Chapter 9

Regions, Regionalisms, and Identities:

Towards a Regional Mess

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Introduction

Regions have been conceptualized recently as increasingly relational and highly networked, and they are increasingly regarded as distinctively "soft" spaces, which have at the most, "fuzzy" boundaries (Amin 2004; Allen and Cochrane, 2007; Haughton et al., 2013; Allmendinger et al., 2014). This understanding of regions is heavily intertwined with the recent emphasis on a global "quicksilver economy" and a neoliberal global agenda, where interconnectedness and hence competition and competitiveness of all kind of spaces is typically underlined (Jones and MacLeod, 2004: 435). It is though, as this chapter argues, premature to declare the end of clearly delineated territorial units (Murphy, 2013). At the same time as the flows of all kinds have increased, new boundaries are being drawn and many new regions have emerged (Deas and Lord, 2006). Many old regions have refused to disappear or become any "softer", and regions are instead increasingly re-institutionalized as highly meaningful bounded spaces both for their inhabitants and – as the current flow of refugees heading to Western Europe has shown – for those who try desperately to enter them (Zimmerbauer and Paasi, 2013). It should be acknowledged that certain regions are distinct from the "regional spaces" of a neoliberal world, and are not sinuously becoming integral

parts of dynamic, global networks, nor are they transforming into hubs of these networks (Jones and MacLeod, 2004). Globalization is spatially selective and treats certain regions differently, and it also works differently in different spheres of everyday life. While the fast movement of capital has globalized the economy, many places have remained isolated from networks, flows and relational thinking, and the everyday life in them has not substantially changed.

It is true that many regions have transformed and new kind of regions, such as "non-standard" or "unusual" ones have been introduced and increasingly emphasized (see Deas and Lord, 2006). However, while it is acknowledged that many regions tend to be not as stable or closed as they perhaps were before, they are not totally open or changing similarly either. This "spatial ambivalence" has caused the need to redefine and re-conceptualize regions. Although spatial change is by no means unique to this time, it cannot be denied that regions and regional systems are in transition, and a better understanding of the processes pushing this transformation forward is needed. Many papers in contemporary human geography and in planning literature have thus concentrated on the commensurability or incommensurability of territorial and relational understandings of regions (Jones, 2009; Varró and Lagendijk, 2013, Harrison, 2013), and on understanding soft and hard(er) spaces in the now "globalized" world (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009).

This chapter, as such, builds on this work, and seeks to interrogate the transformation of regions, in order to tease out the sometimes paradoxical relationship between various approaches to conceptualizing space. It aims to connect discussions on different kinds of regions and regionalisms, considering both deinstitutionalization and institutionalization processes. It questions in particular the mismatch between regions in everyday life and regions in planning literature. It does this by studying one old region and one new region, highlighting processes of deinstitutionalization and institutionalization in relation to ideas of

new (or new new) and old regionalism. The aim is also to focus through the lens of two distinctive regions, upon the relations between the key ideas of regionalism and the contemporary understandings of a "new new regional geography" (Jones, 2016). The chapter concludes by arguing that a spatial system is simultaneously softening and hardening and regions have a certain amount of inertia, while penumbral regions and the idea of a regional mess is also introduced here. Specifically the two regions analyzed in this chapter, to demonstrate the links, gaps and fissures between different approaches to regions and regionalisms, are the municipality of Nurmo in western Finland and the supranational Barents Euro Arctic region in the northernmost Europe.

Relational/Territorial

It is common to make analytical distinctions in order to gain a better understanding of regions and their transitions. For example, new regionalism has become defined in relation to the old regionalism (e.g. Keating, 1998; Harrison, 2006), relational space is defined in relation to the territorial (e.g. Paasi, 2013), and soft spaces are defined in relation to hard spaces (e.g. Allmendinger et al., 2014). These distinctions have been widely reproduced in literature on regions and often in a particular way: a new spatial vision is followed by a critical reaction and then an aim to synthesize, placing emphasis upon contextuality or on the commensurability of the original seemingly distant approaches. For this reason, it is argued that the debate was in fact was a "non-debate" (see Varró and Lagendijk, 2013). One particular example of this type of "non-debate" is the examination of nation states and the controversial idea of "hollowing out" (see Jessop, 2004). The "bordeless world" thesis – nurtured mostly by economic geographers – stemmed from the notion that in a gigantic "global village" with a single global market, nation states have become increasingly

