

Introduction. Studying Regions as 'Spaces For Politics': Re-Thinking Territory and Strategic Action

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Abstract

Transformations in global, European and domestic regulatory government have sparked debates about their effects on regions. Are regions becoming increasingly un-bounded territories and/or passive actors in the face of political change? This Introduction argues for a political-sociological treatment of regions as 'spaces for politics' to answer these questions. This means *first*, conceiving regions as institutionalising spaces, with power structures and logics of action; *second*, studying actor deployments of territory-linked arguments to legitimise the re-institutionalisation of regional regulatory boundaries and spaces of public action; *third*, studying regulatory strategies of individual and collective actors who act in the name of the region.

Key words: sociology of regions, space, politics, territory, strategic action, political change

Introduction

On-going transformations in global, European and domestic regulatory government and markets have sparked new debates in both political science and human geography regarding their continuing effects on regions (Elias, 2008; Pike, 2007). In political science, recent work published by scholars on the regional dimension of European Union (EU) politics has argued that although this was the subject of extensive research in the 1990s, recently the relationship between the EU and the regions has been 'increasingly neglected' (Elias, 2008: 483). Yet, whereas scholars within EU studies are keen to up-date research regarding EU effects on regions, to date they have not sought to question in any fundamental way their ontology of the 'region' in the light of extensive regulatory change (see again, for example, Elias, 2008; Fleurke and Willesme, 2006).

This stands by contrast to intense debates amongst human geographers, where global market and regulatory change has given rise to a line of argumentation questioning the underlying basis of how we even define and study the region as a unit of analysis (Amin, 2004; Allen and Cochrane, 2007). There, scholars are engaging in serious epistemological discussions over the extent to which regions can continue to be treated and studied as 'bounded' territorial entities (Pike, 2007; Hudson, 2007; Morgan, 2007). In these debates, some have even gone so far as to reject the continued territorial integrity of regions in the light of recent transformations brought about by global economic and political influences (Amin 2004: 34, 36; Allen et al 1998). In response, others have argued against analysis of global impacts on regions in ways which view their effects on 'territory' as either deterministic or inevitable (Hudson, 2007: 1157; Pike, 2007). Rather, the focus of research should be on 'political choice', studying regions as 'subjects' as well as 'objects' of change (Hudson, 2007; 1152-7).

This paper draws upon the Introduction to a forthcoming Special Issue which seeks to engage with these general debates and present a collection of articles which analyse effects of recent processes of change within regions - globalisation, European integration, de-centralisation, democratisation – across a range of policy areas and polity-building programmes. To capture the interplay of these different causal processes of change, we share with human geographers the necessity of being explicit on questions of epistemology and 'problematiz[ing] the ontological basis of spaces such as the 'region'' (Smith, 2004: 9). Our starting point in so doing is to advocate re-visiting and up-dating the study of the region in a sociologically-informed way and as a 'space for politics'. This approach, which began in the late 1970s (Grémion, 1976; Sharpe, 1979a; Mény, 1982a) has, we suggest, since been subsumed and eventually lost in the successive literature studying relations between regions and the EU. A central aim of this Special Issue is to renew and refine this perspective on the region first, by grounding it in a political sociology of institutions and second, by applying it as a concept to study political change within and across regions and in a variety of contexts. As we seek to demonstrate throughout, studying regions as 'spaces for politics' allows us to access key controversies raised predominantly, but not exclusively, within human geography, and to address these from a political sociological perspective. In particular, this approach enables us first, to study 'how' and 'when' territory continues to matter in the institutionalisation of regional boundaries, interests and identities; and second, to examine regions as groups of individual and collective actors (Le Galès, 2003), the regulatory strategies and respective powering of whom become an object for research.

1. 'Territory' and regions as 'objects' or 'subjects' of change: current controversies

Unfolding debates in regional studies invite reflection on how we continue to problematise 'territory' in the study of regions and whether we consider regions as objects, rather than subjects, of change (Pike, 2007). A central such debate is one in which scholars have critiqued the 'territorial politics' approach for failing to capture the extent of recent economic and political societal upheaval and for being 'closed' in its imagery of culture in an increasingly multi-cultural world. A number of controversies are raised within this debate which also touch on analytical challenges of a more general nature as discussed within political economics and political sociology (Rumford, 2008; Jullien and Smith, 2008; Hay and Marsh, 2001; [\[iii\]](#)). Three such controversies are identified here: first, the extent to which regions remain 'bounded' places in a situation of increasing global regulation; second, the extent to which territorial politics are mono-culturalist and 'local', thereby rendering them resistant to the multi-culturalism of a global, interconnected world; third, the extent to which regions are 'objects', as distinct from 'subjects, of political change.

