

Cross border regions and territorial restructuring in Central Europe

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Abstract:

As the world's 'first postmodern political form', Europe provides an excellent laboratory for exploring how border regions offer new spaces of/for governance, cultural interaction, and economic development. With the backdrop of dynamic transboundary regionalization in Europe, this article has two goals: the first is to provide a critical review of some recent literature on territorial restructuring whose spatial ambit curiously omits transboundary space. Second, the article follows in the tradition of recent literature on regionalism in geography by exploring competing visions of the scales which are appropriate for organizing particular political and economic activities, in order to call for more engagement with transboundary regionalism. A case-study from Saxony (Germany) shows that the functional utilitarianism — and resulting short half life — of some European transboundary regions is a factor inhibiting the emergence of coherent regions. This notwithstanding, evidence also suggests that cross-border cooperation is becoming a key tool as localities and other territories strive to become 'global'. The tangled map of current regional initiatives within the European Union (EU) reflects the temporal emergence and disappearance of cross-border regions in response to changing political priorities and shifting macro-institutional funding sources. The article shows that transboundary regions play an important role in territorial restructuring in Central Europe, but not necessarily in the way EU regional policy intends.

Keywords: Eastern Europe | European Union Germany | political geography | transboundary regionalism | geography

Article:

Introduction

As the world's 'first postmodern political form' (Ruggie, 1993), Europe provides an excellent laboratory for exploring how border regions offer new spaces of/for governance, cultural interaction, and economic development. New transboundary spaces in Europe not only 'defy

assumptions of hierarchical scalar neatness' (Deas and Lord, 2006: 1847–8), but they also illustrate the potential for vastly altered political and economic geographies of Europe from the dominant forms of the last few hundred years. In geopolitical terms, transboundary regions very visibly call into question the cloth and stitching of the Westphalian quilt of political geography – national identity and boundaries. Yet boundaries and nationalism are still perhaps the most formidable obstacles to integration. It is at the EU's internal borders that the tension between the national and the supranational manifests itself most clearly. On the geo-economic front, meanwhile, transboundary regions create new 'imagined unit(s) of competition' (Deas and Lord, 2006: 1847–8). These are believed by some to be capable of competing under conditions of intense global competition by virtue of their 'perceived agglomerative optimization'.

Given their role in challenging extant, taken-for granted spaces of interaction and exchange, transboundary spaces have been the subject of discussion by geographers, political scientists, and other scholars. A number of recent studies have contributed to ongoing debates on emerging transboundary geographies, particularly with reference to their role in the broader context of European territorial restructuring (including, Deas and Lord, 2006; Kramsch, 2003; MacLeod, 1999; Mamadouh, 2001). There is also an ongoing discussion of multilevel governance in Europe that engages transboundary regionalism (e.g. Hooghe and Marks, 2003). An underlying theme in all of this literature is that these emerging geographies reflect, and provide key insights into, larger transformations of governance in Europe. Given the stress on existing governance and territorial structures caused by ramped-up global competition, it is unsurprising that many levels of government (local, substateregional, national and supranational) have taken a keen interest in capitalizing on such regions as sites fit for the attraction of inward investment. In sum, territorialism that crosses international borders is a force to be reckoned with by geographers and spatially minded social scientists.

Alongside lively inquiry into transboundary regions, there have been a number of scholars investigating territorial restructuring and scalar politics. Yet these two discussions often occur with minimal overlap. This is noteworthy because transboundary spaces along national borders in the EU offer some of the most thought-provoking shifts to existing territorial orderings and understandings. More to the point, there is also a politics of scale emerging in some transboundary regions which is far removed from that which the authors of EU regional policy presumably intended. With this basic premise outlined, two contentions are explored in this article at the nexus of political geography and economic development policy. The first is that transboundary regionalism offers insights into contemporary territorial restructuring in Europe, and yet this particular scale is curiously missing from many of the 'standard' works dealing with Central Europe, specifically Germany. Second, because of the messiness of EU regional policy, transboundary space is being mobilized by local and regional elites in the service of context-specific economic development goals with minimal heed to the stated goals of EU regional policy (described briefly later in the article). A thorough understanding of territorial restructuring

in Europe requires that we take into account scale mobilizations that are not circumscribed by existing national state boundaries.