powerless in their capacity to control their economic affairs (Ohmae, 1990). The initial response was that states have nevertheless an important role in providing public services, controlling migration, regulating markets, and serving as a "last resort" if markets fail. While the "relationists" envisaged a world of rhizomatic flows and networks without regions, the "territorialists" highlighted the fact that even though the emphasis might be on networks, soft spaces and fuzzy boundaries, it should be stressed that many spheres of society operate within established administrative structures that tend to have clear spatial borders (cf. Luukkonen and Moilanen, 2012; Allen and Cochrane, 2007).

Highlighting contextuality and specificity has reduced the juxtaposition of approaches, but it has perhaps also downplayed the debate unnecessarily by underlining contextuality too greatly. In other words, are we belittling the different theoretical arguments by viewing the world contextually and in a sense in isolation? There can be ontological or fundamental changes in society that call for new openings and understandings of space. Analytical distinctions are not unnecessary or irrelevant, their co-existence, and understanding their commensurability and particularly incommensurability, is necessary. This means that it is the tensions and contestations between different conceptualizations and understandings of space that are key to understanding the nature of regions. More often we should ask what does it actually mean when the territorial confronts relational, soft confronts the hard, or new regionalism confronts old regionalism, and we should ask: what are the real-world affects that these tensions cause?

To respond to these issues, it is useful to conceptualize regions as processes. This means that transformations of regions over time are acknowledged: they become institutionalized, re- and de-institutionalized, usually with respect to more general socio-spatial restructuring processes. Typically, institutionalization theories have conceptualized regions as evolving through various "stages", such as naming, symbolizing and bordering (see Paasi, 1986).

Through these processes, regions "solidify" or "harden" to become uncontested parts of the acknowledged spatial structure (Metzger and Schmitt, 2012; Metzger, 2013). Deinstitutionalization as a process has been under studied, but it usually refers to a process where a region loses its acknowledged status and ceases to be part of a legal/administrative structure (Raagmaa, 2002). This conceptualization of deinstitutionalization tells us that a region gradually disappears from all collective consciousness, and deinstitutionalization is therefore a reverse process of institutionalization. The German reunification though suggests that this is not the case, as the closure of borders for a quarter of a century provoked only a 2 to 3 percent difference between the East and West German vocabularies (Lindeborg 1999, 94–97; Fernández Manjón 2010, 72), which through present re-institutionalizing will lead to retaining an old regional consciousness and also collective spatial identities (see Metzger and Schmitt 2012). Similarly, a study of municipality mergers in Finland showed that there was some concern about a weakening of regional identity in the merged municipalities. Currently though, over 40 years after the amalgamations, such concerns have disappeared, as merged regions exist in various manifestations, alongside and outside of the former merged regions in the consciousness of their inhabitants (Leinamo, 2004).

Deinstitutionalizing old regions

Regional structure must understandably change due to several reasons. Yet the justifications for structural change have been lately centered mostly on economies of scale, as bigger spatial units are argued to work better, are more powerful and attract more flows of all kinds. The ideas of streamlining, increasing competitiveness and producing services more economically fit nicely with the idea of metropolis policy, where sub-national urban regions are created and municipalities are being amalgamated. On the other hand, demographic

changes, urbanization and aging populations also give rise to regional restructuring. These justifications are particularly relevant in Nordic "welfare" states, where governments seek to both cut the costs of public sector, and also boost the competitiveness of (city)regions (Zimmerbauer et al., 2012). This has led to waves of municipality mergers and regional restructuring in Scandinavian countries. Heavily influenced by calculations aiming to convince inhabitants about cost-savings, what is missing from this rhetoric is an understanding of regional culture, local democracy, proximity of services, and how they should be valued in an economic restructuring process (Laamanen, 2007). The emphasis on economies of scale has meant that regional identities, a sense of belonging and a will to maintain an old region have been muted and labelled as emotional idealism, regressive and a relic of past times (Zimmerbauer and Paasi, 2013).

