

# The resurgence of the ‘Region’ and ‘Regional Identity’: theoretical perspectives and empirical observations on regional dynamics in Europe

ANSSI PAASI\*

**Abstract.** ‘New regionalism’, ‘region’, ‘city-region’, ‘cross-border region’, ‘border’ and ‘identity’ have become important catchphrases on the global geo-economic and geopolitical scene. The resurgence of these terms has been part of the transformation of both political economy and governance at supra-state, state and sub-state scales. Regions have been particularly significant in the EU where both the making of the Union itself and the ‘Europe of regions’ are concrete manifestations of the re-scaling of state spaces and the assignment of new meanings to territory. Such re-scaling has also led to increased competition between regions; a tendency that results from both the neo-liberalisation of the global economy and from a regionalist response. Regional identity, an idea at least implicitly indicating some cohesiveness or social integration in a region, has become a major buzzword. It has been particularly identified in the EU’s cohesion policy as an important element for regional development. In spite of their increasing importance in social life and academic debates, regions, borders and identities are often studied separately, but this paper aims at theorising and illustrating their meanings in an integrated conceptual framework and uses the sub-state regions in Europe, and particularly in Finland, as concrete examples. Regions are conceptualised here as processes that gain their boundaries, symbolisms and institutions in the process of *institutionalisation*. Through this process a region becomes established, gains its status in the broader regional structure and may become a significant unit for regional identification or for a purported regional identity. This process is based on a division of labour, which accentuates the power of regional elites in the institutionalisation processes.

## Introduction

The death of the region, its inevitable gradual disappearance or at least the need to abandon such bounded spaces have been declared for a long time in academic and policy circles but this idea has not only persisted but also gained new meanings. ‘New regionalism’, ‘region’, ‘city-region’, ‘cross-border region’, ‘border’ and ‘identity’ have recently become important catchphrases in academic and political discourse. Even if region and regional identity have become important in many

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academic fields during roughly the last 15 years, the meanings of these categories are ambivalent and require further theoretical analysis and interpretation of their significance in various empirical contexts. One reason behind this ambivalence is that both region and other categories that are crucial for understanding the roles of regions in social and political life – that is the border and identity – are often taken for granted in research that looks at the political economy, culture or politics occurring *in* such regions. This is partly related to the fact that certain ‘scripts’ have become nearly universal in regional development literature. Accordingly some keywords – like region, city-region, regionalism or regional identity – are often circulated without reflecting on them contextually.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore useful to scrutinise at first how ‘region’ is understood, secondly, how to theorise it and, thirdly, to determine its practical meanings. While some representatives of geography and political science have recently examined region-building processes in such contexts as the Mediterranean, Northern Europe, or the Black Sea,<sup>2</sup> conceptual approaches on such processes have been largely lacking. Similarly, it is important to look at how the idea of regional identity is used, how it can be conceptualised and what are the problems of studying such identities in concrete research.

This article aims to contribute to ongoing debates on the meanings of regions and regional identities.<sup>3</sup> While the idea of ‘region’ can in current debates refer to both sub- and supra-state units, and can of course be conceptualised at various spatial scales, in this paper the region will be scrutinised above all as a *sub-state* level category but by doing this in a wider scalar framework that is by looking at how regions are results of processes taking place at and across various scales. This article offers a perspective that might be somewhat unfamiliar to IR/political science debates on regions that normally deal with state and supra-state units and look at the interstate system as a target of regionalist activities. A fitting illustration is the recent special issue of *Geopolitics* which shows how new practices and imaginations associated with supra-state region and regionness are scrutinised in IR and how the authors draw heavily on constructionist/discursive perspectives that recognise regions as practices of representation.<sup>4</sup>

This article will respectively bring in a somewhat different menu of analytical problems and concepts by looking at the scalar complexity of regions. This is in line with current efforts of geographers, sociologists and IR scholars to find

<sup>1</sup> Arnoud Legendijk and J. Cornford, ‘Regional institutions and knowledge-tracking: new forms of regional development policy’, *Geoforum*, 31 (2000), pp. 209–18.

<sup>2</sup> Iver Neumann, ‘A Region-Building Approach to Northern Europe’, *Review of International Studies*, 20 (1994), pp. 53–74; Christopher Brown, ‘The region-building approach revisited: the continued Othering of Russia in discourses of region-building in the European North’, *Geopolitics*, 8 (2003), pp. 45–71; Alun Jones, ‘Narrative-based production of state spaces for international region-building: Europeanization and the Mediterranean’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 96 (2004), pp. 415–31; Felix Ciuta, ‘Region? Why region? Security, hermeneutics, and the making of the Black Sea region’, *Geopolitics*, 13 (2008), pp. 120–47.

<sup>3</sup> John Harrison, ‘Re-reading the new regionalism: a sympathetic critique’, *Space and Polity*, 10 (2006), pp. 21–46; A. Donaldson, ‘Performing regions: territorial development and cultural politics in Europe of the regions’, *Environment and Planning A* 38 (2006), pp. 2075–92; Joe Painter, ‘Cartographic anxiety and the search for regionality’, *Environment and Planning A* 40 (2008), pp. 342–61; Anssi Paasi, ‘Region and place: regional identity in question’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 27 (2003), pp. 475–85.

<sup>4</sup> Mathias Albert and Paul Reuber (guest editors), Special issue on Strategic Regionalizations: New perspectives on Regions in a Global System, *Geopolitics*, 12 (2007) issue 4.

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interdisciplinary conceptual terrain for new spatial approaches.<sup>5</sup> The arguments will be illustrated with examples from various geographical contexts, especially from the European Union where the idea of the 'Europe of regions' has become very significant. This idea implies that nation-states are regarded as too small for global economic competition but while being too large and remote for cultural identification and participatory and active citizenship.<sup>6</sup> While examples are taken from some European regions, the new functions and meanings associated with Finnish provinces will be looked at as a particular case to scrutinise how the rescaling of state spaces and the 'meaning making' of regions occurs. The 'regionality' of some supra-state units is also briefly discussed, above all supra-state regions (and *regionalisations*) such as the EU itself, NAFTA and other economic formations. Similarly the current roles and functions of so-called cross-border regions that have been created on state borders round the world are scrutinised.

The article is structured as follows. First, the current transformations of state spaces are discussed, then historical backgrounds and current forms of regionalism will be briefly analysed. Thirdly, the contemporary debates on regions will be critically evaluated and then the dimensions of region-building process will be theorised. Regions, symbols, identities and borders are different elements of this process but they are often studied separately. I will bring these categories into an integrated framework and will conceptualise regions as processes that achieve their boundaries, symbolisms and institutions in the process of institutionalisation. Such theoretical frameworks have been rare in Geography and Political Science literature and this article seeks to provide new steps to develop further the framework of institutionalisation. Then I will reflect the individual and institutional dimensions of regional identity and illustrate them by looking at the new roles of regions and identity discourse in the Finnish provinces that represent NUTS III<sup>7</sup> level regions in the EU's regional system. Finally, the relations between region and identity in an increasingly mobile world will be discussed.

### Region and territory in a globalising world

It is obvious that in spite of accelerating globalisation, the rise of networks, flows of immigrants and refugees, internet, the borderless world thesis,<sup>8</sup> and the post-structuralist or post-nationalist literature that have challenged the national state,<sup>9</sup> the

<sup>5</sup> See Bob Jessop, Neil Brenner and Martin Jones, 'Theorizing socio-spatial relations', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 26 (2008), pp. 389–401 and the related commentaries by Edward D. Casey, Anssi Paasi, Michael J. Shapiro and Margit Mayer.

<sup>6</sup> James Anderson, 'The rise of regions and regionalism in Western Europe', in M. Guibernau (ed.), *Governing European Diversity* (London: Sage, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics, or the Statistical Regions of Europe.

<sup>8</sup> Kenichi Ohmae, *The End of the Nations-State* (New York: Free Press, 1995); see also Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Arjun Appadurai, 'Sovereignty without territoriality: notes for a postnational geography', in Patricia Yager (ed.), *The Geography of Identity* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), pp. 40–58; Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press 1999); Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (eds), *Cosmopolitanism: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press 1998).

contemporary world is still a complex constellation of more or less bounded spaces that exist at various spatial scales. These spaces are 'regions' or 'territories'. All territories are regions but not all regions are territories. By definition a territory differs from a region in that its boundaries and the resources therein are under the control of people. Such control is an expression of territoriality. Territoriality is not a constant but a political, spatially selective strategy that can be exercised or not.<sup>10</sup>

International border conflicts have decreased markedly since the 1990s and state borders are in many cases more open than before, but boundaries and territory still matter, simply because they are typically instruments of territoriality. This can be seen not only in how refugees and immigrants are selected and accepted in various states, but also in how many ethno-nationalist groups struggle to create separate territories and maintain their identities.<sup>11</sup> This takes place even inside the EU which has struggled to lower the internal borders of the EU territory by creating new institutional solutions, such as cross-border regions.<sup>12</sup> Territoriality matters at various spatial scales, and respectively the questions of autonomy, pluralism, democracy or the unity of the state are perpetually topical.<sup>13</sup>

Territory has four experiential dimensions that fuel attachments. Thus, territory is social because people inhabit it collectively, it is political because groups fight to preserve or enlarge their space, it is cultural because it contains collective memories and it is cognitive, and hence its capacity to subjectify cultural, political and social boundaries makes territory the core of both public and private identity projects.<sup>14</sup> Emotion is thus a crucial, constitutive dimension of territory, which accentuates the meanings of identities. While territorial spaces are normally bounded and borders are key instruments in the operation of territoriality,<sup>15</sup> such borders are not inevitably fixed. Katzenstein suggests that globalisation and internationalisation create open or 'porous' regions.<sup>16</sup> These transformations have led to claims of 'new medieval' conceptualisations of territoriality which suggest that geographic space, politics, loyalties and identities are becoming more complex and relational.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps a more balanced observation is that borders can be open in some social practices (like economy), in some others relatively closed (like the control of immigration).<sup>18</sup> Neither are such borders constituted by social relations that would remain purely

<sup>10</sup> Anssi Paasi, 'Territory', in John Agnew, Katharyne Mitchell and Gerard Toal (eds), *A Companion to Political Geography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 109–22.