In order to illustrate the central concern of this article, I have drawn upon several recent pieces that deal with how space is used in the context of coping with structural change. These contributions to the current state of territorial restructuring in Europe examine the rescaling of governance with particular focus on Germany, but they do not include transboundary regions. The article then looks at the nature of transboundary regionalism in Europe and presents empirical findings from a case-study along the eastern German border with Poland and the Czech Republic in order to make the case that there is something to be gained by integrating these spaces into analysis of a euro-politics of scale. State of the art: insights and assumptions on territorial restructuring in Europe

Much of the English-language discussion over territorial restructuring and scale politics in Central Europe has been dominated by a handful of authors. In this section, the insights and assumptions of three prominent scholars are examined: what we know from them and particularly some of the limitations of scope common to their work on spatial politics in this part of the world. All share a focus on Germany; two are primarily concerned with western Germany and the third primarily with eastern Germany. Each is concerned with the ways in which elites (including government and economic development officials) manipulate and change space towards policy ends. These spatial policies typically focus on engendering 'regional competitiveness'.

As the country with Europe's largest economy, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) has received much attention from geographically minded scholars interested in the spatial dynamics of economic and political transformation. The attention paid to the FRG in this realm is merited for a variety of reasons: the country has a strong federal political structure which lends itself to regionally innovative politics; it is located at the centre of an ever-widening EU and sees itself with a leadership role therein; and it straddles the former Iron Curtain, offering an internal dynamic which in turn mirrors some larger stresses on European cohesion. In short, the FRG has offered (and continues to offer) researchers a wealth of empirical and theoretical insights into contemporary processes of economic, political, and territorial restructuring. Undoubtedly, the relevance of these insights extends beyond that country's borders (e.g. Herrschel and Newman, 2000; Krätke, 2002b).

Neil Brenner and re-scaling the state

Over the past decade, Neil Brenner has been at the forefront of examining the 'scalar politics' of state territorial restructuring, and German case-studies form the bulk of his empirical material to date (Brenner, 1997; 2000; 2003). It is difficult to overstate Brenner's impact on contemporary debates on the nature of 'new state spaces' and scale (particularly what he terms 'scalar structuration'). Drawing on scholars such as Jessop (2002) and Swyngedouw (e.g. 1997),

Brenner is particularly concerned with explaining how the state, particularly the German state through its evolving spatial development policies during the 1980s and 1990s, actively pursued a neoliberal agenda. He documents policy interventions that were designed to make substate regions (i.e. metropolitan regions) globally competitive while at the same time undermining spatial redistribution as a *raison d'être* of the federal government (hence his use of the term 'rescaling'). While difficult to sum up briefly what is by now a substantial body of literature, his own formalized analytical framework 'Rescaled Competition State Regime' (RCSR) (Brenner, 2004) provides a nice synthesis of the role of space in the shifting terrain of governance in advanced industrial economies (e.g. Germany) during the post-Fordist era.

From Brenner's work we know that the regional scale is widely viewed as the 'key territorial arena for economic competitiveness while the European scale is increasingly seen as the "natural zone" for economic competition' (Brenner, 2000: 321).

He postulates a 'neoliberal offensive' that has occurred in Germany since unification in the early 1990s, and this offensive has taken a 'determinate geographical form.' Importantly, the spaces in question are 'subnational economic spaces' (Brenner, 2000: 321, emphasis added). Brenner is concerned with illuminating the role of the national scale, which in the dominant discourse is too often seen as a passive bystander to enlivened regions and global forces, but in fact is a driving force of changes. The essential point is that Brenner calls into question the conventional wisdom of which scale(s) of governance are orchestrating the fundamental changes in territorial organization said to be occurring in contemporary Europe. This argument, in turn, forms the conceptual backdrop for many other authors looking at similar processes in Germany and elsewhere (including the other two authors looked at in more detail below).

Brenner focuses on scalar structuration within Germany – he makes scale a methodological starting point – and his analysis begs for the integration of other key geographical variables which are in play in the places of his research. By considering scale without thoroughly integrating it with concepts such as region, place, and culture, the explanatory value of the 'scalar' is diminished. More to the point of this article, he is willing to limit the spatial ambit of his inquiry to the territorial confines of the German state, and by doing so he ignores a type of re-scaling – transboundary regions – that might offer missing insights into the nature of territorial restructuring not readily evident within the relatively uniform political and economic cultures of a single state. Brenner is fairly explicit in his concern with national-level government's role in all of this, but upon re-reading his work and the work of other geographers on similar topics, the lack of attention to transboundary space is reinforced. Consequently, this is not simply an issue of one particularly visible scholar limiting the scope of inquiry for practical methodological reasons, but rather suggests a pattern that has in turn been repeated by others who write about similar issues.