Municipalities present in Nordic countries are typical examples of old regions. In Finland, the municipality structure was officially established in 1865 when the municipal statute was given by the central authority. At that time, municipalities were separated from the church. Currently, the just over 300 municipalities have many responsibilities and statutory tasks, such as child care services, as well as providing education, rescue services and road maintenance (Kuusi, 2011). They have also traditionally been responsible for organizing healthcare and social services, but these services will soon be withdrawn from local authorities and joint municipal consortiums, to be controlled instead by a smaller number of autonomous regions. Municipalities are also major bodies of local democracy. Municipality councils are elected every four years by inhabitants and they have considerable decision-making power. To be able to organize the statutory tasks, municipalities have a legal right to collect taxes from their citizens. Due to their long history and their strong role in the everyday life of citizens, municipalities are unsurprisingly the regional units that people identify most beyond the state (see Oinonen et al., 2005; Pekola-Sjöblom et al., 2006).

Municipalities have been a part of the politico-administrative space for about 150 years and were actually established some 50 years before Finland gained independence. Their deinstitutionalization does not simply occur with a single decision to remove (administrative) borders. Resistance can be expected. This was particularly apparent in the case of Nurmo, western Finland, where opposition was severe. Nurmo, a relatively rural and small municipality with 12000 inhabitants was merged with Seinäjoki on the first of January 2009. As studies on the amalgamation illustrate, resistance was explained by concerns on proximity and availability or public services and local democracy (Zimmerbauer et al., 2012; Zimmerbauer and Paasi, 2013; Zimmerbauer, 2016). Much resistance was also linked to a regional identity that can be described as geo-historical (cf. van Houtum and Lagendijk, 2001), attached to territoriality and a territory-based "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991). It can be argued that this kind of resistance has its roots in old regionalism, as the spatial is based on fixity and a clear demarcation of lines, inclusiveness/exclusiveness, and not on fluidity, interconnectedness, or an idea of fuzzy boundaries. Thus regional restructuring, or the deinstitutionalization of regions, is not just a technical process of streamlining administration, but is a complex process where new and old forms of regionalism collide.

The mass resistance in Nurmo has been experienced in other amalgamation processes too. These resistances are not wholly due to the centralizing of decision-making or the losing of statutory services, but rather with concerns about losing *the territorial basis* of identity, as some of the regional institutions and symbols disappear. Quotations from the *ProNurmo* anti-merger bulletin board illustrate this:

> *"The fact is, simply, that our municipality was stolen, and now we are asked to forget it. To start co-operating with the thief!"*

"You supporters of the merger… You did it after all: ruined our dream of the independent municipality and trampled over all the foundation pillars of democracy. We, the inhabitants, will never forget this day, we will never forget you who did not give any value to our municipality. What you did can be never made up. Never. You just could not let this be as the people wanted it to be. I am speechless and feel tremendous hatred because of you traitors… I want that ProNurmo will continue, because if ever, now such movement is needed. There is a clear will. We should not let that will wane and let the time dilute this bottomless sadness and anger."

These quotations summarize initial feelings just after the Nurmo municipality council decided upon the merger by a margin of one vote (18-17), after a referendum in which 63.1% of inhabitants voted against the amalgamation. While it is difficult to extract the meaning of identity from other anti-merger arguments (identity as a word was is in fact only rarely mentioned in the 358 bulletin board messages), the quotations show that the amalgamation was about much more than just re-organizing services. Losing a region that was meaningful to its inhabitants was evident here, and a will to stay "independent" is clear. The arguments resonate with an old regionalism, where fixity, territory, historical-cultural identity and local scale are commonly emphasized.

Conflicting regionalisms become even more visible when looking at the arguments of those who supported the merger. Those supporting the merger stated for example that the citizens who were anti-merger, "Voted more with their emotions than with their reason," or that, "A merger is not for immediate benefits, but for the advantages in the more distant future". It was also mentioned that "while the inhabitants of Nurmo will witness some increased costs immediately after the merger, in a long run the inhabitants will benefit economically". These statements speak to an argument that old regionalism is "regressive" and not future-oriented.

They also illustrate that the citizens who were pro-merger emphasized economic arguments when justifying the municipality amalgamation.