The first of these controversies centres upon whether regions should cease to be conceptualised as 'bounded territorial' spaces. In a context of globalisation when 'supply chains, linkage arrangements and knowledge networks are not locationally restricted' (Amin, 2004: 36), scholars have argued against constructions of the region as a closed or bounded territorial entity – regions are not 'container spaces' (Amin, 2004: 33). Adopting instead what they term a 'relational', as distinct from a 'territorial', reading of place politics, they argue that regions should be problematized as 'relational', 'connected' and 'porous' (Amin, 2004; Amin and Thrift, 2002; Allen et al, 1998). In so doing, they seek to challenge what they describe as an outmoded image of nested regional territories and to view regions instead as 'routinely implicated in distant connections and influences' (Amin, 2004: 33).

Yet, whereas this image of regions as 'connected' is neither controversial nor only held by this group of geographers (see, for example, Smith, 2004; Scott and Storper; 2003, Le Galès, 2003; Paasi, 2001;

Lovering, 1995) the relational interpretation advanced by them goes further in the consequences it draws from this image. In their critique of the 'new regionalism', post-modern geographers have sought to *write territory out* of regional studies (Morgan, 2007: 1247). For them, the connected region is not simply relational but boundary-less. This image of the effects which transnationalism is incurring holds serious consequences for how the relational reading proposes to conceptualise regions:

'the sum is regions without proscribed or prescribed boundaries' resulting in there being 'no definable regional territory to rule over' (Amin, 2004: 34, 36).

These kinds of claims have sparked a wide range of reactions. For example, Morgan has responded that regional political space does not cease to be bounded in a connected world 'because politicians are held to account through the territorially defined ballot box, a prosaic but important reason why one should not be dismissive of territorial politics' (Morgan, 2007: 1248). Others have sought to make the distinction between the geographical openness of regions on the one hand and their continued social and political construction as 'bounded' on the other (Smith, 2004: 9; Hudson, 2007: 1154). In the main, reactions have centred upon arguments claiming that territory continues to matter and that regions can be seen as *both* territorial *and* relational (Hudson, 2007: 1156; Morgan, 2007; Pike, 2007). Yet, the question of 'how' and 'when' territory matters in the construction of connected regions is still left largely under-theorised by this literature. More reflection is thus required and we return to this point in the second section of this Introduction.

How territory matters is also linked to the second controversy evoked by the quest to replace a territorial politics of place with a relational one (Amin, 2004: 38; Amin, et al 2003). In seeking to justify their position, scholars have developed a critique of (UK) devolution which attacks territorially based politics for being mono-culturalist. For them, devolution politics is premised upon an 'insider culture' which is local and homogeneous (Amin, 2004: 37). Critically, it is implied that devolution politics is *solely* grounded in this imagery of culture. It is viewed as being *intrinsically* closed, disallowing for the possibility of plural cultures within territorial politics. The implication, well-captured by others, is

'the sense of relational politics of place being inherently progressive, cosmopolitan, and perhaps even 'urban', whilst simultaneously leaving the impression that territorial political affinities are 'regional' and 'ante-diluvian, parochial or even reactionary' (Morgan, 2007: 33)' (MacLeod and Jones, 2007: 1184).

As a wide-ranging scholarship can testify (Mény, 1982b: 17-18; Anderson, 1991; Diez-Madrano, 1995; Itçaina, 2007; MacClancy, 2007), regional political actors have and do evoke social representations of ethno-cultural identities which are both mythical and reactionary as part of a political strategy to bring about change. Yet, to suggest that these are the only representations of the past and future of regions available to actors engaged in a territorial politics is to overlook a central argument on the links between regions and modernisation. In this vein, one would stress a central objective of UK devolution precisely to institutionalise a 'new politics' based upon an 'openness' of government (Rawlings, 2003; Russell et al, 2002). Indeed, critical tensions within devolution and de-centralisation agendas centre upon reconciling 'past' and 'future' ethno-cultural references. As Morgan argues: 'it is a wholly contingent question whether regionalism ... assumes a progressive or reactionary form' (Morgan, 2007: 1248).

