

Minutes Cross-CRP workshop "Regions", Alsion, 14-16 October 2012

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Sunday, 14 October

Minutes

Cross-CRP workshop – Regions

Sunday, 14 October 2012

University of Southern Denmark, Alsion campus, Sønderborg, room M201

17:15 Opening speech and introduction into the workshop:

The workshop was opened by **Elisabeth Vestergaard**, Head of Department and Director, Department of Border Region Studies (University of Southern Denmark). **Martin Klatt** and **Kurt Villads Jensen** from the University of Southern Denmark gave a short introduction about the programme and goals. The three projects (*Cultic Symbols*, *Cuius Regio* and *Unfamiliarity*) were briefly introduced. The three projects vary in their foci, the regions they study as well as the research traditions they draw from. The workshop's aim is therefore to reveal these differences and instigate discussion on the possible futures of the projects, as well as to come up with ideas for further cooperation. Besides, learning from each other's projects and experiences is an important aim of the workshop.

19:00 – 20:30 Keynote: Regions – theoretical concepts – what makes a region

In the evening, the keynote lecture was given by **Kees Terlouw** (University of Utrecht) on the different theoretical approaches to the notion of the 'region' ("*Regions – theoretical concepts – what makes a region*"). He used David Wishart's (2004) broad definition of the region in which regions are "portions of the earth's surface that have discernibly distinctive characteristics that set them apart from other regions". After an overview of the dimensions of the diversity of regions (spatial forms, constructors, types of regions, spatial relations, time and values) the current fragmented conceptualisation of the region was reviewed in more detail.

Towards the end of the lecture a rather provocative question was raised: "*Is region a useful concept?*" There are several strengths and weaknesses of the usage of the concept of 'region', which were discussed throughout the lecture. The conclusion is that the region, as a conceptual tool and not a goal in itself, is especially useful when relating to societal changes and social integration. The lecture initiated an active discussion among the participants on the concept of region, which continued the next morning.

Monday, 15 October

9-12, reflection on the keynote and discussion of newest research on regions. Short introductions on the concept presented by each CRP.

Following the keynote presentation from the previous evening, the morning session of the workshop was dedicated to discussions of various notions or approaches to the concept of region, the importance of the political constructs in the building of regions, the processes of changing regional identity, how structural and cultural regions relate to political regions (Karen Arijs, Przemek Wiszewski, Kees Terlouw). Kurt Villads Jensen pointed to the Cuius Regio experience of working with historical regions that were structurally or politically different. Adding to the theoretical and methodological questions, Professor Nils Petersen asked how do we work with regions in the regions under study and if there is a common denominator to be applied to the variety of regions. Regionality can be talked about in different ways, which is precluding the chances of arriving at a final definition. Apart from administrative or church definitions of regions, there existed also mental regions.

These discussions prepared the way for the presentation by Kurt Villads Jensen of the conceptualization of region in the Cuius Regio project. Then followed the presentation by Bas Spierings, „**Conceptualizing the Cross-border region: absolute, relative and relational**”. Bas Spiering’s presentation, among other issues, stressed the role of people in the social construction of regions through social practices and agency. The discussion of empiric and theoretical aspects regarding the functioning and the perception of cross-border regions by Bas Spierings was followed by several questions and comments regarding the processes of top-down creation of regions and their relation with the sense of regional belonging in historical times (Karen Arijs, Joao Ferreira, Martin Klatt, Kees Terlouw). Martin van der Velde indicated however the crucial role of the top-down process of region creation as a means of governance. Rudolf Bosch added to the top-down, bottom-up processes, the institutionalization of certain economic interactions, political institutionalization as important factors in regional phenomena.

Nils Petersen found the typology proposed by Bas Spierings useful, commenting on the interactions between territorial and mental regions and the processes of top-down, bottom up agenda.

Carsten Yndigejn commented on the identity, attachment, belonging; defining borders, regions are socially constructed, they are created by people and can be destroyed by people. Region as a EU policy tool. That creates a sense of familiarity to the people. They help people to communicate and implement policies of the EU. In that sense the regions are necessary European constructions.

Joao Ferreira continued the discussion on broader regional identities pointing out the examples of medieval Portuguese nobles active in Portugal and Leon.

Karen Arijs remarked that the national identities are still the strongest forms of attachment maintaining their force.

Jussi Laine presented briefly the Finnish examples of identification of individuals and discussed the region as a constructed concept. The final conclusion of the session spelled out by Nils Petersen was that region is conceived in different perspectives, from social sciences and historical experience.

After the break Martin Klatt proposed a more focused discussion of several points that seemed important to discuss:

- Territoriality: absolute vs. virtual regions
- Behavior as social practice

- Regional identity reflected in social practice
- Region.
 - Institutionalization
 - Demarcation of borders (multilayered).
 - Institutionalization of economic ties.
- Regions as imagined community (Benedict Anderson)
- Spaces of flow and trade
- Culture of the region
- Ability of the ruler to impose or accommodate culture

Kurt Villads Jensen proposed to view regions in a dynamic perspective, taking into consideration multiple and contradictory intentions. Joao Ferreira applied that idea in the case of Portugal. Martin van der Velde proposed to ask how people use “region”? How was the region institutionalized and for whose benefit? The region could be seen as an instrument of control.