While regional identity is invariably linked to an old regionalism and bounded space, it also needs to be emphasized that borders are multilayered social constructs and they typically have an identity layer as well (Schack, 2000). Borders affect perceptions of geographical space and an emotional and cognitive identification with regions. Identity can also be highly durable, and can in fact strengthen after political or administrative institutions have been removed. As Schack (2000: 203) states, "borders do not come and go, but they persist in people's minds even if the political agenda changes". This means that regardless of an official agenda, in which administrative borders are constructed and deconstructed, established regional divisions tend to be preserved and an idea of a region remains (Zimmerbauer, 2016).

Institutionalizing new regions

While Nurmo is an example of an old region and the amalgamation process illustrates the relationship and division between old and new regionalism, through regional restructuring or deinstitutionalizing, Barents Euro Arctic Region is an example of a new region and region-building. Covering 13 sub-regions in 4 countries, Barents was officially established in 1993, when the Kirkenes Declaration was signed by the foreign ministers of Norway, Russia, Sweden and Finland (Svensson, 1998). The primary goal of co-operation was to "promote sustainable economic and social development […] and thus contribute to peaceful development in the northernmost part of Europe" (Barentsinfo, 2015). Barents though has been increasingly characterized by cross-border trade, and ensuring stability and security in the region has been replaced by business opportunities and economic networks (Zimmerbauer

2014). A shift from geopolitics to geoeconomics was evident in Barents. Yet recently due to the crisis in Ukraine and the recent tensions between Russia and European Union, geopolitics has again returned and plays a role in cooperation (cf. Moisio and Paasi, 2013). Even in this sense, discussions have focused on trade, and concerns over EU sanctions against Russia which hit the co-operation badly, as "big geopolitics" impacts the "small" nations and their subnational regions.

Due to its top-down origin and relatively young age, the Barents region is not a region that is very well known, let alone identified with. Although there have been some grassroots projects with good results, Barents' public, or regional, consciousness has remained rather weak. This is something that the "regional elite" responsible for developing the supranational region, acknowledge. Yet it is not known what could be done in order to change this and to grow the region and its nascent identity. A regional advocate illustrates this well:

> *"There are these structures and institutions, but if it (Barents) has become genuinely established or not depends who you talk to. We who are very much in this job of developing the region probably say it has, but if we ask someone else, somebody who is not directly involved with these issues, he/she does not necessarily see it as institutionalized. Or is not even familiar with the name."*

Regional "elites" are participating in regionalization as administrators and stakeholders, but the "general population" has yet to become involved. For those involved in promoting the Barents region, or other such newly conceived "territorial assemblages" a sense of regional consciousness is beneficial, as it creates active citizenship that can be highly supportive of the dominant planning and development ideology (see Allmendinger et al., 2014). Although a strong regional identity can also make citizens increasingly resistant to prevailing ideologies, as seen in Nurmo, it nevertheless creates also a sense of cohesion. The current planning

agenda often emphasizes, regional initiativeness, or the devolution of state power to regions, and cites a regional activism as highly significant to this restructuring. Regional consciousness and identity is something that administrators seek to use, but they do not understand here what the Barents region could be identified with or could be imagined as:

> *"I don't know what the use is, if people know they belong to Barents region. Knowledge as such has no meaning, I guess. Probably. I don't know. Maybe it has."*

Regional consciousness is related not only to cohesion and initiativeness, but also legitimizes regional advocates and institutions. This means that stakeholders are eager to emphasize the viability of supranational regions through visibility. As many newly conceived supranational regions are linked with various regional programmes, especially within the EU, are familiar to only a few people, and they could simply disappear if external funding stops. Thus regional advocates are keen to promote new regions to Eurocrats in order to create an idea of a coherent region that deserves to be supported. Some kind of an "imagined community" is thus brought into being, via branding and other representational means to illustrate that the region does in fact exist – it may indeed exist wholly in the imaginary and on paper yet it does exist – and the allocating of funds accordingly gives it an institutional, political, or "real" life.

Developing regionalism and regional identity based on an imagined supranational community in the context of Barents region is troublesome. It was felt that the administrators and stakeholders have limited means to promote an identity based on cohesion, or a sense of common history and culture. Barents as a territorial idea has a long history that dates back to the Pomor trade era of the early 19th Century. Yet it is not regarded as an old region which people identify with or as a historical region known to outsiders (Zimmerbauer, 2014).