<sup>11</sup> Anna Triandafyllidou and Ruby Gropas (eds), *European Immigration: A Sourcebook* (London: Ashgate, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Mabel Berezin and Martin Schain (eds), *Europe without Borders* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Paasi, 'Territory'; William Safran and Ramón Máiz (eds), *Identity and Territorial Autonomy in Plural Societies* (London: Frank Cass, 2000); Mathias Albert, David Jacobson and Yosef Lapid (eds), *Identities, Borders, Orders* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Miles Kahler and Barbara F. Walter (eds), *Territoriality and Conflict in an Era of Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Berezin, 'Europe'.

<sup>15</sup> Robert David Sack, *Human Territoriality* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1986).

<sup>16</sup> Peter J. Katzenstein, *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> James Anderson, 'The shifting stage of politics: new medieval and postmodern territorialities?', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 14, pp. 133–53; Jörg Friedrichs, 'The meaning of New Medievalism', *European Journal of International Relations*, 7 (2001), pp. 475–501.

<sup>18</sup> Anssi Paasi, 'The changing discourses on political boundaries: mapping the backgrounds, contexts and contents', in Henk van Houtum, Olivier Kramsch and Wolfgang Zierhofer (eds), *Bordering the World* (London: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 17–31; Anssi Paasi and Eeva-Kaisa Prokkola, 'Territorial

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internal in the regional spaces. In the contemporary world territories increasingly 'leak' or 'stretch' in space across borders.

State-centric spatiality and territoriality has been challenged worldwide not so much by elitist cosmopolitan ideas as by neo-liberal globalisation and increasing economic competition. New transformations have been part of the legitimisation crisis facing the current post-Keynesian 'competitive' state, where social and regional interests have become fragmented under the neoliberal condition. Respectively many states have rescaled their governance so that regionally based processes of economic and political integration, security co-operation and social integration have become significant elements of the international system.<sup>19</sup> In many cases states have combined forces by establishing regional alliances while simultaneously decentralising or devolving some of their power and traditional responsibilities for regional development to regional and local institutions.<sup>20</sup> Brenner suggests that the production of such 'new state spaces' occurs via the growth and transformation of urban locational politics.<sup>21</sup> The 'city-region' has become an important instrument in such politics and the roles of the networks of such global cities have been accentuated as key sites for understanding the spatialities of the globalising world.<sup>22</sup> Metropolitan regionalism has been central in debates on the 'new regionalism', particularly in the US,<sup>23</sup> but this tendency has also become stronger in most EU countries.

'New states spaces' are also recognised on broader scales than cities. One feature of the current regional dynamics has been the resurgence of the 'region'. This has been somewhat paradoxical since the demise of the region that should follow from the deepening modernity and the consolidating state-centric spatiality, has been predicted since the nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> The rise of regions has occurred around the world. For many scholars sub-state regions are key contexts of the world economy.<sup>25</sup> This idea has gained popular support. Castells refers to the results of World Values survey data which shows that people tend to identify themselves with local and regional scales.<sup>26</sup> A Google search of the phrase 'regional identity' returns more than 400,000 pages (loaded 10th August 2008). Many web-pages suggest that regional identity – however it is understood – has been recognised as a significant asset in economic competition and cultural promotion of regions. Respectively regional identity has become an important catchword round the world, not least in the European Union which consists of a rich mosaic of regions that have often very long

dynamics, cross-border work and everyday life in the Finnish-Swedish border area', *Space and Polity*, 12 (2008), pp. 13–29.

<sup>19</sup> M. Beeson, 'Rethinking regionalism: Europe and East Asia in comparative historical perspective', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 12 (2005), pp. 969–85.

<sup>20</sup> Neil Brenner, Bob Jessop, Martin Jones and Gordon MacLeod (eds), *StateSpace: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell 2003); Bob Jessop *The Future of the Capitalist State* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> Neil Brenner, *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Allen Scott, *Regions and the World Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Allen Scott (ed.), *Global City-Regions: Trends, Theory, Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Saskia Sassen (ed.), *Global Networks. Linked Cities* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> Maano Ramutsindela, 'Perspectives on regionalism in (southern) Africa', *Geojournal*, 62, pp. 107–10.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Keating, *The New Regionalism in Western Europe* (Cheltenham: Elgar, 1998); Michael Keating (ed.), *Regions and Regionalism in Europe* (Cheltenham: Elgar, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Michael Storper, *The Regional World* (New York: Guilford Press, 1998); Scott, *Regions and the World-Economy*.

<sup>26</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

histories.<sup>27</sup> It has been noted that rise of regional identity or consciousness has been a parallel tendency with the integration process.<sup>28</sup> Confidence in the power of regional identities has become an important part of the emerging cohesion policy in the EU.<sup>29</sup> In IR literature Katzenstein has discussed the meanings of regional identity and he associates this idea with Asia and Europe that have emerged with new collective meanings above national states.<sup>30</sup>

'Region' means different things in different contexts and respectively the resurgence of regions can not be explained by any single cause.<sup>31</sup> Factors observed pertaining to European sub-state regions include uneven development; threats to regional languages and cultures; and devolution, regionalisation or federalisation as a means of reducing the power of central states or as a means of managing separatist aspirations and conflicts.<sup>32</sup> In spite of the narratives of the death of the nation-state and the rise of the borderless world, the state retains a strong interest in maintaining its power in the governance of space economy, citizens' well-being, and social cohesion, and respectively the 'minds' of citizens. The modification of the structures of regional governance and regional policy is a key medium in this process. The increasing power loaded in sub-state regions can also be seen in the fact that while the number of states has quadrupled since the end of World War II, the number of sub-national regional units has multiplied even more.<sup>33</sup> This is the major background for the current tendency to both distinguish regions from each other (identity) and to bring them together (integration).

### Regionalism: traditional, old and new

One of the most salient features of the international order that has gradually replaced the sharp Cold War divide has been the rise of 'new regionalism'. A boom of regionalisms and regionalist projects have occurred worldwide since the late 1980s, the EU only being the most significant example. Respectively scholars have mapped forms of regionalism both in terms of theory and empirical research across the globe, from Europe to Asia, from Australia and Africa to South America.<sup>34</sup> This section will briefly map the historical background of regionalism and regional thinking.

<sup>27</sup> Anssi Paasi, 'Region and place: regional identity in question', *Progress in Human Geography*, 27 (2003), pp. 475–85.

<sup>28</sup> Jörgen Gren, 'New regionalism and West Sweden: change in the regionalism paradigm', *Regional and Federal Studies*, 12 (2002), pp. 79–101.

<sup>29</sup> Andreas Faludi (ed.), *Territorial Cohesion and the European mode of Society* (Cambridge, MA: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Peter J Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*, see also the theme issue in *Geopolitics*, 12:40 (2007).

<sup>31</sup> Patrick Le Galés and C Lequesne (eds), *Regions in Europe* (London: Routledge 1998); Paasi, 'Regions and regional dynamics'.

<sup>32</sup> James Anderson, 'The rise of regions'.

<sup>33</sup> John Lovering, 'The new imperial geography', in S. Baghni-Sen and H. Lawton-Smith (eds), *Economic Geography: then, now and the future* (London: Routledge 2007).

<sup>34</sup> Stephen C. Calleya (ed.), *Regionalism in the Post-Cold War World* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2000); Bruce Katz (ed.), *Reflections on Regionalism*, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000); Heribert Dieter (ed.), *The Evolution of Regionalism in Asia* (London: Routledge, 2007); A. Andrew Grant and Fredrik Söderbaum (eds), *The New Regionalism in Africa* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2003); Sajal Lahiri (ed.), *Regionalism and Globalization* (London: Routledge 2001); Al Rainnie and Madelene Grobbelaar (eds), *New Regionalism in Australia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Beeson, 'Rethinking'.