Bianca Szytniewski reacted to this last point saying that region lacks a control component. Then Karen formulated the question regarding the importance of purpose of those involved in region making. Kees Terlouw proposed to look at which choices are made by people. The final question asked was “WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF REGION?”, indicating that the group prefers to analyze “region” around social practices.

Monday afternoon session started with the presentation by professor Nils Holger Petersen, “**Demarcating Saints’ Territories**”. The reflections upon the dynamics of regions created under the patronage of saints, the importance of the cult of Saint Mary in the West, the choices made between various saints, the universalization of local figures (such as Thomas Beckett). Methodologically, the questions to be used are how regional, universal or local saints were? Kees raised the question regarding the importance of holy places. Nils Petersen responded that miracles happened at the place of martyrdom, the relics were important materially, but there was a dynamic process of universalizing and appropriating of local saints. Joao Ferreira added some examples of patron saints in Portuguese churches.

Rudolf Bosch, **Urban networks as (trans)formative structures?** Some reflections of state formation, economic development and urbanization patterns in a multi-faceted region: The Lower-Rhine, ca. 1300-1600. What are medieval regions? Are these principalities, are these economic regions, as markets, cultural regions? Can urban systems be seen as formative structures in the formation of regions and states? The medieval state as composite state; regions and subregions as elements? Demarcating regions. What kind of regions? Political, economic, cultural? Geographic component: landscape, soil, rivers, and demography. The impact of political borders-principalities versus states. Towns as actors in political networks-administrative regions. Trading networks-nodal regions, urban networks and central places. Social networks (dynasty, nobility, local (urban) elites, cross-border connections). Local versus regional identity. Differentiation in both time and scale. Approaches: Geschichtliche Landeskunde, Kulturraumforschung; Lower Rhine area, Westphalia & Eastern Netherlands form one integrated cultural region (political, economic); Anglo-saxon tradition, State formation theories : -concentration of capital & coercion (Tilly & Blockmans); -important role for urban networks as formative structures; -use of demographic urban models: hierarchy of regions (De Vries), European urbanization. The impact of social structures.

Steen Bo Frandsen, **Regions, historical landscapes and the nation state**

Regions: concept without clear + unambiguous definition. Different in different disciplines, but also countries. Can be constructed in science to answer research questions (i.e. Timothy Snyder “Bloodlands”). Here: regions as historical landscapes. Constructed, can disappear and be reanimated.

Most historical landscapes had a long history, when modern nation states appeared. HL remained containers of memories, traditions and histories, could conflict with national narratives/ideologies. Nation state reinvented and reorganized space (France: département instead of région).

1960's: concepts of regional geography where abandoned – presumably a 19th century concept. Revived in the 1980's as concept to explain problems in the empirical study of industrial and pre-industrial societies (Langton 1984), concept of proto-industrialization – regional cores of strong economic differentiation as a starting point for industrialization, along with center-periphery concept.

Hierarchical dimension in territorial structures! “New Regionalism” as a strategy to tranquilize centres and powerful regions that have grown so strong that they pose a threat to the established order.

Regionalism as a concept of planning and administration, not necessarily identity

Relational aspects: often regions/centres were given specific functions in national development to accommodate them with the new structures (Hamburg as Deutschlands Tor zur Welt). Also Italy is interesting, as the Risorgimento drastically changed territorial hierarchies stable since the middle ages.

Then, Steen illustrated the specific regional vs. national case north of the Elbe river from 1800-2000.

Martin Klatt, **Cross-border regions**,

Euroregions concept. Definition. Evaluate different concepts. Degree of institutionalization. Hierarchy in a federal or quasi-federal system. Identity? How to measure? Different concepts of identity-should we be identity researchers? Multiple relational identities? National, regional, local, European, football team supporter... Regional cross-border? Subjective (own identification) or objective (others identify). Collective and individual (trend goes to latter?). How to clarify? Relevant? Statistical evidence of identity? Concept of *Heimat*. Consequences. Cross-border regions – challenges: Find methodologies to assess the degree of institutionalization beyond stakeholder interviews. Find methodologies to assess the degree of social construction of space and identity. Spaces and flows produce mental regions.

Tuesday, 16 October

“Do matters of method matter?”

Methodological issues – how do we analyze regions and regional identity (Maarten van Driel)

Aim of presentation:

- Not: discussing individual methods of each CRP
- But: tie-up what has been said so far + questions & perspectives for future research

Starting up the CUIUS-project:

- Starting point: questioning & problematizing “the border”
- Interdisciplinary approach

- And firstly: need for a common definition; and a common research goal for all sub-projects
- Need for a non-ambiguous definition, and a common vocabulary
- Specific attention for the stakeholders of the region
- Starting point: claims of regional identity; then studying the different aspects; coherence; importance
- **Need for framework – resulting in a questionnaire that includes all these aspects**
- **Goal: comparing regions**

Note: “region”: vague concept – therefore focus on “snapshots”: important moments in European history which would make it doable to make comparisons

- Comparative research demands a common starting point/common foundation & terminology

But: is it possible to define “region”?