Instead, it is arguably a little known soft space that has been molded and has already taken up several different spaces and shapes after negotiations amongst regional elites.

Despite its role as a "soft tool", supranational identity is not something that is actively or consciously developed or utilized in region-building. Contemporary or newly-conceived of (soft) spaces, as such, sometimes "jar against established territorially bounded bodies" (Deas and Lord, 2006: 1848). There is a reason for this. Newly-conceived regions are often only "regions on paper" and people identify instead with older regions. The institutions that create and develop such regions are typically institutional rather than identity-building. They are interested in networks, branding and competitiveness, rather than in a regional consciousness and identity (see Blatter, 2004).

"New new regionalism" and old and new regions as processes

Looking at Nurmo and Barents, it is easy to see a paradox: at the same time as old, meaningful regions that people identify with are being deinstitutionalized, new regions that are top down and insignificant to most – except perhaps regional elites – are being established. The situation where new regions are being established only to remain "regions on paper" while old regions are being deinstitutionalized against the will of their inhabitants, is certainly not an ideal one, as little cohesion between regions and initiativeness in regions can be expected. Yet the demolishing of significant regions and the construction of insignificant regions is unlikely to be changed anytime soon, as often old regions are regarded as unsuitable or uncompetitive spaces for regional elites – or at least their boundaries are experienced as problematic in many practices associated with the global neoliberal economy. So it remains important to critically interrogate this paradox, and to ask whether "regions on paper" are actually deterring regional development and active citizenship.

The new regional geography created to understand and theorize these paradoxes, is largely concerned with "thinking space relationally" and emphasizing networks, flows and fluidity. It is less concerned understanding space territorially and underlining boundaries, inclusiveness/exclusiveness, rigidity and fixity. And while many scholars have lately stressed that these are analytical "extremes" – the question of relationality and territoriality is a contextual rather than ontological question – it is nevertheless clear that traditional understandings of space have been challenged. Indeed we have witnessed scale-bending and scale-jumping, we have observed and documented processes beyond the control of individual states or other such territories (Smith, 2004). These processes require thinking via networks and through soft spaces that are often temporary and created only for limited – often economic – purposes. In other words, spaces are not as hard as they used to be. Despite a softening of space we not living in a highly networked world of flows, where boundaries have lost all their meaning either. As the case of Nurmo illustrates, territory and boundaries matter. This does not mean that they matter in all practices, however. In Nurmo parts of the municipality have knitted together with Seinäjoki over time, and many people commuted across the municipality border in the past without acknowledging its existence. The process of deinstitutionalization – or more precisely the threat of deinstitutionalization – triggered a resistance, and the inhabitants of Nurmo sought to re-institutionalize their municipality as a bounded region.

Understanding space as relational or territorial is not only matter of context. An "old regionalism" has not disappeared. Regions, borders and communities, imagined or not, are highly significant, and although they are not pivotal continually in all practices, territory has a certain allure, particularly when under threat. Old regionalism is not replaced by new regionalism. They continue to exist in parallel, albeit often manifested in different social, political, and cultural practices. Old regionalism should not be regarded as regressive or as a

relic from a (territorial) past. It may in fact ignite initiativeness far more powerfully than a vague promise of something new, fuzzily bounded competitive "regional space" (cf. Jones and MacLeod, 2004). Acknowledging existing regions and interrogating the regional restructuring process via a relational and territorial approach is as such valuable, serving the purposes of regional elites and advocates. Planning spaces and lived spaces should not be pulled apart, as often seems to be the case.

As regions are conceived of here as processes, it is important to note that old regions were once new. And as such certain new regions might eventually become as meaningful as old regions to their inhabitants and become something to be identified with. Nurmo and Barents were selected in this chapter as they illustrate starkly that not all regions are alike. Some regions are experienced by citizens as more significant and important than others. The answer is not to only set territory against networks or the relational against the territorial, but perhaps the answer here is to study different regions, their histories and regionalisms, and their contested "forms" of agency. The answer is perhaps to move beyond a "regional fetishism", foregrounding instead regional activists and advocates who contribute to and reveal what are often contested regional processes (Paasi and Metzger, 2016).