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While political scientists and economists often trace the roots of regionalism to the protectionism of the 1930s, this movement has motivated social, economic and cultural life since the nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup> Originally regionalism was important in cultural fields like art, literature and architecture and was thus related to regional identity and consciousness, and cultural performance. Gilbert and Litt recognised several forms of regionalism that were related to political, cultural and economic tendencies inside the state.<sup>36</sup>

Regionalisms are historically contingent. The label 'new' was brought into use during the 1990s to make a distinction from the 'old' regionalism. Current 'new regionalism' is not confined merely to formal inter-state regional organisations and institutions, but is characterised by multidimensionality, complexity, fluidity and non-conformity and by the fact that it involves a variety of state and non-state actors that often come together in rather informal ways.<sup>37</sup> The expression 'old' or 'first' regionalism refers to the first post-World War II initiatives of integration that took place in Western Europe – hence it does not refer to the *traditional* cultural and literary regionalism recognised above.<sup>38</sup> While old regionalism emerged along with the rise of European integration, new regionalism has gained currency in the context of globalising region system. Keating argues that the rise of regionalist politics in the second part of the 1970s was not an expression of any return to anti-modern old provincialism or to the cultural roots of regionalism. Rather new regionalism was seen as an instrument in an emerging territorial economic policy.<sup>39</sup> It paved the way to the current rescaling of the global system and, apart from the EC/EU, the new regionalism soon expanded to cover other supra-state formations, such as NAFTA or MERCOSUR, which demonstrate mainly economic and political interests associated with global capitalism.<sup>40</sup>

Väyrynen locates the rise of new regionalism in a situation where traditional views on the state-centric regional system were challenged by the concentration of political and military power at the top as well as by transnational networks that were built around economic ties and cultural identities. He notes how the early post-Cold War expectations that regions and regional concerts would form the foundation for a new international order have proven untenable. Instead, regions appear to arise either through the dissemination of various transactions and externalities or as protection against the hegemony of capitalist globalisation and great-power politics.<sup>41</sup> Of course it may be argued that the international system is still adapting to the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, no reason suggests that regionalism would take similar forms and directions everywhere, such as in Europe, Americas or Asia. This new complexity means that the actors behind regionalism are 'spread' across various spatial scales. Indeed at times the key background for regionalism may exist outside of the national

<sup>35</sup> Pauli T. Karjalainen and Anssi Paasi, 'Contrasting the nature of the written city: Helsinki in regionalistic thought and as a dwelling place', in Peter Preston and Paul Simpson-Housley (eds), *Writing the City* (Routledge: London, 1994), pp. 58–79.

<sup>36</sup> E. W. Gilbert and B. Litt, 'Geography and regionalism', in Griffith Taylor (ed.), *Geography in the twentieth Century* (London: Methuen, 1960).

<sup>37</sup> Fredrik Söderbaum and Timothy M. Shaw (eds), *Theories of New Regionalism* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan 2003).

<sup>38</sup> Gilbert and Litt, 'Geography', John Tomaney, 'Regionalism', in Rob Kitchin and Nigel Thrift (eds), *International Encyclopaedia of Human Geography* (London: Elsevier, 2009).

<sup>39</sup> Michael Keating, 'The new regionalism'.

<sup>40</sup> See also the analysis of both of these formations in the present collection.

<sup>41</sup> Raimo Väyrynen, 'Regionalism: old and new', *International Studies Review*, 5 (2003), pp. 25–51.

context. This has been the case with the region formation, for example, in Africa. Ramutsindela suggests that in this specific context a discussion on regionalism claims that broader connections are noted than the state.<sup>42</sup> The projects of imperialism, for example, favoured regional projects that were in line with metropolitan interests.

Regionalism is increasingly based on practices and discourses that take place in and through various spatial scales, and that may be crucial in the institutionalisation of new scales.<sup>43</sup> In a word, new regionalism is both the context and result of the ongoing *re-scaling* of the state.<sup>44</sup> Political geographers and political scientists developed the label 'new regionalism' just to remind that while old approaches on regionalism were often based on economically focused integration theory, new approaches had to go beyond them and to emphasise social, political and cultural dimensions as well. For some authors the concept of new regionalism related to political economy is now *passé*: it is suggested that the rise of relational thinking and the emergence of the city-region concept, for example, require broader conceptualisation of regionality and the concept of region, perhaps even a search for a 'new geography of the region'.<sup>45</sup>

### The resurgence of the 'region', the EU and the new regionalism

A number of scholars have traced the meanings of regions in the context of new regionalism.<sup>46</sup> From his examination of supra-state regions Hettne argues that the region is not of interest as such but rather in its specific roles, for instance, as a supranational or 'world' region in the process of wider transformation.<sup>47</sup> Further, regions are not 'given' but are created and recreated in the process of transformation. Regions are territorially based subsystems of the international system, and there are many varieties of such subsystems with different degrees of what Hettne terms 'regionness'. This refers to the degree to which a particular region constitutes a 'coherent region'. It is often difficult to shape what this purported coherence could mean. In which sense may such supra-state regions as the EU, MERCOSUR or NAFTA be regarded as 'coherent'? They may be coherent in terms of certain forms of shared economic-institutional governance but certainly not in the sense that most national states or historical sub-state regions are that is popular identification with such supra-state regions may be weak. It may of course be an important goal for a community to create prerequisites for such identification, as has been the case in the EU, for example.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Ramutsindela, 'Perspectives'.

<sup>43</sup> Anssi Paasi, 'Place and region: looking through the prism of scale', *Progress in Human Geography*, 28 (2004), pp. 536–46.

<sup>44</sup> Brenner et al., 'State/Space', Gordon MacLeod, 'New Regionalism Reconsidered: Globalization and the Remaking of Political Economic Space', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 25 (2001), pp. 804–29.

<sup>45</sup> John Harrison, 'The region in political economy', *Geography Compass*, 2/3 (2008), 814–30.

<sup>46</sup> Martin Jones and Gordon MacLeod, 'Regional spaces, spaces of regionalism: territory, insurgent politics and the English question', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 29 (2004), pp. 433–52. Anssi Paasi, 'Regions and regional dynamics in Europe', in Chris Rumford (ed.), *Handbook of European Studies* (London: Sage, 2008).

<sup>47</sup> Björn Hettne, 'The new regionalism revisited', in Fredrik Söderbaum and Timothy M. Shaw (eds), *Theories of New Regionalism* (London: Palgrave) pp. 22–42.

<sup>48</sup> Martin Kohli and Mojca Novak (eds), *Will Europe work? Integration, Employment and the Social Order* (London: Routledge, 2001).

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Scale matters. For regional activists and social movements it is mostly the units between local scale and the state that are significant, and most obvious this is in the case of 'ethno-regionalism', that is regional movements represented by minority nationalist groups in Europe and elsewhere (such as in Britain, Canada and Spain). At times regions and their identities are regarded important in terms of culture<sup>49</sup> at times they are accentuated because of the need to democratise governance.<sup>50</sup> Such roles of regions as pools of power may weaken the links between national identities and citizenship.<sup>51</sup> This fact may also be used as a strategy to regionalise state space to resolve ethno-territorial conflicts. The regionalisation of Spain in 1981, for instance, and the respective introduction of regional autonomies has strengthened regional identities in many regions and also lead to new forms of regional activism. The case of Galicia shows the impact of such regionalisation on the reshaping of the political structures in this area, whereas the Basque country and Valencia show how old forms of regional-cultural regionalism may constitute new forms of regionalism as part of the political-economic rescaling.<sup>52</sup>

Felix Ciutã suggests that regions play a significant role as legitimating political vectors and that region-making transcends the boundary between theory and policy.<sup>53</sup> Europe has provided a particularly fascinating arena to examine such transcending exercises since regional transformation has occurred in this context for decades at various scales. Horizontal expansion and simultaneous strive to remove the internal borders of the EU has changed dramatically the boundaries of Europe in both practice and imagination. Other organisations such as NATO or the Council of Europe have further complicated the European meta-geography, fusing the horizontal and vertical spatialities so that it is difficult to distinguish such clear spatialities in the ongoing re-scaling of the European space. Ideas and practices flow both vertically and horizontally.<sup>54</sup> If it was relatively easy to identify competing ideas of Europe until the 1980s, such as 'Europe as an experienced unit', a 'structural or geographical Europe' and 'Europe as an institution',<sup>55</sup> the key actors running the dominating institutional Europe – the European Union – have now taken the lead and actively promote regional dynamics through planning and development practices and by promoting ideas of European identity and European citizenship.

<sup>49</sup> David M. Wrober and Michael C. Steiner, *Many Wests: Place, Culture & Regional Identity* (Kansas City, MO: University of Kansas, 1997); Charles Reagan Wilson (ed.), *The New Regionalism* (Jackson, MI: University of Mississippi Press, 1997).

<sup>50</sup> Martin Jones, 'Social Justice and the region', *Space & Polity*, 8 (2004), pp. 157–89.

<sup>51</sup> Joe Painter, 'Multilevel citizenship, identity and regions in contemporary Europe', in James Anderson (ed.), *Transnational democracy: political spaces and border crossings* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 93–110; Joe Painter, 'European citizenship and the regions', *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 15 (2008), pp. 5–19.

<sup>52</sup> Frans Schrijver, 'Regionalism in Galicia after regionalization', *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 96 (2005), pp. 275–86; David L. Prytherch and Laura Hunttoo, 'Entrepreneurial planning in a rescaled Spain: the cases of Bilbao and Valencia', *Geojournal*, 62, pp. 41–50.

<sup>53</sup> Ciutã, 'Region'.

<sup>54</sup> Christer Jönsson, Sven Tägil and Gunnar Törnqvist (eds), *Organizing European Space* (London: Sage 2000). Anssi Paasi, 'Europe as a social process and discourse: considerations of place, boundaries and identity', *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 8 (2001), pp. 7–28; Anssi Paasi, 'Remarks on Europe's transforming meta-geography', *Geopolitics*, 10 (2005), pp. 580–5.

<sup>55</sup> Roger Lee, 'The future of the region: regional geography as education for transformation', in Russell King (ed.), *Geographical Futures* (Sheffield: The Geographical Association, 1985), pp. 77–91; Paasi, 'Europe'.