Experimental regionalism

To illustrate, let me take a recent piece by Enrico Gualini that draws heavily on Brenner's work and focuses on many of the same issues.¹ In the article (Gualini, 2004b), the author engages regulationist theory in order to make several claims about how globalization is causing a rearticulation of scales with the 'active engagement of the state' (p. 333). Gualini is particularly concerned with the 'coevolutionary relationship in the redefinition of scales and institutional rationales of territorial governance' (p. 330) and argues that research into scale and territorial governance must be integrated. Where better than Germany to undertake his research on the politics of scale, since it is the 'most perfectly federalized state in Europe' (p. 329) and since the governance structures of the Länder have little basis in historical-cultural regions (p. 334)?²

Gualini argues that the 'recomposition of political space' since the 1980s is most evident in economic development policies. Yet it is curious that, like Brenner, his focus is entirely on spatial development policy at the nexus of federal-Länder interaction, without any explanation offered as to why the FRG's highly unique tradition of spatial development (*Raumordnung und Raumplanung*: roughly, comprehensive territorial planning) offers more insight into the politics of scale than, say, the business acquisition and cluster development policies at the scale of Länder, or the myriad transboundary arrangements which have come into being, such as the Maas-Rhein Region (Euregio) along the Dutch- Belgian-German border (Kramsch, 2002).³ Presumably, the reader is to accept the continued dominance of the federal state in calling the shots with respect to economic development. This same author has written elsewhere about multilevel governance and the evolving role of the state in Europe, but his other work exhibits a similar blind spot for transboundary regions (Gualini, 2004a; 2006).

Perhaps most puzzling, in his efforts to identify new conceptions of state power in Europe, by using scalar restructuring as an analytical starting point, Gualini (much like Brenner) actually perpetuates the 'territorial trap' (Agnew, 1994) he purports to be challenging.⁴ Although sympathetic to the notion that scholars should not accept scales of governance (e.g. the federal state) as 'pre-given, quasi-natural sites for the reframing of territorial policies' (Gualini, 2004b: 333), it appears that by focusing his inquiry solely within the national borders of Germany, the author of this particular piece repeats, rather than corrects, the limited scope of many other scholars. Indeed, scale cannot simply be understood as a hierarchical nesting of levels, but geographers and spatially aware social scientists should require little prompting to begin factoring in unconventional scalar structures in their analyses – 'unusual regions' in the words of Deas and Lord (2006) – for how else can we escape the tyranny of the spatial nesting suggested by limiting our analysis to the confines of the national state?⁵ Metropolitan regions, for all the promise transmitted to them as sites where the contemporary dynamics of globalization are played out, are arguably but one of many levels in a nested hierarchy of national governance/economic structures, even if they may be deeply integrated into global economic processes.⁶

New regionalist discourse and development

One final example illustrates the point. Tassilo Herrschel has also written a number of pieces that resonate with Brenner and Gualini, though his empirical focus is on eastern Germany (Herrschel, 1998; 2005). In his most recent piece exploring regionalization in eastern Germany (Herrschel, 2007), he engages ‘new regionalist’ discourse and documents the existence of dual messages among regional elites in eastern Germany: one geared towards an internal audience (‘introverted’) and another targeted at potential investors from outside the region (‘extroverted’). Many of the insights in this and other articles by the same author, particularly with respect to the motivations of regionalist governance, are highly informative. Yet again the empirical focus is entirely circumscribed by the border around an ‘eastern Germany’. Particularly in the eastern part of the country, where my experience suggests that regional officials are near to obsessed with the challenges (and opportunities) posed by neighbouring lower-wage areas of Poland and the Czech Republic, this omission seems odd. The evidence among regional development agencies in Saxony, at least, suggests that the focus of region building and cooperation is anything but limited to the neat jurisdictional levels of the German state.