Highlighting agency

To discuss whether different regionalisms are linked to different kinds of agency, a distinction between activists and advocates is useful. In short, activists are actors who struggle actively over specific meanings which are often distinctively "regional". Advocates, on the other hand, are more often actors in what can be described as responsible for "soft region work" (Paasi, 2010). This means that advocates operate in institutionalized positions that have continuity. Also advocacy is not embedded within an emotional attachment to

territory, but to a position that can be filled by another actor, given the advocate moves elsewhere. Advocates are often "professionals", such as regional planners and consultants, whereas activists are often "amateurs" in the very original meaning of the word,[1] as they have a strong emotional attachment to a region and are thereby strongly "rooted" in the region. A sense of regional identity fuels their endeavor, and the work they do in promoting and maintaining a region is typically unpaid.

This distinction suggests implicitly that activists operate more often in the context of bounded space, and understand a boundary as a line of demarcation, while advocates are often region builders and therefore conceptualize spaces as more open, as distinctively relational. The case of Nurmo illustrates activism is often connected to the territorial, or an old regionalism, whereas the pro-merger advocates emphasize ideas of soft spaces and relationality, more typical aligned with a new regionalism. Accordingly old regionalism, territoriality and regional identity, built upon the idea of boundedness, are often placed in contrast to ideas of relational thinking in current planning ethos, which emphasizes competitiveness and economies of scale.

Seeing agency as played out through territorially-oriented activists hanging on to fixity and network-oriented advocates emphasizing relationality would be an oversimplification. This is by no means always the case, as activist movements can occur within softer spaces and can in fact find territorial structures legitimized and maintained by advocates as restrictive or harmful in their politico-spatial aspirations. It is often the case that activists and advocates operate in an intertwined manner, negotiating and renegotiating spatial transformations from both territorial and relational standpoints simultaneously. It should be noted that no matter how far advocates, such as planners, emphasize fluidity and relationality in their work, they

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[1] Word *amateur* comes from Latin *amator* which means *lover* (Oxford Dictionaries 2016)

still have to operate within systems of bounded spaces, thinking relationally and territorially at the same time (Paasi and Zimmerbauer, 2016).

Regions are often constructed and deconstructed "top-down", and agency should be distinguished not only on an individual level, but also understood through various institutions wherein advocacy is responsible for constructing regions and regional identities. As originally outlined by Blatter (2004), an analytical distinction between identity providing and instrumental institutions is particularly useful here. Blatter's conceptualization starts with an assumption that institutions are created to serve specific public and private purposes. An identity dimension stresses a certain "ritualism" and "symbolism", creating mutual obligations among social actors who have "objective" interdependence. An instrumental dimension emphasizes that institutions are mechanisms of power and control. Identity providing institutions seek to decrease ambiguity while the key objective of instrumental institutions is to reduce uncertainty (Blatter, 2004). The former builds on emotional symbols for citizen mobilization whereas the latter focuses on the establishment of clearly defined regulations. The two dimensions are complementary and are embraced by almost every regional (political) institution. Constructed simultaneously through various governance structures, they are, however, not totally commensurable, and according to Blatter (2004) a holistic assumption should be avoided in order to make analytical differentiations between various institutions and their objectives.

Penumbral regions and regional mess

As stated earlier, "regions on paper" do not necessarily stay that way, but – depending on agency (both at an individual and institutional level) – can also harden and become "regions with identities" or at least regions that are widely known. There is a body of literature that has

studied how soft regions emerge and how they are hardened or "solidified". In much of this literature, regions have been seen to be built or institutionalized through various phases or as becoming hardened through speech acts by regional spokespersons (Paasi, 1986). Similarly, institutionalization has been connected to the emergence and stabilization of a regional public and to singularization – or hegemonization – of regionalization discourses through political struggles (Metzger and Schmitt, 2012; Metzger, 2013).