Such spatial ideas are doubtless attractive to politicians and planners who see the region and regional identity as new magic words for developing economy through culture and as important cohesive elements for social life. In the new discourse academic narratives on regions and governmental practices have become increasingly fused. The EU related process of state re-scaling has resulted in an increasing competition between regions; a tendency that is related both to the neo-liberalisation of the global economy and to a regionalist response by regional actors.<sup>56</sup> Alun Jones suggests that particularly the international 'region-building' by the state and the EU political actors is based on a triple logic of markets, democracy and regional multilateralism.<sup>57</sup> European politics and planning have respectively witnessed a shift to economic 'entrepreneurialism' on the sub-state regional level in pursuit of global competitiveness, which has enabled the 'recruitment of locally defined identities to strategies for competitiveness'.<sup>58</sup> Statistical NUTS regions are crucial in creating the vision of 'the Europe of regions' and rather than being meaningless, the location of regional boundaries can prove of huge economic importance in regional policy.

One more example of the search for a new regional dynamic in the EU is the 'unusual' or 'non-standard' regions. The map of such units in Europe is very complex.<sup>59</sup> Most of these approximately 150 units are local or regional cross-border regions located between two states but some larger-scale regional constructions encompass several states (for example the Baltic Sea region). These units aim at lowering state borders and are fitting examples of new regions that often lack regional historical basis but are rather 'projects' of planners and politicians. They are steps towards a 'monotopic Europe', a 'seamless and integrated space within the context of the European project', as Ole B. Jensen and Tim Richardson label it.<sup>60</sup>

Cross-border regions were also central to Ohmae's 'borderless world' thesis. He argued that nation-states will be, at least economically, superseded by 'regional states', such as Northern Italy, Baden-Württemberg, Wales, San Diego/Tijuana, Hong Kong/Southern China, and the Silicon Valley/The Bay area in California, which he suggested that in a 'borderless world' would be 'the natural economic zones'.<sup>61</sup> What is paradoxical in at least some of these regions is that economic development and new forms of regionalisation have created strong regionalist and nationalist movements. The rise of the 'Padanian nationalism' in Northern Italy is the case in point. The Lega Nord (the Northern League) has attempted to invent an ethnicity for Northern Italy (Padania) and thereby justify its political claims for the protection of the economic interests of the region.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>56</sup> C. Rumford, 'European cohesion? Globalization, autonomization, and the dynamics of EU integration', *Innovation*, 13 (2000), pp. 183–97.

<sup>57</sup> Alun Jones, 'Narrative based', p. 420.

<sup>58</sup> Lovering, 'The new'.

<sup>59</sup> Iain Deas and A. Lord, 'From new regionalism to an unusual regionalism? The emergence of non-standard regional spaces and lessons for the territorial reorganization of the state', *Urban Studies*, 43 (2006), pp. 1847–77.

<sup>60</sup> Ole B. Jensen and Tim Richardson *Making European Space: Mobility, Power and Territorial Identity* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>61</sup> Ohmae, *The End*, p. 80.

<sup>62</sup> John Agnew 'The rhetoric of regionalism: the Northern League in Italian politics, 1983–94', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, New Series*, 20 (1995), pp. 156–72; and Benito Giordano, 'Italian regionalism or 'Padanian' nationalism – the political project of the Lega Nord in Italian politics', *Political Geography*, 19 (2000), pp. 445–71.

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<sup>63</sup> Anssi Paasi, *Encyclopedia of Regional Science and Urban Studies*, p. 100.

<sup>64</sup> There is a book by J. S. R. Rokkan (London: Croom Helm, 1995) titled *Cooperation in World Politics*.

<sup>65</sup> Paasi, *Human Geography*, p. 100.

<sup>66</sup> Samuel  
<sup>67</sup> Keating

These examples show that a number of competing regional frames thus shape the daily worlds of the EU citizens. These also manifest themselves in concrete policy such as through the implementation of structural funds. In spite of their increasing importance little is nevertheless known of the production and reproduction of regions, and the roles of local, regional and state boundaries, symbolisations and various identity narratives therein. The next section raises some theoretical perspectives in order to trace these processes concerning the region.

### Theoretical perspectives on region

Whereas the region has been a major category of analysis for geographers since the establishment of the field in the late nineteenth century,<sup>63</sup> also the representatives of such fields as history, IR or political science have come more recently, first in the 1960s but much more prominently since the 1980s, to scrutinise the dimensions of regions and ideas regarding their identities.<sup>64</sup> Region is a complicated category since it brings together both material and 'virtual' elements, as well as very diverging social practices and discourses. We normally see regions only on maps but know their existence via the territorial practices of governance and media. There are different kinds of regions. Region refers in most debates on new regionalism to *administrative* units. They can be simultaneously *functional* regions, that are based, for example, on labour markets. The third example is homogeneous or *formal* regions which are based on the classification of human and physical features. Traditionally such regional spaces were traced on all spatial scales, from regional to global, by regional geographers who labelled them as 'geographical regions'. Such regions were presented as regional divisions that tried to distinguish homogeneous, cohesive units based on the features of nature and culture.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps the best known example of such indicator-based regions outside geographic literature is the much-criticised 'cultural realms' identified by Samuel Huntington.<sup>66</sup>

Assumptions of certain cohesion also exist today in connection with administrative regions and indeed this is one of the implicit assumptions in the EU's policy on regions. This is further implied by authors such as Michael Keating who suggests that a region is a construction of diverging elements with greater or lesser cohesion. He further contends that where 'geographical' elements such as nature or landscape, economic cohesion, cultural identity, administrative apparatus, popular identity and territorial mobilisation coincide in space, strong regionalism results.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Anssi Paasi, 'Regional geography', in Rob Kitchin and Nigel Thrift (eds), *International Encyclopaedia of Human Geography* (London: Elsevier, 2009); Anssi Paasi, 'Region and place: regional identity'.

<sup>64</sup> There has been an emerging interest in regionalism in political science and IR since the publication of J. S. Nye, *International Regionalism* (Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1968), see for example Stein Rokkan and Derek W. Unwin, *Economy, territory, identity: politics of West European peripheries* (London: Sage Publications 1983); Peter Katzenstein, 'Regionalism in Comparative Perspective', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 31 (1996), pp. 123–59; Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell, *Regionalism in World Politics: Regional Organization and International Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Peter J. Katzenstein, 'A World of Regions'.

<sup>65</sup> Paasi, 'Regional geography', in Rob Kitchin and Nigel Thrift (eds), *International Encyclopaedia of Human Geography* (London: Elsevier, 2009).

<sup>66</sup> Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

<sup>67</sup> Keating, 'The New Regionalism', p. 10.

The idea of region as a cohesive unit has been challenged recently by so-called relational thinkers who argue that globalisation and the general rise of a society of transnational flows and networks now prevents a conceptualisation of such units in terms of spatially bound processes and institutions. Bounded regions and regionalism are seen as regressive forces. Such arguments have been presented particularly by British scholars who have typically studied the south east of England and particularly the London area.<sup>68</sup> Such views on regions are in practice political-normative statements that are based more often on this rather special case rather than on broad comparative perspective. As the rise of regionalism at various scales shows, region and regionalism matter, demonstrating the perpetual role of territoriality in social life. That they matter does not mean that we should understand regions inevitably as bounded, unique units (which may of course be the case in regionalism that draws on exclusive ethnic relations). Contemporary regions are increasingly based on social practices, processes and discourses that may have their origins both in regions and outside of them. Planners, politicians, entrepreneurs and developers effectively lean on regions in organising and governing the spatiality of social and political life, and often exploit the narratives of regional identities.<sup>69</sup>

Simply stated, scale matters. For some scholars regions 'represent scalar territorial power containers in and through which different visions of social justice flow and are contested'.<sup>70</sup> A division of labour seems to exist among scholars by which for geographers the region is typically a sub-state category while for political scientists and economists it is usually supra-state entities that exist as subsystems of the international system. A similar distinct arises concerning the idea of regional identity. Whereas geographers often trace such identities in sub-state regions, Morten Boås and Helge Hveem, for example, look at the African, Asian and 'blended regionalism' and address the role of regional identity in such macro-contexts. However, they do not specify what regional identity could actually mean in the case of such 'regions'.<sup>71</sup>

### *Regions as social constructs*

The previous discussion demonstrated that different regions emerge for different purposes. Michael Keating has usefully summarised this complexity:

A region may have a historic resonance or provide a focus for the identity of its inhabitants. It may represent a landscape, an architecture or a style of cooking. There is often a cultural element, perhaps represented by a distinct language or dialect. Beyond this, a region may sustain a distinct civil society, a range of social institutions. It can be an economic unit, based either on a single type of production or an integrated production

<sup>68</sup> John Allen, Doreen Massey and Allan Cochrane, *Rethinking the region* (London: Routledge, 1998); Ash Amin, 'Regions unbound: towards a new politics of place', *Geografiska Annaler B*, 86 (2004), pp. 33–44.

<sup>69</sup> Cliff Hague and Paul Jenkins (eds), *Place Identity, participation and Planning* (London: Routledge, 2005); Mark Tewdwr-Jones and Philip Allmendinger (eds), *Territory, Identity and Spatial Planning* (London: Routledge 2006).

<sup>70</sup> Martin Jones, 'Social justice and the region: grassroots regional movements and the "English Question"', *Space & Polity*, 8 (2004), pp. 157–89 (cited p. 163).

<sup>71</sup> Morten Boås and Helge Hveem, 'Regionalisms compared: The African and Southeast Asian experience', in Björn Hettne, Andreas Inotai and Osvaldo Sunkel (eds), *Comparing Regionalisms* (London: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 93–131.