The types of politics being institutionalised in the territorial *and* connected region and the meaning of culture in the social construction of its boundaries should, we argue, be for empirical research to discover - rather than being reduced to assumptions about polity-building projects. Building on others' work, research examining actor evocations of ethno-cultural identities can, and should, go beyond instrumentalist essentialist conceptions of culture. This can be achieved in particular through a

systemic analysis of its symbolic construction of space and belongings, including the meaning attached to both (Eriksen, 1991; Carmen Garcia and Genieys, 2005). We return to this point in section two below.

The final controversy we raise here pertains to the conceptualisation of regional power in the relational reading of place politics. A strong undercurrent of this work suggests that the relational region is somehow powerless in the face of globalisation:

‘the new localism cannot pretend to be able to control the forces... that are implicated in new spaces of trans-territorial organisation’ (Amin, 2004: 36).

These types of claims are problematic for two reasons. First, they give the impression of regions as ‘objects’ not ‘subjects’ of public policy and economics, and this despite their history of governing and institutionalisation (Hudson, 2007: 1152; Paasi, 2001: 16). Examining the complexity of causality between the ‘global’ and the ‘local’ has been the object of an extensive empirical work conducted by scholars within political economics and sociology and one which demonstrates its variation both across sectors, regions and cities (Jullien and Smith, 2008; Le Galès and Voelzkow, 2003; Le Galès, 2003; Hay and Marsh, 2001). For example, work on European cities identifies different interpretations of global-local dialectics and their consequences for local action (Le Galès, 2003; Le Galès and Voelzkow, 2003); work on industry conceptualises regions both as venues for global and EU government, but also as coalitions of actions who seek to influence global/EU regulation on wider stages (Carter 2008). All the aforementioned studies suggest that the effects which global/EU/state regulatory processes and decisions are having on local choices are complex and merit continued research. Importantly, scholarship must focus on ‘who’ acts in the mediation of global-local dialectics and the mechanisms through which this action is translated. Or as Lagendijk puts it: ‘when’ and ‘why’ do regions behave as subjects rather than objects of change (Lagendijk, 2007: 1200)?

This leads us to our third difficulty with the relational ontology of the region, namely its failure to identify in a systematic way the key actors, motivations and decisional arenas of the relational politics. Instead, politics is evoked as somehow taking place ‘outwith’ institutional logics of power and dominance (Amin, 2004: 38-40). This results in the relational reading at times falling into the trap of ‘fetishis[ing] space and reify[ing] places as if they themselves – rather than classes or regional alliances – are the agents’ (MacLeod and Jones, 2001: 670). More is required to identify power struggles between actors, the construction and alignment of regional interests and the institutionalisation of certain logics of action as dominant. Studying how the ‘region’ acts thus requires problematising different actors’ ‘strategic action’ in the name of the region and developing analytical concepts for studying the institutionalisation of actors’ political struggles.

In summary, ‘relational’ versus ‘territorial’ politics debates raise important research questions on how we problematise both ‘territory’ and ‘strategic action’ in the study of global/EU/domestic impacts on regions. To begin to address these questions in this Special Issue, we propose studying regions as ‘spaces for politics’.

2. Conceptualising regions as ‘spaces for politics’

As we state above, the underlying aim of this Special Issue is to argue for a renewal and refinement of a sociological treatment of regions in order to problematize them as ‘spaces for politics’. We contend

that resuscitating this treatment of the region is conceptually promising for accessing current debates within regional studies. In particular, this is to be achieved *first*, by conceiving of the region as an institutionalising space, with its own power structures and logics of action; *second*, by conceptualising 'territory' as a social construction whose various evocations are deployed by actors to legitimise the re-institutionalisation of regional regulatory boundaries and spaces of public action; and *third*, by studying the political sociology of the 'strategic action' of regional actors within these processes of transformation. Consequently, our approach implies a renewal of research design and in particular a move away from treatments of political change in which economic globalization, European policies (e.g. EU structural funds) and/or State reforms (decentralisation or devolution) are examined as independent variables having uni-directional 'top down' effects. In these, regions are frequently perceived as simple receptors of macro political and economic transformations. The articles presented in this Special Issue rather adopt a completely different research design, starting with the region as a unit of analysis and grounding it in a political sociological understanding its construction (boundaries, interests, identities) as an interactive political process.