Table 1 Insights and assumptions of key scholarship on regionalization in Germany

Key insights of Brenner/Gualini/Herrschel

- a. Rescaling of territorial governance offers lens into spatial strategies for coping with structural changes
- b. Politics of scale in German case examples involves capitalizing both on existing formal governance structures as well as creation of ad hoc, informal, ‘loosely-coupled’ (Gualini, 2004b: 349) arrangements
- c. Neoliberal experimentation in new forms of governance involves quasi-unregulated spaces fit for global competition

Key assumptions of Brenner/Gualini/Herrschel

- a. Territorial restructuring most evident at sub-state scale in the case of Germany
- b. This type of regionalism circumscribed by national borders
- c. Spatial development policy under auspices of German state (Raumordnungspolitik) is the realm that offers the most insights into rescaling of territorial governance

By omitting the transboundary dimension of scalar restructuring as it relates to places in Germany, Brenner, Gualini, and Herrschel paint a selective account of the complex nature of contemporary rescaling. 7 In the case of Brenner’s work, not only is his starting point the ‘rearticulation’ of the national scale, but he sees that rearticulation happening primarily in urban city-regions (i.e. Euro-regions). Consequently, the omission of transboundary cooperation is

perhaps more understandable in his case, since transboundary metropolitan regions are few and far between along Germany's border.⁸ Gualini, by contrast, focuses explicitly on regions in a more traditional sense (e.g. Länder). He writes repeatedly about the 'Europeanization' of regions without once mentioning cross-border space except in a footnote to remark that cross-border and metropolitan regions were 'omitted for the sake of simplification' (Gualini, 2004b: 340). Indeed, such an omission simplifies, but my reading of all three scholars leads me to ask if transboundary politics were neglected because historical-cultural factors might unduly complicate political-economic interpretations of contemporary geography in this part of the world.⁹ The important question arising from the previous discussion of these three authors is whether transboundary regionalism might offer insights into the nature, motivations, or key elements of territorial restructuring that we do not necessarily gain by their more limited scope. Given Germany's central position within Europe, its 3,757 km external border (including Switzerland, a non-member of the EU), and relative enthusiasm for cross-border cooperation, there is much to suggest that the German state cannot be considered any more distinct from its context within a wider Europe.

What can be learned from transboundary regions

...But it is not my intention to expatiate with the same minuteness on the whole series of the Byzantine history. (Gibbon, 1878: xxviii)

In the Preface to Volume III of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Edward Gibbon, already apologetic over his *lebenswerk's* rapidly growing girth (and promising three more volumes), saw fit to assure his readers that he would cut corners somewhere, and in a calculated move he chose to short-shrift the Byzantine Empire. Among Gibbon's intended audience (the educated British aristocracy) at the time this volume was published (1780s), the successor regime to the Roman Empire in the East was synonymous with intriguingly complex rules and regulations. Increasingly, Byzantium is an appropriate analogy for contemporary European regional policy, and one has to wonder if its impenetrableness has kept transboundary regions from figuring as prominently in the literature on regions and restructuring as perhaps they should have.

With every macro-agenda of the EU (Lisbon being the current catchword), new priorities are injected into the mix and new pots of money become available for regional officials' consideration. With each new funding period (2007–13 being the current one), another set of layers are added to the map of possible regional initiatives, while some previous iterations of the map are more or less thrown on the scrap heap with seemingly little objection from those living there. In the case of transboundary cooperation, the central government of the member states has traditionally been viewed as omnipresent, suggesting the persistence of the national state-centrism of cross-border relations even in 'postmodern' Europe (e.g. Kahler, 1987; for more on the role of the national in re-scaling debates, see Mansfield, 2005). Although my analysis is sceptical of these assessments, certainly the difficulty in measuring national-level 'interference'

only adds to the sense of confusion when one attempts to make sense of the aspirations of crossborder cooperation.¹⁰ There is a palpable sense that until there is something ‘graspable,’ or until crossborder regions play a larger role in the quotidian lives of Europeans, these spaces will continue to be under the radar of scholars such as those I singled out above. However, in addition to being perhaps the most obvious sites of territorial restructuring in Europe today, there is also increasing evidence that cross-border regions are figuring into the economic development strategies of local and regional officials as a means of circumventing traditional governance structures and capitalizing on cross-border comparative advantage. Borders are viewed as economic opportunities as well as economic threats, particularly when those borders separate places with substantially different regulatory frameworks, labour market structures, etc. The bottom line is that transboundary regionalism deserves our attention not simply because it is happening, but because it reveals elements of territorial restructuring in Europe which are masked by a focus on just national or subnational scales.