While these conceptualizations are suitable for region-building processes, more research is needed on how spatial structure is changed by the simultaneous hardening of soft regions and softening of hard ones. As can be seen, old, hard regions will not always remain hard, but may become softened in order to overcome the "problem" of borders. This two-way process of concurrent hardening of soft spaces and softening of hard ones calls for new understandings on the transformations of regions. Understandings that go beyond the institutionalization process, where spaces are often seen merely as "regions-in-becoming", which will be eventually fully institutionalized. What are the outcomes of institutionalization processes – in terms of spatial understandings, definitions, and manifestations – and what real-world effects do these processes have and cause? As both soft and hard spaces become renegotiated or (re)performed (cf. Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2008; Haughton and Allmendinger, 2015), will regions become less hard and less soft at the same time, and simultaneous multiple imaginaries overlap partly but not exhaustively, causing a regional mess and contested regional identities? The idea of penumbral borders and regions seeks to answer that question by serving as a conceptual tool to understand some of the multiplicity of bounded spaces.

The idea of penumbral borders/regions is an alternative way of conceptualizing regions as processes, and steps beyond the usual institutionalization theory with stages that lead eventually into a fully institutionalized region that has an uncontested status in the official

spatial structure. Accordingly, the idea of penumbral borders/regions does not understand the deinstitutionalization of regions as a complete deconstruction, where regions disappear altogether from the collective consciousness. The idea of penumbral region emphasizes the "contextuality of things" by capturing the multilayered roles of borders. It underlines that the various layers of borders have an effect only when "the light is cast from a certain angle", i.e. in certain practices and discourses. Penumbral regions have multilayered borders and some layers can be highlighted and meaningful at one time. The concept underscores the temporal aspect of the issue (cf. Walsh et al., 2012). A penumbral region may be visible and meaningful – that is, relevant – only for a relatively short time, for instance when funding is applied for the newly conceived unusual or non-standard regions, or when such regions are promoted in various advertising campaigns with supporting cartographic representations. Penumbral regions and borders alike are highly selective in terms of flows and closures, and they are activated in both context – and time – contingent junctures. The notion does not imply that these borders would be fuzzy, wavering or illusory, instead they are typically clear-cut.

Penumbral regions are regions with definite borders, yet they occur only in certain times and spaces, possibly remaining in the background for the most of the time. They are not particularly soft, but their borders define insides and outsides clearly. They can be understood as "ghost" or "shadow" regions too. While they may not have confirmed administrative or legal boundaries, they have boundaries that are present in the public consciousness and in speech acts. Accordingly they represent a kind of in-betweenness. They can be soft regions that are in the process of becoming hardened or – perhaps more typically – hard regions that become softened through the vanishing of layers of borders. They can be regions constructed for statistical use (NUTS) or for EU-programmes, such as Interreg, and they can be regions

with borders of one sort or another that "are now dispersed a little everywhere" (Axford, 2006).

If regions are understood as penumbral, it is possible to view a spatial system metaphorically as a palimpsest, a parchment from which writings become occasionally partially or completely erased to make room for another text (Mitin, 2007). However this is not to say that all the (old) layers of texts are completely washed off, but only certain layers (depending greatly on power structures), leaving limited space for new layers. In the context of this chapter, old regions and territorial notions of space do not disappear, but remain as one layer of many in the palimpsest of spatial systems. A palimpsest is filled with transforming and penumbral regions of all kinds, and they have various amounts of stickiness and inertia. Inertia works both ways. Regional systems have a certain inertia, which decelerates the institutionalization of newly-conceived regions, as can be seen in the case of Barents. And regions have a certain stickiness when they are deinstitutionalized, as seen in the case of Nurmo.

Conclusion

Table 9.1 illustrates the analytical distinctions between different regionalisms and emerges out of the arguments that I have put forward in this chapter. It seeks to go beyond the conventional new/old dichotomy, outlining key features of a "new new regional geography". This is done in terms of spatial form, organization, agency, purpose, time and scale, placing them alongside each other in order to critically interrogate competing regionalisms, as I have done throughout this chapter. While old regionalism has served as a lens through which to interrogate newer regionalisms here, it is significantly, not argued to be an intrinsically regressive category.