Let us explore these points further. *First*, in their early work, both Grémion and Sharpe were keen to emphasise their conception of the region as a space for the exercise of *power* (Grémion, 1976: 34; Sharpe, 1979). For example Sharpe, in his critique of theories of centralisation and homogenization of states, argued that impulses towards de-centralisation were not simply an 'accident of geography', but were being shaped by 'the effect of space on the distribution of power' (Sharpe 1979,: 18). Grémion's sociological study of French de-centralisation in the 1960s/70s was also premised upon a fundamental distinction which he drew between the construction of the local as a space of powering, [\[iii\]](#) by contrast to an administrative 'level' of (state) government facilitating liaison between the 'centre' and the 'local' (Grémion, 1976: 34). Central to both of these accounts linking space and power was a line of argumentation questioning treatments of central politics which reified their 'rationality' (Grémion, 1976: 156). As Grémion argued, analyses of local political action frequently viewed it as always extremely contingent, subject to an inexplicable randomness and/or the influence of personalities (Grémion, 1976: 156). This argument was also advanced by Polsby (1979): 'the opposite of 'central' [is] not 'undifferentiated' or 'uncoordinated' ... [these are] concepts which belong to theories of hierarchical organisation' (Polsby, 1979: 2).

To move beyond these accounts, Grémion's work in particular sought to establish the 'local' not as a place of random action, but as a space with its own 'logic of action' (Grémion, 1976: 156). The onus of research was thus shifted to that of identifying structuring 'systems' of local action. This included demonstrating mechanisms of regulation in order to reveal a *sui generis* local power structure (Grémion, 1976: 160). This was achieved by studying the logic of actors' behaviour, the structuring of their actions and analysis of the resources which they used in order to shape public policy (Grémion, 1976: 246, 265). In this space for power, 'politics' was thus not reduced to struggles between political parties and/or voting behaviour. Critically, it was defined as actor interactions in the exercise of authority and in the name of the local – a politics in the formation of collective decisions (Grémion, 1976: 464).

In this Special Issue, our first aim is thus to draw upon and develop these ways of conceptualising the local as a site of power. Our starting point in so doing is to conceptualise regions as being stabilized through on-going processes of 'institutionalization, de-institutionalization and re-institutionalization' (Jullien and Smith, 2008). A central aim of this approach is to move away from any evaluation of processes of institutionalization of regional power structures which focus solely upon formal institutions and this building upon notions of urban and regional capacity-building (Cole, 2006; Pasquier 2004, Stone, 1993). Rather, by drawing upon recent sociological and constructivist accounts of

institutions, we place our emphasis on identifying dominant beliefs, ideas and identities as held by a multitude of regional actors and which relate to action in an interpretative way (Parsons 2007: 96). Studying the institutionalisation of the region as a space for politics thus requires studying how shared social and political representations, cultural values, territorial discourses and regional practices all become stabilized and legitimized as representative of the region during the course of regulation (Lagroye, 1997).

Second, and following from this, we seek to illustrate 'how' territory matters in this process of institutionalisation. In elucidating the construction of a region's boundaries, we start by asking why and how the frontiers of any polity, including regions, are constructed and subsequently maintained or altered. This general goal is also held by political geographers where it is argued that:

'while the disappearance of boundaries (and the state) is a popular theme in much current research, we cannot 'write' boundaries away in our academic discourseswhat we can do is re-conceptualize them to understand [their] functions and meanings' (Paasi, 2001: 17).

From this point of view, transformations in regulatory government and markets would not be seen to produce an absence of boundaries. Rather, in a connected world, not only would boundaries still be considered to matter but, moreover, would be understood to be proliferating (Rumford, 2008). For us, the region is therefore not viewed as 'unbounded', but as a political space whose multiple frontiers (regulatory, representational) are in a constant process of being produced and re-produced – including their scope and meaning. We hypothesise that, in their interactions with global/EU/domestic influences, actors will mobilise to reconstitute former boundaries, endow them with new meanings and/or institutionalise new frontiers of public policy action. Moreover, in a relational political environment, where the limits of spaces of regulatory action are not necessarily synonymous with geographical borders (Rumford, 2008: 8), how actors reconcile different frontiers, and hence spaces of politics, becomes a central line of inquiry.