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system. It may be, and increasingly is, a unit of government and administration. Finally, all these meanings may or may not coincide, to a greater or lesser degree.<sup>72</sup>

One key to unravelling this complexity is to recognise regions as social constructs that do not rise in a vacuum but that are *made* in broader social practice – regions are hence contested results of power relations.<sup>73</sup> Such approaches challenge traditional ideas of regions as given, bounded, ahistorical entities that have a specific essence and a permanent identity. Constructivist approaches have led later to somewhat uneasy expressions such as ‘region-building’, which has a certain functionalist tuning and implies that regions are simply made of some stuff by manipulating this. Region-building should not be understood so literally. Rather regions should be seen as complicated constellations of agency, social relations and power. Regions are institutional structures and processes that are perpetually ‘becoming’ instead of just ‘being’. They have a material basis grounded in economic and political relations. Various time scales come together in such processes. Similarly social institutions such as culture, media and administration are crucial in these processes and in the production and reproduction of certain ‘structures of expectations’ for these units. Such structures are the basis for the narratives of identity, mobilisation of collective memory, and they also constitute the visible and invisible social ‘gel’ based on values, norms and ideologies.<sup>74</sup> Region-building can be understood only in a framework of social division of labour and this accentuates particularly the role of (regional) economic, political and cultural/media elites in the production of regions and identity narratives.

An *analytical* distinction between ‘old’ and ‘new’ regions helps to understand the nature of the ‘region-building’ process in the European context. The former sees regions as having normally emerged along with the history, have gradually become established parts of governance, may be meaningful entities for citizens and may therefore be important sources of regional identity and even emotions. Such historical regions exist in most European states (many Swiss Cantons, Dutch or Italian historical provinces or British regions, for example). In contrast, ‘new regions’ are typically created as ad hoc projects that aim at developing or increasing the competitiveness of the spatial unit in question. In the case of cross-border regions the key motive may also be to lower the boundaries between states. As bureaucratic constructs such units may be rather separate from the daily lives of citizens and their spatial identifications. Many of EU’s cross-border regions are typical examples of such project-based regions. On the other hand, the actors operating in some new regions may partly draw on historical connections in the region building projects. While the ‘historical depth’ of old and new regions may hence differ radically, both types of regions may have also common elements: they can result from contested economic, political and cultural processes; may exist some time; and they may also vanish. In practice such types of regions may be overlapping and the actors

<sup>72</sup> Michael Keating, *Regions and Regionalism in Europe* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2004), pp. xi.

<sup>73</sup> Allan Pred, ‘Place as historically contingent process’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (1984) pp. 279–97; Anssi Paasi, ‘The institutionalization of regions: a theoretical framework for understanding the emergence of regions and the constitution of regional identity’, *Fennia*, 164 (1986), pp. 105–46; Paasi, ‘Deconstructing regions: notes on the scales of socio-spatial life’, *Environment and Planning A* 23 (1991), pp. 239–54; Alexander B. Murphy, ‘Regions as social constructs’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 15 (1991), pp. 22–35; Browning, ‘The region-building’, *Ciuta*, ‘Regions’.

<sup>74</sup> Paasi, ‘Deconstructing’.

contributing to the region-building processes in new regions may partly exploit the institutional structures and infrastructures that have emerged along with old regions. New regions are often created by following the same pattern. At first a set of (at times contested) political, economic or cultural discourses are created concerning the possibility of a region. Such ideas are then introduced into plans and maps and ultimately regions may become materialised so that they have an effect on the actions of citizens and on broader social practices.

### *The institutionalisation of regions*

How, then, are we to conceptualise the dimensions of such region-building processes? One solution is provided by the theory of the *institutionalisation of regions*<sup>75</sup> which has provided a background in recent debates on regions and which has been used in the analysis of the emergence of regions and regional identities in such diverse contexts as Finland, Denmark, the UK, USA, Germany, Spain or Italy.<sup>76</sup> This general and flexible approach suggests that regions should be conceptualised as historically contingent processes. It also claims certain openness in the sense that the constitutive powers of regions may originate both from the region and from the outside. Such a claim is particularly crucial in the EU. The discourses and practices around the 'Europe of regions', for example, are modifying how the region is understood and exploited in Europe today. Key instruments in shaping this imagination are the statistical NUTS regions that render possible comparisons between various states and regions. Such regions are sometimes meaningful historical units or ad hoc units created for the purpose of governance.

Four stages can be abstracted for analytical purposes from the process of the institutionalisation of regions. Such stages do not neatly follow each other and their order can vary; in most cases such processes occur simultaneously. For the first, the existence of a region always draws on a certain *territorial shape* that emerges along with history (what we can call 'old regions', which is itself distinct from the IR conception of 'old' regionalism) or is simply decided ad hoc (new regions). This shape is often used to distinguish the unit in question from others that is in social classification. Such distinction is normally based on a combination of functional, political, economic, cultural and administrative practices. Making and deciding regional boundaries is typically a contested process and may be crucial, for example, for the economic success of regional economies. In the EU, for example, the location of the boundaries of a region can radically define the level of economic support that the actors in a region can receive from the EU funds. Territorial shaping thus refers to the emergence and existence of boundaries which can vary from 'soft' to 'hard' that is boundaries can vary from practically open and insignificant to more or less closed. Even the roles of the different boundaries of a single region can vary, as

<sup>75</sup> Paasi, 'The institutionalization' and 'Deconstructing'.

<sup>76</sup> John Harrison, 'Re-reading the new regionalism: a sympathetic critique', *Space and Polity*, 10 (2006), pp. 21–46; A Donaldson, 'Performing regions: territorial development and cultural politics in Europe of the regions', *Environment and Planning A*, 38 (2006), pp. 2075–92; Joe Painter, 'Cartographic anxiety and the search for regionality', *Environment and Planning A* 40 (2008), pp. 342–61.

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happens when regional borders also serve as a state border. In most cases such borders are more closed than those that open inside the territory. The cross-border region policy in the EU has striven actively to reduce such borders precisely by making new regions.

*Symbolic shaping* refers to the process of naming and the creation of additional symbols that normally both express and strengthen the idea of the existence of a specific region and regional identity. Similarly as the emergence of the bounded shape, also the making of symbolic shape is often a contested, unique process. Naming a region often brings together cultural, historical and political interests and is an expression of power relations. Place names, often linked together with landscape features, encode the shared past and distinguish the members of one group from others and may become important elements of collective identity.<sup>77</sup> A fitting and topical state-level example of the power of names is 'Macedonia' that has provoked a dispute between Macedonia and Greece. While that case is particularly well-known, this also holds with lower regional scales and other symbols: the choice of the 'iconography' for a region may be a deeply contested process. An analysis of the institutionalisation of Finnish provinces, for example, shows that the naming and re-naming of regions have been significant political issue. Similarly a major public debate arose in Finland in the late 1990s when almost all traditional county names were changed when the number of counties was reduced from 11 to five.<sup>78</sup> Such struggles over regional or territorial symbols may also be on formal symbols such as flags or coats of arms, or more mundane symbols such as the naming of regional foods, birds, or songs. Currently intensifying region and place marketing has added a new dimension in regional symbolism globally. Regional traditions and current economic expectations are now often combined with fancy symbolisms that are created to attract investments and 'right' (educated, wealthy) people to live in regions. This is particularly crucial in the contemporary tourism business.

*Institutional shaping* is part and parcel of the emergence of territorial and symbolic shape and this refers to the development of informal and formal institutions that are needed to produce and reproduce other shapes. Some institutions can thus be habits or dialects that are regarded as 'regional ways of doing things' or to express oneself 'regionally', while some other institutions can be formal social or political organisations. Regional institutions have been regarded as highly significant in recent regional development literature where the concept 'institutional thickness' has been used to depict not only the existence of such institutions as firms, financial institutions, chambers of commerce, local authorities, innovation centres, educational establishments, etc. but above all their interaction and networking both inside the region and externally. Part of this idea is the rise of a common agenda, or a 'cognitive map' of the region.<sup>79</sup> Consequently the concept of regional identity has become significant and researchers have consequently identified what they have termed industrial regional identities and entrepreneurial regionalism.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup> K. C. Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape* (Iowa City, IA: Iowa University Press, 1993).

<sup>78</sup> Paasi, 'The institutionalization'.

<sup>79</sup> Gordon MacLeod, 'Institutional thickness' and industrial governance in Lowland Scotland', *Area*, 29 (1997), pp. 299-311.

<sup>80</sup> Elaine Romanelli and Olga M. Khessina, 'Regional industrial identity: cluster configurations and economic development', *Organization Science*, 16 (2005), pp. 344-58; David L Prytherch and

The *establishment* of the region means that it is accepted as part of the regional system and broader social consciousness. This stage has different meanings at various spatial scales. At the supra-state level it is the institutional functioning of the unit that gives it legitimacy. The establishment of a state territory requires that the sovereignty of this unit is recognised. At sub-national level such establishment is normally based on gaining an administrative status in the broader regional system. Respectively the institutionalisation of a region is accompanied with the de-institutionalisation of some other regional units which takes place either through integration or dispersion. Established regions are then 'ready' to be used in struggles over power and resources (which manifests itself most typically in regional policy) and they are then reproduced in discourses and social practices (in politics, economy, media/culture, education) that partly draw on what Painter has labelled as 'cartographic anxiety'.<sup>81</sup> This refers to the significance and dominance of geographical information and maps in making sense of the regional worlds.

