are therefore unviable positions for competing parties to pursue.

#### *H2: Parties emphasize different motives for paradiplomacy*

Both parties agree on the end goal of increasing Quebec's international presence, but emphasize different motives for paradiplomatic action. Paradiplomacy and the National Question are both multidimensional issues underlined by the trifecta of economic, cultural and political motives (Conversi, 1997; Keating, 1999; Kuznetsov, 2015).

Which paradiplomacy motive a party chooses to emphasize is determined by how the party tends to frame Quebec nationalism in general. The QLP primarily frames paradiplomacy as *economically* beneficial for Quebec, because emphasizing this dimension — particularly Quebec's trade relationship with the United States — serves to reinforce voters' broad perceptions of the QLP as the most competent party on economic issues (Bélanger & Gélinau, 2011). Due to the perception of the PQ as the most competent defender of the French language (Bélanger et al., 2018), it places a greater emphasis on the *cultural* dimension of paradiplomacy, such as expanding Quebec's engagement with France and the global Francophonie.

#### *H3: The federalist Quebec Liberal Party (QLP) demonstrates a greater emphasis on paradiplomacy than the sovereigntist Parti Québécois (PQ)*

Parties converge around the same broad pole of more paradiplomacy, but take slightly different positions to compete for ownership of the issue. Paradoxically, a stronger commitment is demonstrated by a federalist — not sovereigntist — party. Understanding the extent to which issue ownership changes — or not — over time may be indicative of where issue ownership originally derives from (Egan, 2013, p. 54). There are three main reasons to expect that international relations policy is "owned" by the QLP rather than the PQ.

First, the QLP benefits from ownership of the 1965 Gérin-Lajoie Doctrine. This foundational document, developed by a provincial QLP cabinet minister, marked the beginning of Quebec's modern paradiplomatic era, legitimized its international activities, and continues to be upheld by all parties. The QLP is therefore able to claim an earlier, more enduring commitment to paradiplomacy than the PQ.



Second, Quebec's status as the most internationally active sub-state region in the world has been achieved *within the existing federal system*. This fact allows the QLP to argue that its preference for federalism is not an impediment to Quebec's pursuit of a strong international engagement. By contrast, the PQ's *raison d'être* of independence not only unnecessary, it would require extremely difficult constitutional changes.

Third, Quebec's paradiplomacy underwent an intense period of expansion in the early 2000s, under QLP premier Jean Charest. The personality of politicians has been identified as a factor in the foreign policy development of sub-state entities (Paquin & Lachapelle, 2005).

Although public opinion on issue competence is considered distinct from public opinion about leader strengths and weaknesses (Green & Jennings, 2017, p. 3), Charest's leadership in this regard strengthened the perception of the QLP as distinctively competent to manage Quebec's international interests (Jeyabalaratnam & Paquin, 2016). Charest's unmatched success in promoting Quebec's interests abroad has even been acknowledged by rival parties and elites (*ibid.*).

It is in the QLP's interest to stress its commitment to paradiplomacy, as doing so almost always works in the owning party's favour (Budge & Farlie, 1983, p. 271). There is a central debate in valence theory regarding the best strategy for a non-owning party. Budge and Farlie (*ibid.*) argue that it is more viable for the non-owning party to divert attention from one issue to another. For the PQ, this means emphasizing that eventual statehood would enable Quebec to have a "full" diplomatic presence in the world, rather than an existing paradiplomacy, constrained by a hostile federal government (Conversi, 1997, pp. 131–132).

Tresch, Lefevre, and Walgrave (2015) propose an alternative strategy for a non-owning party: emphasizing issues which the party *does* have a reputation of owning, thereby reinforcing voters' perceptions of the party as the "associative owner" of an issue it is otherwise weaker on. Holian's (2004) earlier research finds that a non-owning party may use well-crafted rhetoric to successfully ameliorate voters' perceptions of its issue ownership. Engagement, rather than avoidance, offers the non-owning party the possibility of "stealing" an issue from the historical owning rival party. As discussed in H2, the PQ may leverage its ownership of French language protection by attempting to frame paradiplomacy ownership along cultural terms, rather than the economic terms emphasized by the QLP.

The arrival of a new party in the system acts as a catalyst for such issue trespassing and stealing (Bélanger, 2003). As Bélanger (2003, p. 553) notes, "the goal of gaining such issue ownership advantages might in turn generate battles of reputation between old and new parties."

The QLP's ownership of international issues was largely unchallenged during the nascent paradiplomatic era of the Quiet Revolution. However, the emergence of the PQ in 1970 galvanized the QLP to strengthen its paradiplomacy emphases, as the PQ would attempt to challenge its credibility on international issues in subsequent campaigns.

#### *H4: The salience of paradiplomacy to Quebec parties has increased since the 1960s*

In addition to salience across parties, paradiplomacy's overall salience across *time* has increased. There are two reasons to support this expectation. First, the acceleration and intensification of Quebec's international engagement since the 1960s (Kirkey et al., 2016, p. 136) has resulted in paradiplomacy's institutionalization as a norm. Second, globalization has strengthened this institutionalization, by "internationalizing" formerly domestic policy areas such as education and environmental protection. As Green & Jennings (2017, p. 8) stress, "issues *become* about competence when the politics of time makes them so [and] are only valence issues when the terms of political debate and public evaluations become about management, trust, delivery and competence."

## **Conclusion**

This article has argued that analysis of paradiplomacy — particularly highly developed cases like Quebec — must account for regional parties as primary actors. A theoretical framework conceptualizing international relations as an issue in regional party competition provides four *prima facie* hypotheses for future empirical research. Operationalizing these hypotheses is, however, confronted by both theoretical and methodological concerns.

Valence theory suffers from a lack of clarity regarding what constitutes “ownership” of an issue, and equally as important, how to measure it (Green & Jennings, 2017, p. 3). As a result, it is not always possible to disentangle a party’s issue ownership from its overall popularity (*ibid.*). Such measurement concerns are not unique to valence theory. Paradiplomacy research is limited by a complete lack of comprehensive data sets for regional foreign policy competencies (Blatter et al., 2008, p. 469), rendering attempts to quantify the phenomenon largely unsuccessful (Kuznetsov, 2015, p. 11).

For these reasons, a mixed-methods research design involving a content analysis of regional party literature and semi-structured elite interviews would be the most effective approach to testing the hypotheses. Party literature such as manifestos provides the clearest reflection of a party’s positions on an issue, as well as how these positions are communicated to voters (Budge, Klingemann, Volkens, Bara, & Tanenbaum, 2001). Given that such documents rarely provide an explicit *contrast* between a party’s position on an issue and that of its rival parties, semi-structured interviews with party members would elucidate intra-party competition for ownership of paradiplomacy.

The proposed research agenda has implications for three separate bodies of knowledge. As discussed in the literature review, existing studies have overlooked paradiplomacy as a policy issue in regional politics. Paradiplomacy therefore represents a new issue to be analyzed within the framework of valence theory. Second, understanding the motives and strategies of regional parties advances the small but growing body of research concerning regions as non-state actors. As the most internationally active regions are minority nations, the study of sub-state nationalism must be broadened to include its compelling international angle.

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