As a result, we make no assumption about the scope of regional authority, but want to identify through empirical research the multiple regulatory spaces in which regulatory authority is exercised and how these are maintained by actors who inhabit them. If we accept that regional political activity can extend beyond the local, we must be concerned with examining the 'stretching [of] the cognitive map of regional actants' (MacLeod and Jones, 2007: 1184). Analysing territory-linked arguments deployed by actors is thus critical to explaining the institutionalisation of multiple boundaries and spaces of public action (Carter and Smith 2008). For, images and representations of territory mobilised by actors to legitimise frontiers also simultaneously establish insiders and outsiders of the spaces they institutionalise (Rose, 1995). Drawing on Carter & Smith (2008, 2009), we can identify different categories of territorial representations which are mobilised by actors to legitimise political choices over the reach of regional activity. Evocations of territory can be considered as including polity-building, sector-building and/or identity-building (both ethno-cultural and professional) categories of territory, all of which can be deployed by actors in their political activity. For example, actors might mobilise around discourses of a past history of the region; actors working within industries located in a region might mobilise around shared representations of their professional identity and seek to connect these with regional ethno-cultural identities in order to legitimise a particular (regional) way of acting. How actors work to construct shared histories or futures and their reasoning in so doing are consequently all studied as political processes institutionalising regions as spaces for politics.

Taken as a whole, we can identify the following usages of territory in regulation (the below is adapted from Carter and Smith):

- ~ to legitimise the 'frontiers' of the region as a 'space' of and for politics – geographical frontiers or, in the case of regulation, policy frontiers (competences to set policy instruments);
- ~ to justify eligibility of membership of the 'space'; to justify 'belonging' either to a territorial polity, or to a regulatory partnership or regulatory arena: to legitimise 'appropriate' members, insiders/outsideers; to legitimise representation, or 'who' can act, set instruments in the name of the region;
- ~ to politicise and/or depoliticise choices arising from the institutionalisation of choices made both in the defining of frontiers and membership of the region/regulatory arena/partnership.

Third, through applying this approach to a range of case studies we seek to demonstrate its analytical purchase in opening up the 'black box of the region' and this 'to explain how it can perform as a political subject' (Hudson, 2007: 1154). As we state above, the regions as 'spaces for politics' approach seeks to un-pack the region into both individual and collective actors (Le Galès, 2003: 22) and theorise their political behaviour from within predominantly sociological, constructivist and institutionalist theories of action (Genieys and Smyrl, 2008; Smith, 2004). Significantly, we do not only examine public action of regional administrations and the mechanisms by which they connect with their environment (Grémion, 1976). In the articles that follow, a range of actor behaviour is evaluated, including the regulatory action of regional governments/councils, regional Ministers, officials of organisations, political parties, sectoral interest groups and stakeholders, cultural actors, trade unions, NGOs, civil society actors. Throughout, we illustrate how actors use *multiple* cognitive, institutional, and discursive resources - drawn from regional, central, EU and global political processes – in many discretionary ways and in the name of the region.

In this examination of regions as 'subjects' of change, emphasis is placed upon the conditions which shape these respective actors' representations of their social and political realities and how these representations guide them in their concomitant regulatory and polity-building activities. For, in situations of transformation, any one of a region's institutions might become de-stabilized. Because of this, the onus of research is placed upon investigating how 'windows of opportunity' (Legendijk, 2007: 1200-1201) of change presenting in a variety of regulatory arenas are identified by actors as such. Importantly, this requires elucidating the strategies of action pursued by actors either to preserve the *status quo* or to seek to alter regional practices and/or their meanings and align them with new ideas generated within macro political processes. For example, regional actors seeking to shape their own destiny might draw on EU and global resources to bring this about. Additionally, regional actors may wish to shape global and EU institutions (norms and rules) in their own image. In proceeding in this way, the articles reveal different modes of strategy-building and different arenas in which regional actors invest. Regarding the former, these include problematisation; alliance-building; consensus-building; deliberation; conflict mediation; politicisation/de-politicisation; banal and cognitive regionalism. Regarding the latter, these include sites *within* organisations, for example, within regional governments or trade unions, as well as inter-actor arenas both within the region and beyond - e.g. partnerships, forums, citizens juries, public policy networks, domestic inter-governmental arenas, EU arenas, global arenas, sectoral institutional orders. Studying strategic action of the region as a space for politics is thus not just to study what goes on in the region but to study a variety of regulatory spaces and arenas in which regional actors act.