Case Friesland illustrates possible difficulties:

- Friesland; Dutch province
- Thick, well-bounded region: officially bi-lingual; institute for the study of Frisian history,...
- But: how sustainable is this region? Who profits from the well-boundedness of the region?
- What is a ‘failed’ region? Does this exist?
- Cataluña: “successful” region; semi-statal (cfr. Luxemburg); but contingencies of history make this very vulnerable for changes
- Is the region Friesland as well-bounded as it appears? Sub-regions within the province; ...

General remarks concerning EuroCoreCode:

- Is it sufficient to present individual results; or is there a need to bring all the results together?
- Was the working of the ECC-program satisfying?
- What is the best way to coordinate the participants?

Proposal for joined research:

- Research not so much about region but about spatial organization of social actions (and territoriality as element of organization & mental construction)
- Variations in scale; people belong to all kind of forms of social organization
- Different phases in history with consequences for occupation of space

Bottom-up vs top-down:

- Both approaches necessary
- Selection of “points in space”, then inventory of forms of organization; can deliver insights in spatial organization and complexity of identity construction
- Need for comparative research

Some comments from the discussion following Maarten van Driel's presentation:

Terlouw:

You claim that it is difficult to pin down a region; but in the case of Friesland you did make an attempt on defining identity, administrative organization, etcetera: are those not the elements that can lead to the conceptualization of a region?

van Driel:

I agree, but I do think that it might be confusing and even problematic to study regionalism starting from regional conceptualization.

Our discussions during this workshop have showed me that these concepts do not suffice as a foundation for multidisciplinary research. That is why I proposed a non-definitional approach.

Bregnsbo:

Our interest in regions indeed differs somewhat depending on our research field. Some of us do not really need a definition of "region", others do. My question is about the questionnaire: is it useful – since it is being composed after selecting regions? Could it also apply on non-existing regions? Can you "construct" a region using these questions as guiding principles? Can you call an area a "region" when it reaches an 80% score on the questionnaire?

Answer: I cannot really answer that, also because I feel insecure about the questionnaire. If you would find an area which corresponds with 85% of the questions, it would already have been labeled as a region.

Klatt:

I was interested in the remark that we should collaborate in these kind of comparative projects, but will this type of research not be very restrictive in our research creativity?

Answer: I do not see that problem; researchers can still develop their research questions.

One of the uses of this type of research is that when stakeholders of a region claim legitimacy for their region, we could argue against it and prove them wrong.

Bosch:

If research starts from a clear definition of “regions”, then the gradients between two regions will disappear in the research. This is the danger of preconditions of the region: projections on the maps that will then inevitably shape the research.

Answer: I do not agree; if we are aware of those dangers; we can overcome this problem.

Wiszewski: Still we should agree on what we want to study.

Bosch: We could agree on a common starting point; but by conducting the research, other and different problems and questions will emerge.

Spierings: I do not believe that we need such a common definition of “region”; it is much more interesting to have the freedom to adapt your ideas while researching. Having different definitions is much more interesting for discussing and understanding what a region is, than the use of a single definition. It is important to define regions suitable to specific research questions. As such, definitions could also differ per CRP.

Also, I believe that our goal should not be comparing regions, what we should do researching social practices and representations.

Petersen: What is in fact the basis question of the ECC-program? My research is not aimed at answering the question: “what is a region”, nor were the other Saints-projects. We each had the liberty to design our own research projects. Cross-CRP discussions are extremely valuable, and offers new insights, but it is very unrealistic to ask that all these projects would be merged into one general research goal.

This does, by no means, imply that we should not talk about our research or compare our results!

Popa-Gorjanu: This interdisciplinary approach has been very interesting for me. I’ve learned a lot from reading Keating and Paasi, and some of their concepts seem useful for my research on 14th century Transylvania. It is extremely valuable to learn from each other’s methods and questions.

Ferreira:

The questionnaire [Cuius Regio’s standard questionnaire to assess “regions”, MK] is, I think, designed to discover transnational “super-structures”. But this can be problematic; because it implies looking for the “mechanic” that makes these structures work. I doubt that this will learn us the historical reality.

The difficulties in defining “region” is what makes researching the region interesting. The differences between regions might be bigger than we would expect.

Answer: But it is important to note similarities and differences; otherwise we only end up with individual observations.

Bosch: Still I believe that this questionnaire [Cuius Regio’s, MK] is too ambitious: each question on each stakeholder could be the research question to structure a Phd-thesis; every question demands a specific methodology.

Bregnsbo: Comparative research can spring from one or two similar questions, this facilitates the comparison. But at the same time a researcher needs the individual freedom to shape his or her research.

The workshop finished with some general discussion on practical issues of the final conference to take place 29-31 August 2013 in Arnhem, The Netherlands