History of regional policy

The beginnings of widespread cross-border arrangements are found in the shifting emphasis of European redistribution policies in the mid-1970s from sectoral supports (e.g. agriculture) to geographical supports (e.g. regional policy).¹¹ The goal of regional redistribution became an even higher priority during the 1980s as the single market gave rise to concerns that lower trade barriers could result in larger geographical disparities. In 1988, when then EC Commission President Jacques Delors proposed doubling funds for structural supports (‘Delors Package’) (Hama, 1996: 77), the European Community established a comprehensive regional policy according to three regional ‘objectives’. These included regions where the GDP was 75 percent or less of the EC average (e.g. Mezzogiorno), industrial restructuring regions (e.g. Ruhr Valley) and rural areas (e.g. Brittany) (Hall and van der Wee, 1995: 9).¹² The factors justifying cross-border regions during the 1970s and 1980s were congruent with the overall political goals of European integration: diminishing ruinous interstate competition; evening out economic inequalities between regions; fostering economic interdependence; and encouraging cultural exchange among the peoples of Europe.¹³ In summary, the explicit goals for creating new European regions arise from three interrelated factors, identified by Deas and Lord (2006: 1848) and others. They are: (a) lowering internal boundaries within the EU to improve the functioning of the single market; (b) improving competitiveness by encouraging coherent, viable regions; and (c) fostering social cohesion through economic interdependence and harmonization.

Transboundary regions and scale

Transboundary regions provide evidence that the focus on states as containers of economic and political activity is at least being challenged (see Jönsson et al., 2000) and perhaps even fundamentally undermined (Newhouse, 1997). Though there is clearly a range of interpretations on the degree to which this is occurring, Paasi is surely correct when he points out that contemporary efforts at regionalization within the context of the EU may today be only “regions

in discourses” and “regions on paper”, but they may some day turn into “regions as social practice” with very concrete effects on the daily lives of people’ (2002: 198–200).

A number of studies survey the history and motivations behind cross-border relations in the EU. Perkmann (2003: 156–7) distinguishes between two types of cross-border interaction: cross-border cooperation (CBC), defined as ‘a more or less institutionalized collaboration between contiguous subnational authorities across national borders,’ and cross-border region (CBR), which is ‘a bounded territorial unit composed of the territories of authorities participating in a CBC initiative’. He points out that an approach favoured by the Council of Europe in the early years of European integration whereby CBRs would have had formal legal status as administrative regions was sacrificed in favour of voluntary cooperation with strong economic undertones. The 1990s saw a sharp rise in CBRs, and along with it the emergence of discussions in geography on ‘new regionalism’ (MacLeod, 2001) and ‘new regional geography’ (Paasi, 1999). Clearly governance plays a key role in these cross-border arrangements. A useful framework for understanding differences in the types of governance in cross-border cooperation is provided by Blatter (2004). Building on Hooghe and Marks (2003) and Castells (1996), Blatter distinguishes between ‘spaces of place’ (territorially based governance) and ‘spaces of flows’ (functional governance involving networks of governance institutions – government and civil – working together thematically on issues of mutual interest, rather than strictly based on their physical proximity). Transboundary regions, at first glance, may appear to be purely the former, but the latter also play a substantial role.

There is some degree of agreement that the adoption of more neoliberal policies during the past two decades has begun to change the relative strength of, on the one hand, political goals in line with the idealistic rationales of European integration (mentioned earlier), and on the other hand the more utilitarian goal of economic success for the EU in the aggregate (Agnew, 2001). Certainly the pursuit of elusive ‘competitiveness’ has sharpened the dynamic tension between the socio-cultural agendas of region-building and the political-economic, and parsing out the relative importance of these two broad categories represents a key area for research on this front. Authors such as Herrschel (2001: 154) believe that Europe’s regions represent key sites for rescaling governance and constructing territorial entities for economic development purposes. Regions seen as sites for new spaces of economic competitiveness in turn facilitate the emergence of a ‘winners’ or ‘losers’ dynamic with respect to regional development (Paasi, 2002: 198). In this more functional sense (that of purely economic development), Herrschel writes that:

Regions are also operating increasingly as entities of territorial marketing, seeking to portray specific images and ‘profiles’ to appeal to envisaged western investors, and as containers of indigenous strengths both as competitive advantage and the basis of inherent development potential (Herrschel, 2001: 160).