Studying shifts in actor strategies from 'passive' to 'active' forms of engagement ultimately leads research to identify *patterns* of institutionalisation which both 'frame' and 'operationalise' the region (Nay, 1997). This is because of political sociology's underlying intellectual inquiry to reveal power and

domination in governing. Hierarchy of power is not assumed either between individual actors and groups of actors within the region; or between regional actors and central state ones; or between regional actors and other EU or global organisations. Rather, the onus for research is placed upon studying how power is assigned and re-assigned through actors interactions and how those assignments become stabilized and institutionalised over time (Carter and Smith 2008: Mény, 1982: 10). Eventually, it is through studying the links between different regional 'spaces' for politics and their interactions that we are able to elucidate 'whose values and principles shape the dominant conceptions of development and how do they do so?' (Hudson, 2007: 1157).

3. Application of the approach and panel discussion points

In this final section of the paper, we summarise the application of the approach in the Special Issue and categorise core lines of argumentation. The aim of this section is to introduce a number of general discussion points which will additionally be developed upon by the other papers of the panel. It is important to stress that the articles in this Special Issue, and the three papers on this panel, represent a first attempt to explore the central lines of inquiry generated by a study of regions as 'spaces for politics' as outlined above. Taken as a whole they are exploratory, rather than demonstrative, in their exposition and suggest possible avenues for future research.

As we state above, change in regional governance and politics has for the last two decades mainly been analysed through studying the impact of three explanatory variables on institutional and political empowerment: economic globalization, European integration and State reform (decentralisation trends). Critically, for the most part, the effects of these processes have been examined through applying 'top-down' approaches to regions. This was typical of work done in the 1990s which studied both regions and systems of regional actors largely as receptors of these macro political processes. The papers in this panel (and the articles in the Special Issue) seek to move debate on regions, regionalism and power hierarchies forwards by emphasising instead the shifting scale of political communities and policy in contemporary Europe. To do this, the papers apply an alternate research design, whereby a region's own on-going construction (boundaries/interests/identities) is viewed *as the central political process* to be researched. Capturing the effects of regime change within this process includes therefore investigating how actors deploy and align different social and political representations, cultural values, territorial discourses and regulatory practices and stabilize them as representative of the region.

A central line of inquiry which transcends the papers in the panel (and the articles in the Issue) examines how EU-wide institutions (rules, ideas and expectations) are mobilised by actors within the region's on-going construction (boundaries/interests/identities). As we argue elsewhere in the Special issue (Carter and Pasquier forthcoming 2010), the transformation of European institutions and markets brought about through collective EU regulation has institutionalized the EU as a critical space for public action. Yet, frequently regions are considered 'objects' of EU politics, rather than 'subjects' of its daily government. In an EU increasingly characterised by the emergence of newly empowered regions stabilized through projects of de-centralization, devolution and federalism, this image of the relationship between the region and the EU appears inconsistent. Nonetheless, prevailing narratives within EU studies which construct regions as 'winners' or 'losers' of integration result in this image being a hard one to shift. Moreover, human geographers within regional studies who, as we have argued in Section 1, are engaging in exciting discussions on how to define the 'region' in an inter-connected world, infrequently apply their insights to study in detail the relationship of 'region' and the 'EU'. In fact, studying Europeanisation effects on regions does not appear to be a core interest for a large

number of these scholars.

To bridge this gap between EU studies, on the one hand, and human geographers in regional studies, on the other, several of the papers (and articles) thus specifically address this question of Europeanisation from within the paradigm of regions as 'spaces for politics'. This is demonstrated, for example, through a re-evaluation of impacts in policy areas of traditional concern for EU studies scholars such as regional policy and Structural Funds (Graziano forthcoming 2010); through investigation of Europeanisation effects in new trans-sectoral policies, e.g. maritime policy (Saliou forthcoming 2010); through analysis of Europeanisation effects in modernisation projects, e.g. participatory democracy (Gourgues forthcoming 2010). Additionally, attention is paid in this Special Issue to capturing Europeanisation effects on the construction of cross-border regions (Malloy forthcoming 2010); and finally to capture global and EU interactions and their effects on industry regulation (Smith forthcoming 2010). Through applying political sociology's conceptual tools, we argue therefore that research can reveal how actors use European or EU-wide resources to re-frame their interests and collective identities.