	Old regionalism	New regionalism	"Hybrid" regionalism, "New new regional geography"
Spatial form	Closed Hard	Open Soft	Relational and territorial "Penumbral"
Organization	Institutionalized	Project	Mixed
Agency	General population	Administrators & stakeholders	Interplay of activists & advocates
Purpose	Multiple Culture	Single Economy	Multiple, co-operation & cohesion
Time	Historically oriented Stable Old	Future oriented Fluid New	Palimpsests (layers of assemblages that vary over time)
Scale focus	Local and national	Supranational and global	Cross-scalar

Table 9.1 Key features of regionalisms

In a period of fuzzy regions, soft spaces and unclear spatial imaginaries, a territory with definitive boundaries reveals structures within which identities are built. Territory holds a continuing allure, and boundedness should not be regarded as problematic by default. Despite the increasing attention placed upon themes such as flows and nodes, many processes work within the realities and complexities of bounded space (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2010: 813). Many operations and processes, especially in planning and development, take place within and through administrative boundaries which fundamentally are not fuzzy, but are instead clear cut. As Allmendinger and Haughton (2010: 813) state, "there are multiple spaces and scales that must be negotiated in everyday life, some of which are more fixed and formal than others". It should be recognized that there are regions with specific histories and identities, and these regions react sometimes rebelliously to regional change. And while new regions may start out as soft spaces with fuzzy boundaries due to the "territory-effect" regions become solidified through various spokespersons and speech acts (Metzger, 2013). The boundaries of newly-conceived regions harden as the region in question becomes gradually embedded through various spatial strategies and regional promotion, where in which the idea of boundedness and distinctions between inclusiveness and exclusiveness are pivotal.

Different regionalisms, as well as institutionalization and deinstitutionalization processes, need to be understood in relation to universal changes in societies and ideologies. Deinstitutionalization, and the softening of borders, stems from a general need to increase competitiveness and to adapt to demographic changes. It can also be seen as a mechanism of de-politicization where clear insides and outsides are not needed to be defined. Vague or fuzzy spatial definitions leave open "whether a particular area or place is included in a policy framework or not" (Haughton et al., 2013: 218). Olesen and Richardson (2011) state that "fuzzy spatial representations become an effective means to camouflage spatial politics and

depoliticize strategic spatial planning processes". As such, deinstitutionalizing bounded

spaces may be seen as a way to avoid conflicts that concrete borders of inclusion and

exclusion might cause.

It is, as this chapter argues, therefore politically pertinent to question and seek to halt the

constructing of new regions – perhaps particularly if they remain only "regions on paper" –

when old, meaningful regions are being top-down deinstitutionalized. These new

regionalisms and regional transformations are often manifestations of policy transfer – a

process "in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions, etc. in

one time and space are used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and

institutions, in another time and space" (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996: 334). Relating to the

themes highlighted in this chapter, policy transfer can mean "bringing together the diffusion

of currently dominant ideas on 'relational space' and the normative planning ideals of

national ministries, the EU or the OECD, for instance" (Paasi and Zimmerbauer, 2016). This

can be read as a diffusion of largely Western spatial ideas to a non-Anglo-American spatial

context. These "solidified paradigms" have colonizing effects upon spatial practices and

vocabularies elsewhere. Indeed various post-communist countries have attempted to emulate

the West, as it has been seen as "the quickest solution to many problems without having to

reinvent the wheel" (Stead, 2012: 107; Randma-Liiv, 2005). Accordingly, Prince (2011)

argues that the circulation of policy agendas does not simply mean their transfer from one

bounded state territory to another other. Policy transfer is instead crucially related to

institutional formations both 'above' and 'below' the national scale.

As such, regions – when understood – as ongoing processes are influenced by prevailing and

dominant ideologies, which are often adapted locally somewhat uncritically. Allen and

Cochrane (2007:1162) note, "Rightly or wrongly…political institutions lend themselves to

the language of territory, fixity and boundaries…territorial focus has remained much the

same, despite a more flexible spatial vocabulary that speaks about regionalization and the re-scaling of the state". While at the same time the emergence of "fuzzy spatial representations", has led to changing geographical understandings of regions among planning practitioners (Paasi and Zimmerbauer, 2016), and new relational concepts of space are now brought into a "discursive melting-pot" full of various spatial conceptions (see Healey and Underwood, 1978). This is the ongoing paradox of regions, regionalisms, and identities, it is a regional mess.

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