Regions do not rise in a vacuum. The institutionalisation perspective puts stress on the historical process, the division of labour and power relations in the production and reproduction of regions: some actors – individuals and collectives like associations, planning bodies and firms (which are themselves also based on a division of labour) contributing to the 'institutional thickness',<sup>82</sup> may actively produce regional spaces while others rather reproduce them. And this complex matrix of power relations is subject to a perpetual change that normally results from both internal and external transformations. Regions are constructed and reconstructed in uneven ways that basically defy all assumptions of hierarchical scalar neatness and often reflect struggle around such themes as what are the identities and boundaries of these entities.<sup>83</sup> Region is thus not a fixed 'scale'; rather it is a perpetual and dynamic process of scaling the practices and discourses through which the previous shapes are produced and reproduced.

### *Rescaling state system and the shapes of regions*

As noted above, much of the current debate on regions challenges the roles of regional boundaries in the globalising world and the politics based on bounded regions.<sup>84</sup> However, I will argue that it is clearly the institutional shape of regions that faces the major challenges in the context of globalisation, and not necessarily 'borders' that may in some respects be simultaneously open, and in some others more closed. That human beings, ideas and capital increasingly cross borders and regions are constituted in an interaction between 'external' and 'internal' factors is undeniable. However, I will argue that rather than borders, it is the transformation of the institutional sphere that 'draws' the region as part of broader economic, political, cultural practice and power relations and that their symbolic and territorial

Laura Huntoon, 'Entrepreneurial regionalist planning in a rescaled Spain: the cases of Bilbao and Valencia', *Geojournal*, 62 (2005), pp. 41–50.

<sup>81</sup> Painter, 'Cartographic'.

<sup>82</sup> MacLeod, 'Institutional'.

<sup>83</sup> Donaldson 'Performing'.

<sup>84</sup> Amin, 'Regions'.

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shape can at the same time remain more or less the same and become even 'thicker' just due to this increasing interaction and the fact that region is employed in regional marketing. It is also useful to recognise that borders are not merely lines limiting spaces. Rather boundaries manifest themselves in social practices all over in a 'bounded' society and these practices may well be linked with the external world, especially in terms of economy.<sup>85</sup> Boundaries may manifest themselves in practices and institutions that produce distinction (in the case of nations such institutions may include flagging days, national ceremonies and parades, in the case of regions, such as festivals, regional symbolism, regional museums, archives, and newspapers). Part of such institutions draw on emotional and historical attachments with a region, some others on efforts to benefit from such elements in economic terms. Regions and their identities may hence be crucial in mobilising economic interests, such as in the form of what Elaine Romanelli and Olga M. Khessina label regional industrial identities.<sup>86</sup> They understand this as a social code that arises from the shared understandings of residents and external audiences regarding the suitability of a region for particular kinds of business activity and investment.

Certain boundedness of spaces may also be crucial to social movements that exploit regionalist arguments either because their concerns are linked with a territory or because the territory is not strongly colonised by existing movements.<sup>87</sup> In many cases new forms of regionalisation of state spaces has led to the revival and emergence of regionalism but regionalisation may as well be a reaction to manage regionalist claims and may even strengthen regionalism. Such resurgence of regionalism has happened, for example, in Galicia, in Spain after 1981, when this region gained regional autonomy.<sup>88</sup> The devolution in the UK in 1997 has similarly fed regionalist thinking. Regions thus provide a context for certain spaces of dependence through which actors can conduct their engagements.<sup>89</sup>

The degree to which regions are regarded as closed and bounded or open and permeable is thus ultimately context-dependent, and not a purely theoretical or political-normative choice. In spite of the degree of their openness regions may be crucial in social identification which is often based on distinctions and active mobilisation of history, memory and emotions. Memory of the past and the accounts through which such memory is presented is often focusing on bounded regions and regional identity.<sup>90</sup>

### The invention of regional identity

Like the region, regional identity has also become a catchphrase since the 1980s and has been recognised as an important element in the making of regions as social and

<sup>85</sup> Paasi, 'Territories'.

<sup>86</sup> Romanelli and Khessina, 'Regional'.

<sup>87</sup> Doria Della Porta and M Diani, *Social Movements* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999); B. A. Miller, *Geography and Social Movements* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

<sup>88</sup> Frans Schrijver, 'Regionalism in Galicia after regionalization', *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 96 (2005), pp. 275-86.

<sup>89</sup> Jones and Macleod, 'Regional spaces'.

<sup>90</sup> G. J. Ashworth, B. Graham and J. E. Tunbridge, *Pluralising Pasts: Heritage, Identity and Place in Multicultural Societies* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), pp. 54-6.

political spaces. Mark Tewdwr-Jones and Philip Allmendinger note how identity remains an ongoing problem for politicians and policymakers who often exploit such collective identity narratives in regional policy debates.<sup>91</sup> It is nevertheless difficult to elucidate what this identity consists of and how it affects collective action and politics. Regional identity has also become a slogan for planning and regional governance and it is often used in a related sense as social capital. Identity is thus understood as a 'soft' tool, one used by authorities worldwide, in the promotion of social cohesion, regional marketing and economic development. It is therefore important to recognise both the individual and the institutional side of identity narratives.

It is obvious in many countries that the rescaling of the regional system and devolution of power to regional scale has made such identities topical. On a more general level it has been suggested that people's awareness of the processes of globalisation generates a search for new orientation points, and both affirm old boundaries and create new ones that is regional identity and a search for roots would be a reaction to being in the 'wider world', not merely an inwards looking state of affairs.<sup>92</sup> Whether or not regional ties motivate people into conflict with their respective state (often intersecting their affiliation to 'nations'), a phenomenon occurring in many regions around the world, from Basque country to Sri Lanka, belonging to a region may raise a sense of identity that challenges the existing hegemonic national identity narratives in cultural or economic terms.<sup>93</sup> On the one hand, as David Harvey suggests, territorial identities, especially when conflated with 'race', gender, religious and class differentiation, are among the most dynamic bases for both progressive political mobilisation and reactionary, exclusionary politics.<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, cultural globalism has become the everyday filter through which a national and regional attachment (one's 'sense of place') is developed and expressed and, respectively, this may raise a question of the changing relations between particularistic and cosmopolitan interests – neither of which remains constant.

Strong senses of regional identity, often cutting affiliation to existing nations, have been reported round the world, but very little critical research and knowledge exists on this phenomenon. Many studies on regional identity often start from a set of suppositions. The first idea is that cultural distinctiveness or identity of a region is an empirical phenomenon that can be simply mapped by tracing such cultural elements as dialects, music, regional food, literature, and folklore, as indicators. Ultimately regional identity is a label reserved for the existence of a kind of spatial shape for these traits. The analysis of any of these features is then regarded as an illustration of regional identity, which seems to lead to a rather loose use of this category in research. In this sense identity is understood to be a feature of the 'region' that can be mapped, rather than a feature of the regional consciousness of the people living there. 'Region' is then taken as a given stage where all this happens. On the other

<sup>91</sup> Mark Tewdwr-Jones and Philip Allmendinger, 'Territory, identity and spatial planning', in Mark Tewdwr-Jones and Philip Allmendinger (eds), *Territory, Identity and Spatial Planning* (London: Routledge 2006), pp. 3–21.

<sup>92</sup> B. Meyer and P. Geschiere, 'Introduction', in B. Meyer and P. Geschiere (eds), *Globalization and Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) pp. 1–15.

<sup>93</sup> Sarah Radcliffe and S. Westwood, *Remaking the Nation* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>94</sup> David Harvey, 'From Space to Place and Back Again: Reflections on the Condition of Postmodernity', in J. Bird, B. Curtis, T. Putnam, G. Robertson and L. Tickner (eds), *Mapping the futures* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 3–29.

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hand, understanding regional identity as a regional consciousness often begins from an assumption that surveys carried out among ordinary people can reveal the character and power of regional identity, an assumption that often passes the theoretical and methodological problems that are hidden in all social classifications. Such surveys namely formalise, label and modify the cultural discourse and the categories so that ordinary people are simply forced to adapt to given classifications, and respectively identities. This has clearly been the problem of so-called Eurobarometers, for instance, which ask people to choose their 'regional identity' between given regional levels. On a general level such comparisons may of course reveal certain differences between states.

Even if many studies demonstrate that people often identify themselves with their home region, belonging to a region is not a self-evident. Many people simply do not reflect these questions in spatial terms in their daily life, an absence compounded by many people's mobility. At the personal level regional identity/consciousness provides presumably an answer to the question 'where do I belong?' This answer is often based on a personal or family spatial history, which is increasingly less bound to one specific region. This problem is of course multiplied among immigrants and refugees. On the other hand, the answer to the question of where do 'we' belong raises again the problem of social classification and hence forces the question: who is this 'we'? Rather than being 'knowledge', identification with the local or regional community may represent 'feeling' and rather unreflective participation in social practice and linguistic structures of expectation. What we call an identity is probably generally performed through one's daily activities than explicitly articulated.<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless certain continuity over time and social and spatial differentiation from others are often key elements of identity.<sup>96</sup>

It is obvious that regional identities and interests do not always correspond with the EU's simplifying concept of what constitutes a 'region', that is in terms of its statistical NUTS units. In spite of its abstract character, the idea of regional identity has been exploited in such institutional contexts as the EU's cohesion policies – that is policies that are about a just distribution of opportunities in space – that are developed to motivate 'regions' to exploit their cultural characteristics, special skills and social capital.<sup>97</sup> Such aims have become also visible in the fact that regional identity has become an object of intensive benchmarking within the EU with the aim to use this instrument to promote regional development. This implies that new forms of governance are not only created to manage regions but also to map the most emotional aspects of regional civil society and the minds of citizens to mobilise them as assets in regional development. Regional identity thus seems to refer, in the context of the EU, to the ability of 'regions' to rely on their specificity in developing their economy or to provide new sustainable and attractive environments for migrants seeking 'a new way of life'. In the European Commission's fourth report on economic and social cohesion, for example, cultural identity, local tradition and historical heritage are mentioned briefly in the context of rural areas, and the key is to recognise the commercial potential of

<sup>95</sup> Paasi, 'Territories'.