Second, and returning to the discussion points raised in Section 1 of this paper, the articles collectively come to a number of conclusions concerning 'territory' and 'strategic action'. First, they demonstrate that actor regulatory interactions (regional/state/EU/global) have *not* produced 'unbounded' territories. Rather, regions' regulatory and representative frontiers are proliferating within and outwith geographical borders. Second, actors frequently draw upon multiple cognitive and regulatory resources (regional/central/EU/global) to shape their own destinies and transform themselves from objects to subjects of political change. To illustrate both these claims, a central focus of the pieces has been to demonstrate how actors politically use representations of 'territory' as causal in legitimising both 'the reach' of regional public action and the representative authority of a range of actors to regulate in the name of 'the region'. The articles propose a number of different methodological approaches for doing this: for example, through the tracing of policy processes and, in particular, studying actor political usages of territory to problematise issues and politicise arguments (Smith); through constructing territory as 'identity repertoire' and narrative (Saliou); through examining territory as banal as well as cognitive regionalism (Kernalagenn). In all of these, for us 'territory' is not just another way of referring to the 'region'. Rather, we stress the significance of studying its multiple evocations which we contend enables research to grasp the 'stretching of the cognitive map' of regional actors and how they represent themselves as 'interconnected' in a transforming world.

Third, and as we state in Section 1, it is an empirical question whether regionalism produces a progressive form or not. The articles, too, address this point. For example, the articles by Kernalagenn and Saliou both show how regional actors reconcile past and future references in their social construction of regional identity. In this, authors make the case for the study of simultaneous processes of 'framing' and 'creating' the region (Kernalagenn forthcoming 2010). Kernalagenn argues that actors 'create' regional identities in economic class struggles and that discourse analysis can be used by scholars to grasp the symbolic and economic construction of the region and its culture. The article by Gourgues also discusses this problematic. This piece develops the sociological argument to demonstrate that institutional processes whereby the 'region' becomes a participatory space for politics are 'less rational than contingent' (Gourgues forthcoming 2010). It also reveals the need to conduct in-depth process tracing case studies to capture the institutionalisation of the region as a progressive polity.

Finally, the articles also explore how and why actors within regions can and do act as 'subjects' of the rules which affect them – both 'at home' but also elsewhere, for example in state and/or EU-wide arenas. They reveal the multiple regulatory spaces in which regional authority is exercised and the multiplicity of actors who act in the name of the region and as subjects of its politics.

By way of concluding, therefore, even though this project has been a first attempt to renew the agenda on territorial politics, the different contributions open stimulating fields of research transforming regions as relevant units of analysis of (1) collective, (2) policy regulation and (2) democracy.

Regions as spaces for collective mobilisation

First, considering regions as spaces for collective action, current literature has mainly taken as its focus of study the role of ethno-regionalist parties and cultural movements in the building of regionalist repertoires. The papers (and articles) presented here seek to renew our understanding of the wide range of actors and the logics of collective action at work in regions as spaces for politics. For example, Tudi Kerlanlegenn has demonstrated the active engagement of a mainstream French trade union, the CFDT, in the discursive and institutional construction of Brittany. He showed how the CFDT emerged as a key actor in defining Brittany as a legitimate space for politics and playing a pivotal role in its institutionalisation. CFDT took part in the rehabilitation of the Breton identity, albeit alongside other actors. Moreover, in developing its strategies of engagement, the CFDT did not need to invent a tradition, but created, on the contrary, new cognitive tools to understand the territorial (and cultural) implications of political and socio-economical phenomena. This article invites us therefore to consider regions as spaces for social regulation. Collective mobilisation is also addressed in some of the other papers. For example, Graziano, Malloy and Smith underline the increasing combination of territorial and European ideologies in the building of *collective* proactive strategies in regional spaces.

Regions as spaces for policy regulation

A second aspect of the research done for this Special issue which is innovative centres upon capturing regions as spaces for policy regulation. First, the way this has been addressed by the contributors enables us to go further than the frequently sterile debates between those who juxtapose 'administrative regions' on the one hand, with 'legislative regions' on the other. For example, Virginie Saliou's contribution shows how a region without primary legislative powers (in this case Brittany) can 'capture' a public policy without any formal authority to do so. The uncertainty of the administration of maritime affairs, combined with a political vacuum brought about by an inter-sectoral regulation, provided the opportunity for the President of the Brittany regional council to take political action and transform Brittany into a space for maritime politics. Following from this work, we emphasise the importance for future research to make no assumption about the scope of regional authority. Rather, scholarship should be encouraged to identify through empirical research the multiple regulatory spaces in which regulatory authority is exercised and how these are built and maintained by actors.