Given Brenner’s reinsertion of the national scale into debates over territorial restructuring, it makes sense to ask what role national states play in transboundary politics. Kennard (2003: 204),

citing Habermas's thesis that national governments are 'entangled in transnational networks', believes that European national governments in fact depend on regional policy for development-related outcomes, with regions even being central to state strategies for economic development in peripheral areas. Here, though, one must look on a case-by-case basis: Central and Eastern European national governments tend to be heavily involved in all aspects of regional policy making (particularly Poland), whereas the German state has a more hands-off attitude towards the Länder in light of its highly federal system. This has been alluded to by Perkmann (2003) in what he refers to as 'the German factor': Perkmann found that 85 percent of all cross-border initiatives in Europe with 'high intensity' relations involved a German partner. In this context, however, it is important to point out that the 'success' of such initiatives on the eastern border of Germany is much more mixed than on the western border.

Deas and Lord (2006) isolate several key characteristics of European regional policies, which can assist our understanding of the challenges of establishing coherent regions. The following three categories also offer potential ways in which transboundary space might be mobilized by local and regional elites for their own purposes. Using somewhat different terms, they point to these aspects of regionalism in Europe:

- **Silly string boundaries:** rather than neat divisions of European space which transcend existing national borders where appropriate (on the basis of coherent economic regions, unifying physical geographical characteristics, ethnocultural coherence, etc.), the map of European regions looks more like a hodgepodge of overlapping collaborative initiatives serving specific, functional ends. There is often little regard for nestedness or complementarity among such initiatives (in stark contrast to the neatly nested NUTS regions, which are delimited for statistical collection purposes).¹⁴ When mapped, European regional initiatives' boundaries resemble a children's recreation room following a particularly vigorous exchange of multicoloured silly string at a birthday party.
- **Institutional impermanence:** Alongside such regions' curious delimitations, there is the fleeting nature of many of these spaces, a reflection partly of the mechanisms in place at the European level. When local and regional officials apply for funding to support the often minimal institutional architecture of a particular transboundary region, there is usually a fixed term conforming to some subset of the six-year budget periods of the EU. Consequently, many existing regions are immature in age, and there is little guarantee they will exist in the future.
- **Arbitrariness:** The existence of regions is often a function of an active, entrepreneurial local or regional administration, helping to explain why such regions often fail to conform to coherent social, cultural, economic, physical spaces. The appearance can seem 'forced' and 'manufactured' (Deas and Lord, 2006: 1856). This also helps explain the 'experimental' nature of regions, and the fact that they exist more in the rhetoric of enthusiastic local boosters than in the minds of area residents.

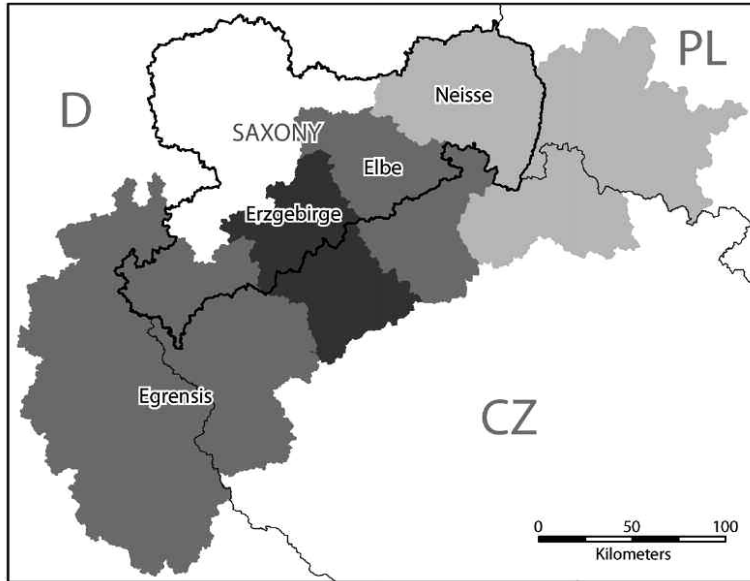


Figure 1 Map of ‘traditional’ Euro-regions along the Saxon–Czech–Polish border (Interreg III-A)

These three unflattering assessments might suggest at first glance that such spaces are at best tenuous, ephemeral constructs. Why, indeed, should we take this particular scale seriously given its messiness? The answer is a classic scale problem: to find the relevance of transboundary space for territorial restructuring in Europe one must look in the places themselves, not in Brussels or national capitals. And even though the state of research on transboundary regions in Europe has advanced since Perkmann (2003) remarked that there were more research agendas and normative prescriptions than analysis and conclusions,¹⁵ there is still much room left to engage transboundary space with a vigour comparable to other types of spaces. There is still not a satisfactory integration of transboundary regionalism into wider debates over territorial restructuring in Europe.