<sup>96</sup> Montserrat Guibernau, 'The Identity of the Nations'.

<sup>97</sup> Andreas Faludi, 'Territorial cohesion policy and the European model of society, *European Planning Studies*, 15 (2007), pp. 567–83.

these aspects.<sup>98</sup> Such policies also accentuate the role of territory in attracting and keeping high-quality jobs that Europe depends on. A recent survey of Euro-regions found that strong identities are associated with peripheral location, economically weak areas, low level education and high relative levels of primary employment.<sup>99</sup>

In spite of this official rhetoric, and while the ideas of multilevel citizenship/identity have emerged in the EU, little is actually known about the meanings of regions as sources of identities, as constituents and motivators of social and economic life, and how these meanings work when regional structures, cultural influences and citizens are increasingly mobile.<sup>100</sup> The production and reproduction of the discourses on region are normally crucial in establishing the spatial frames for regional identities. This simply means that debates on 'regions' and identities include an element of power as part of them. As Bourdieu has suggested:

Struggles over ethnic or regional identity – in other words, over the properties (stigmata or emblems) linked with the *origin* through the *place* of origin and its associated durable marks, such as accent – are a particular case of different struggles over classifications, struggles over the monopoly of the power to make people see and believe, to get them to know and recognise, to impose the legitimate definition of the divisions of the social world, and thereby, to *make and unmake groups*.<sup>101</sup>

### Conceptualising regional identity

This section will reflect regional identity in conceptual terms and tries to make sense of the complex relations between individual actors and socio-regional structures. I suggest that the concept of regional identity weaves together elements that have become significant in the institutionalisation process of a region and which are present in its 'structures of expectations' that is ideas on regional unity, the character and history of a social community and its special features that are seen important in distinguishing one region from others. Diverging 'building-materials' are related to regional identities and they typically put stress on the material-morphological basis: physical nature, the history of human and nature relations, that is, the history of work, communal institutions (economics, administration, politics, culture) or systems of symbolism (language, dialects, naming) and values and norms. Some scholars accentuate the roles of symbolic boundaries between 'us' and 'them' behind the (written) identities or narratives of 'us' and 'our' identity. Such divisions are used at all spatial scales and they are well theorised in the geographic and IR literature. To

<sup>98</sup> European Commission, *Growing Regions, Growing Europe: Fourth Report on Economic and Social Cohesion* (2007), p. 57, accessed at: ([http://ec.europa.eu/regional-policy/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion4/pdf/4cr\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional-policy/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion4/pdf/4cr_en.pdf)).

<sup>99</sup> J. Millard and A. L. Christensen, Regional identity in the information society. Biser (Benchmarking the Information Society: e-europe Indicators for European Regions) *Biser Domain Report* No. 4 (2004), accessed at: ([www.biser-eu.com/10%20Domains%20Report/BISER\\_Regional\\_Identity-ful\\_r.pdf](http://www.biser-eu.com/10%20Domains%20Report/BISER_Regional_Identity-ful_r.pdf)).

<sup>100</sup> Anssi Paasi, 'Bounded spaces in the mobile world: deconstructing regional identity', *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 93 (2002), pp. 137–48; Mike Raco, 'Building new subjectivities: devolution, regional identities and the re-scaling of politics', in Mark Tewdwr-Jones and Philip Allmendinger (eds), *Territory, Identity and Spatial Planning* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 320–34.

<sup>101</sup> Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), p. 220., p. 221 (emphasis in the original).

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take but one example, in Finland the narrative of national identity has crucially built on the distinction between Finland and Soviet Union/Russia since the nineteenth century. The production and reproduction of this distinction, at times accentuating cultural difference, at times suggesting enemy images, has historically accentuated the importance of such institutions as literature, newspapers and other media, as well as education. Dichotomies between us and them are used in Finland at times also on the sub-state regional level as a basis for the narratives on regional identities and to distinguish provinces from each other.<sup>102</sup> Often such dichotomies are maintained by regional media and they are based on purported tribal or collective features of their citizens.

It is useful to distinguish *analytically* between the identity of a region, and the regional identity (or regional consciousness) of the people living in it or outside of it.<sup>103</sup> The identity of a region points to those elements of nature, culture and people that are used in the discourses and classifications of science, politics, cultural activism, regional marketing, tourism, governance and political or religious regionalisation. The aim of such classifications is often simply to distinguish one region from others, and respectively such classifications are acts of power performed to delimit, name and symbolise space and groups of people. The regional identity of people or regional consciousness, for its part, points to the identification of people with the regions. This is multi-scalar in the sense that people may identify with a number of spatial units and relations that occur in various material and social processes. Regional identification implies two intertwined contexts: cultural-historical and political-economic. Political ideologies and regionalism/nationalism do not themselves produce identification, for the latter comes – and here culture and history enter the stage – only if ‘it interprets and provides an appropriate attitude for an experienced reality’.<sup>104</sup> This experience may be politically manipulated but any symbol and ideology without a relevant experience is meaningless and impotent in terms of evoking identification. Social psychologists in particular have emphasised the motivational dimensions of identity processes.<sup>105</sup>

A particular problem in identity narratives concerns the relation between individuals and institutions. Beck and Beck-Gersheim suggest that an individual’s contemporary life in the western world is very dependent on institutions that, instead of binding traditions, ‘appear on the scene to organize your own life’.<sup>106</sup> They refer to the bureaucratic-institutional jungle of modernity where life is most securely bound into networks of guidelines and regulations. Accordingly, formerly local individual biographies have become increasingly ‘globalised’. The key question is how the narratives on identity become elements of the ‘regional self-understanding’ or cultural literacy and how identity narratives become regionalised. Here the institutions constitutive of the institutionalisation of regions (economy, governance, language, media, literature) and inherent power relations are significant. Respectively it is important to pay attention to diverging social institutions, and regional activists

<sup>102</sup> Paasi, ‘Territories’.

<sup>103</sup> Paasi, ‘The Institutionalization’.

<sup>104</sup> W. Bloom, *Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 52.

<sup>105</sup> M. A. Hogg, ‘Subjective uncertainty reduction through self-categorization: a motivational theory of social identity processes’, *European Review of Social Psychology*, 11 (2000), pp. 223–55.

<sup>106</sup> Ulrich Beck and Beck-Gersheim, *Individualization* (London: Sage, 2002), pp. 24–6.

operating in such contexts, in the production of identity narratives regarding both the region and people living there. Discourses on regions or regional identity, in which actors (both individuals and groups) invest their interests and presuppositions in things, may actually create a 'reality' that they are describing or suggesting.<sup>107</sup> As McSweeney suggests:

Collective identity is not out there, waiting to be discovered. What is 'out there' is identity discourse on the part of political leaders, intellectuals and countless others, who engage in the process of constructing, negotiating, manipulating or affirming a response to the demand – at times urgent, mostly absent – for a collective image.<sup>108</sup>

Benwell and Stokoe link spatial identity with narrative theory and suggest that people express a sense of *who* they are through stories about *where* they are.<sup>109</sup> Such stories are, when we think regional identities, inevitably shared and take us to the problem noted by McSweeney. The citation above shows that what is important is the division of labour, social positions and power relations where such collective narratives – that regional identities partly are – are created. Narrated collective identities are therefore often *ideal identities*, which imply that ideological practices and motives may be an important part of the discourses on spatial identities. These discourses are used by the media in shaping spatial consciousness and social practices 'from above', and are laden with economic, cultural and political interests. On the other hand, identity narratives may also emerge from below and be 'identities for resistance'.<sup>110</sup> This is often the case with suppressed minorities and displaced people. Della Porta and Diani suggest that identity production is a crucial component of collective action and that this action can not occur without a distinction between an identity groups, that is, 'we' and the other.<sup>111</sup> Often this produces positive identification for 'us' and negative for those who are not only excluded but also opposed, at times also in relation to those that are regarded as 'neutral'. Identity discourses may also be examples of what Bourdieu labels as symbolic exchange, that is the exchange of symbolic 'goods', which points to a certain deference.<sup>112</sup> Unbalanced exchange on 'regional identity markets' is thus accepted because people see that they may benefit from this situation more than from an active (at times bloody) struggle.

### The institutionalisation of Finnish provinces and their regional identities

As an example of the ongoing rescaling of state spaces in the EU and to show how previous theoretical ideas come together, this section examines the institutionalisation processes of Finnish provinces and how regional identities manifest themselves at both individual and institutional level. Finnish provinces date back to the Middle Ages and they have been important units in cultural politics since the mid-nineteenth century, when some new provinces were institutionalised as part of Finland's regional

<sup>107</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), p. 220.

<sup>108</sup> Bill McSweeney, *Security, Identity and Interests* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 77–8.

<sup>109</sup> Bethan Benwell and Elizabeth Stokoe, *Discourse and Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

<sup>110</sup> Castells, 'The Power'.