Second, several contributions converge to consider usages of territory are a key variable for the study of regions as spaces for policy regulation. In his study on Scotch whisky case study, Andy Smith clearly

highlights how territory is constantly within, rather than alongside, regulation. For example, far from being simply about marketing, the 'pure malt' crisis provoked debate about the ethno-cultural meaning of whisky and the professional identity of its producers. Virginie Saliou, too, demonstrates how actor usages of territorial resources re-shaped regional identities and, at the same time, re-defined the frontiers of public policy.

Third, several contributions confirm that regions have become proactive policy regulation spaces. Paolo Graziano demonstrates how EU cohesion policy has reinforced the 'politicization of the regional territory' in Italy and further legitimized regions as political arenas. Last but not least, both Saliou and Smith underline the overlapping of regulation and negotiation sites. Contemporary policy regulation takes place through sets of overlapping sites operating at different scales, frequently inhabited by the same actors, including regional actors. These contributions thus demonstrate that policy regulation is not done by one specific actor – e.g. a regional government - acting alone. To develop any regulation strategy, regional actors need to be involved in extra-regional decision-making arenas. Regional governance takes place in multi-configurational spaces, revealing the inter-connectedness of regional actors.

Regions as spaces for democracy

Finally, this special issue develops new perspectives on democratic practices. Regions can and are also innovative spaces for democracy. Gourgues' contribution analyses the transformation of modern democracy in this light. In his study of the citizens' juries in Rhône-Alpes, he confirms that regions are producers of their own choices vis-à-vis democracy. Regions do not only respond to pressure from EU initiatives. Regional discourses and practices concerning democracy can be viewed as empirical testimonies of the scalable conception of power through regional contexts. Participatory democracy, whether managerial or leftist, requires consensus between political actors and relies on one *sine qua non* element to exist: the power of the region, deeply rooted in a 'population' which is now identified, counted, divided and classified in various categories (users and targets of public policies, 'ordinary' citizens, stakeholders, etc.). A general hypothesis emerges from this idea: participatory practices reveal that some actors inside the regional public authority consider that the regional 'space' can be governed, emancipated or controlled. In other words, they consider that the region *is* a space for power and politics, despite the rational analysis of the effective weakness of their institutions. In this sense, we observe that actors consider the region as a space for democracy. As a consequence, the study of regions as 'spaces for politics' must take into account the behaviour and influence of those political actors, elected representatives and/or civil servants, who consider regional democracy as a political issue. The question of regional 'power' is thus raised in every arena in which regional actors meet, talk and command 'their' own demos across frontiers and public policies.

Summary

In this manner, the papers on this panel (and the articles in this Special Issue) collectively aim to demonstrate the analytical purchase of studying regions as spaces for politics. They show that this is not a research agenda which strives to produce a scholarship defined (and perhaps dismissed) as specialising in 'the regional' or in 'the local'. Rather, the ultimate ambition of this approach is to argue for the consideration of regions as relevant and pertinent units of analysis for critically examining

macro-processes of transformation. For as Grémion argued, it is at the periphery, and not at the centre, that one can really understand centralisation – a process which for most of the articles in this Special Issue refers to Europeanisation (1976: 154). Yet, despite a rich literature which documents regions' intermediary character, at the cross-roads between different types of political processes - e.g. globalisation, Europeanization, de-centralisation, metropolism and localism - the imagery of the centrality of the nation-state continues to determine it as the place where social science examines the meaning of political change[iv]. A consideration of regions as spaces for politics thus joins with others before it to invite social sciences instead to regard regions as critical units of analysis for studying political processes and notably for testing hypotheses of the re-institutionalisation of political power.

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[i] For example see Keating and Jones, 1985; Hooghe, 1996; Marks et al, 1996; Jeffery, 1997; Keating and Loughlin, 1997.

[ii] In this Introduction, we limit ourselves to general discussions about the consequences of political change for regions, whether resulting from globalisation, European integration, regionalism or decentralisation/devolution strategies. The specific ways in which EU effects on regions have been analysed within political science, and which have given rise to a substantial body of work with its own theories and methods, are discussed in detail in a separate article in this Special Issue; see Carter and Pasquier, 2010.

[iii] 'Un lieu de pouvoir' (Grémion 1976: 34).

[iv] See for example much of the literature on Europeanisation which focuses on the EU as political change by examining its effects at the centre of states; or the literature on parliamentary adaptation to the EU which takes as its focus national parliaments; or indeed work within political economy such as *Varieties of Capitalism* by Hall and Soskice (2001) which examines political and economic change on national welfare systems.

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