<sup>111</sup> Della Porta and Diani, 'Social', pp. 85–7.

<sup>112</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Järjen käytännöllisyys* (Tampere: Vastapaino, 1998).

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<sup>113</sup> Paas

<sup>114</sup> Paas

<sup>115</sup> Ibid

system. This occurred in the context of the emerging spatial divisions of labour and cultural activism that were simultaneously part of the emerging nation-building processes. While regions are 'social constructs' this construction also has a material basis. A major motivation for this process in Finland was to enhance circulation of capital and division of labour with reflections starting to appear in the spatial structure in the form of features of production (the beginning of centralisation and urbanisation), consumption (the rise of market areas) and circulation (systems of transport and communication).<sup>113</sup> This functional-economic basis changed the traditional territorial shape, developing a new symbolic and ideological organisation of space. Several possible regions have also existed in discourses, plans and maps in the course of almost 150 years, but many of them have never gained an established role. Provinces differ markedly in their institutionalisation processes, even though the stages presented above can be identified in each case. The population varies from 1.3 million to less than 100,000 people and population density respectively from 216 to 2 per km<sup>2</sup>. The share between those born in the regions and who migrated there also varies considerably.<sup>114</sup>

The Provinces, now numbering 20, gained prominence in 1994 when the Finnish regional system was reshaped as part of the national strategy to fulfil the EU's regional system and to the accelerating global economic competition. When Finland entered the EU in 1995, new Regional Councils became a major medium in managing and implementing EU-based planning and development strategies. The old 'from below' Provincial Leagues and state-bound Regional Planning Associations were joined together giving rise – and a justification – to the provinces. Provinces became concomitantly part of state-led policy but were simultaneously forced to partake in 'scale-jumping', in that they had to create new links to the supra-national program based regional policy within the EU. Regions became dependent on supra-national decision making since Regional Councils have their representatives in the EU's Committee of Regions. The international role of the Regional Councils expanded respectively and international relations and interaction between the actors in different regions have become part of daily routine. Both a vertical and horizontal rescaling has consequently occurred. Similarly the Councils are involved in developing Union's regional policy and are forced to draw up the programmes required for the granting of support from EU structural funds for their own provinces/regions and in part they also implement them. Political representatives in the councils have been chosen from the elected representatives from municipalities. Hence, contrary to other Nordic countries Sweden, Norway and Denmark, Finnish citizens do not choose their regional representatives by direct elections.

Provinces have been represented as central units for regional identification since the first decades of the twentieth century even if empirical evidence for this has remained very contradictory and the intensity of identification varies from region to region. When people were asked, in which province their current place of residence is located – a question that mapped perhaps more a cognitive than emotional dimension of identification – people used various regional labels to name this 'province' that varies from the names of local municipalities to those of provinces and counties.<sup>115</sup> The vague role of such units is doubtless related to their weak political

<sup>113</sup> Paasi, 'Territories'.

<sup>114</sup> Paasi, 'Bounded'.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

role. Some regions have a strong historical cultural identity while many others rather weak.

This relative openness and vague identity of these units has not prevented the use of regional identity rhetoric in the planning by Councils. I present below some examples from Provincial Plans to illustrate how regional identities are used and how scalar aspects, tradition, myths and regional development optimism often come together in such narratives. The plans were written in 2003–2005 in all Finnish provinces that became NUTS III areas in the 1990s, and reflect the EU-based (cohesion) strategy and accentuate regional features and identity, illustrating how activities occurring at different spatial scales become fused.

Strong provincial identity creates a lively and distinctive solidarity among the people in the region, it strengthens community spirit and cooperation.<sup>116</sup>

Citizens who have adopted a strong Southern Karelian identity will work in cooperation on behalf of the whole province.<sup>117</sup>

Regional identity means inhabitant's strong commitment with the home region. It is the image that people hold of the home area, this image has to be taken into consideration in development activities and to encourage people's creativity and entrepreneurship. Identity is greatly modified by how people feel they are esteemed. A strong identity and a positive image are remarkable resources in regional development. Both of them can be influenced by positive communication.<sup>118</sup>

[The province of] Kainuu has the need and capacity – based on its identity, distinctiveness of nature and culture – to develop its competitiveness by investing on the development of the resources of the local people, that is on human, educational and social capital.<sup>119</sup>

The rhetoric of the anonymous authorities behind the plans is often based on rather normative narratives on regional identity, at times implying a 'spatial fetishism', that is presents a region as an actor that can do certain things and facilitate positive developments. The reports may thus personalise regions and present them as collective actors that struggle with other regions. These examples illustrate that politics is increasingly made by fusing social practices so that institutional needs and policies are effectively related to the purported will and needs of citizens. A further observation is that planning rhetoric drawing on regional identity narratives seems to have become increasingly 'globalised' and thus separate from the experience of ordinary citizens. The plans are not based on the interviews of citizens but instead lean strongly on normative assumptions and ideas of a self-evident existence of regional identities of social collectives. Whose regional identity it is that previous citations depict? Identity discourse exploits effectively an idea of abstract 'citizens' that do not represent any origin, class, gender, sexual orientation or ethnicity but the 'region' in questions. Regional identity comes hence near the idea of ideology and its use aims at the production of some basis (commitment, solidarity, trust) for regional development and social cohesion. Previous citations are examples of the tendency of policy makers and bureaucrats to select certain elements from history and myths for identity narratives.<sup>120</sup> In many reports such narratives echo the themes of the EU's

<sup>116</sup> Pohjois-Pohjanmaan liitto, *Maakuntasuunnitelma 2003* (Oulu, 2003).

<sup>117</sup> Etelä-Karjalan liitto, *Maakuntasuunnitelma 2003* (Lappeenranta, 2003).

<sup>118</sup> Lapin liitto, *Maakuntasuunnitelma 2002* (Rovaniemi, 2002), p. 43.

<sup>119</sup> Kainuun liitto, *Maakuntasuunnitelma 2003* (Kajaani, 2003), p. 40.

<sup>120</sup> John Lovering, 'Theory Led by Policy: The Inadequacies of the "New Regionalism" (Illustrated from the Case of Wales)', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 23 (1999), pp. 379–95.



documents, showing that local actors adapt to the claims and language of the EU. In this sense it is easy to understand how regions are 'open', relational and how they partly are constituted in social interaction that crosses the borders.

Planning documents thus provide interesting material not only to study the institutional identity narratives, for example, the assumptions of closed vs. open or homogeneous versus heterogeneous regional spaces, but also to examine the wider connections between such discourses. Critical discourse analysis seems a particularly promising method to uncover the relations of power and ideologies and the narratives on regional identities.<sup>121</sup> The use of identity-based planning rhetoric may be understood as an example of the principle of Foucaultian 'governmentality' that Painter has identified in some EU's programmes, which emphasise knowledge, technological innovation, information society, regional identity and sustainable development.<sup>122</sup> Such measures are not concerned only with reducing regional variations in prosperity across Europe; they are also a 'region building project' concerned with regional economy, regional identity, regional cohesion and regional integration. This is, Painter argues, a project that purports not only to identify objects of governance (like regional economy or regional identity) for development and assistance but it is indeed 'striving to constitute those objects and bring them into being'.<sup>123</sup>

## Conclusions

Ideas about region and regional identity are mushrooming at various spatial scales of the international system. The resurgence of these terms has been part of the broader transformation of both political economy and governance at supra-state, state and sub-state scales. Regions are highly significant in the EU where both the political making of the Union itself and the 'Europe of regions' are examples of the re-scaling of state spaces and of the new meanings being assigned to territories. These processes have led to an increasing competition between 'regions'; a tendency that results from both the neo-liberalisation of the global economy and from a regionalist response. Regional identity has simultaneously been identified as an important element for regional development in the EU. Such identities are seen increasingly as policy instruments but they are also significant for actors operating in economic/business life and in regional marketing.

This article has aimed at problematising the dimensions and relations of region and identity and it indicated the utility of conceptualising the rise of regional identity discourse as part of the process of the institutionalisation of a region, that is, the historically contingent process through which a region emerges as part of the territorial structure and social consciousness of society. In addition, such conceptualisation helps to carry out concrete research in regions. Even if people usually identify themselves with certain regions, such belonging should not be taken for

<sup>121</sup> Martin Jones, 'Critical realism, critical discourse analysis, concrete research', in Jonathan Joseph and John Michael Roberts (eds), *Realism Discourse and Deconstruction* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 43–67.

<sup>122</sup> Painter, 'Multilevel', p. 10.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

granted. Regional identity is only one element in the complicated constellation of identifications that people normally have, based on such elements as class, gender, generation, ethnic background, or religion. Much of identification takes very probably place in civil society through the participation in social networks and associations that may well cross the borders of bounded spaces. Some of these identities may be linked with a territory, some with other territories, some may be non-territorial.

A question for future research is that while the power of regions has been increasing, what will be the role of regional identities in the globalising world which is characterised by mobilities: migration, immigration and tourism. Since personal spatial histories increasingly take place in many locations, this forces us to reflect, what will happen to the relation between region, identity and human being. Such mobility certainly challenges the ideas of the fixed links between a territory and a group of people. Thinking critically the complexity of regions, regional identities, their roles in regional promotion, politics of identity and difference, is therefore a highly salient task in the current turbulent world. A crucial related research question concerns how regional distinctions and classifications are produced and reproduced and how they express relations of power. This forces us to ask in each concrete research case not only whether such an identity exists and how it manifests itself, but also whose regional identity is in question and for what purpose it is articulated.

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