Where research into transboundary regionalism might take us

The relevance of transboundary regions to processes of territorial restructuring becomes visible while observing attempts by local and regional elites to ‘go global’. My own research took place in Saxony (Germany), where I spent four months during 2006 shadowing officials in a regional economic development agency and another two months in the State Chancellery of Saxony working with crossborder issues. In addition to interviews with officials in Saxony and the Czech Republic, I also examined a variety of official documents and newspaper clippings related to cross-border cooperation initiatives along Saxony’s international border. This research in the field led me to begin to question some of the existing insights into territorial restructuring. Foremost, it became evident to me that transboundary regionalism both complements and challenges some of the ways in which territorial restructuring (particularly centred on the German case) is understood. Rather than subnational scalar politics (of the sorts described by

Brenner, Gualini, and Herrschel) being entirely separable from crossborder politics, they are in fact slightly altered sides of the same coin.

An underlying assumption of the literature I have looked at earlier in this piece is that the national scale – e.g. federal spatial policies – has not been given its due credit by scholars, owing to an overriding obsession with cities, regions and, above all, global scales. The currency of many studies of globalization had been, in other words, regions bypassing the traditional mediating scale of the national state (e.g. Ohmae, 1995). In highlighting overzealous accounts of autonomous subnational units, these and other authors still overlook what I found to be a more complicated picture. In this case, a messy, complicated EU regional policy (but one with plenty of funds available for disbursement) was seen as an avenue by local and regional authorities for pursuing aggressive strategies of internationalization. The only real condition on receiving EU monies, of course, was that there had to be some cooperative element.

In the case of Saxony, enthusiasm for cooperation with Poland and the Czech Republic is motivated by a sense of opportunity and ‘this is where our future is’, but also partly by a sense of admiration and nervousness. When a factory worker in Chemnitz looks eastward towards Poland – where wages are much lower than what she is earning for a similar job, and where workers demand far less of management – the writing is on the wall. There is a fairly widespread perception among Germans in the state of Saxony that Poles and Czechs – especially those just the other side of the border – have more of the same qualities they associate with themselves such as work ethic, job skills, and dependability than do people from further to the East in Belarus or Bulgaria. In eastern Germany, this fictional worker’s factory in Chemnitz is most likely supported by a range of government subsidies that fall under the rubric ‘fixing the East’ (Aufbau Ost). Because those subsidies will almost certainly expire one day (2019 being the target year), the fact that the EU already includes Poland and the Czech Republic invokes a response of ‘if you can’t beat them, join them’ among those charged with economic development.

Interreg III and ephemeral regionalism

One particular regional cooperation arrangement merits further mention. 3-CIP (3 Countries Innovation Push) was funded during the 2004–06 EU funding cycle through Interreg III-C,16 and most people (even in the region itself) will not have heard of it (see also Johnson, 2008). But initiatives such as this one are playing a role in governance strategies, particularly in economic development, in spite of their lack of public profile.

Leaders in the relevant regions have agreed in principle to continue the project even in the absence of EU monies, though the lack of funding from Brussels presents obstacles in terms of keeping the institutional supports in place (e.g. office space and staff, marketing, etc.). The vision of this transboundary space, linking parts of eastern Germany, western Poland and the northern Czech Republic, as described in their common declaration of purpose is threefold:

1. We are convinced that the EU enlargement in 2004 has provided an additional and decisive stimulus for the development of the neighbouring regions in the triangle between Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland into a common region of growth and prosperity. It is our firm intention to give our long-term and ambitious support to this development and take advantage of all opportunities of cross-border cooperation.
2. Our joint efforts are directed towards representing the region as an attractive economic area in Europe and worldwide.
3. A new idea that sets new cooperation standards shall be realized: the joint profiling, presentation and marketing of our Central European economic area. (paraphrased from 3-CIP Steering Group, 2005)

My interviews in Saxony and Usti suggest that institutional frictions exist within 3-CIP (Poland's more centralized political structure, for example, means that Polish representatives must often consult with Warsaw before making significant decisions). In observing trilateral meetings of 3-CIP in Germany and the Czech Republic, and in conversations with various officials, it was clear that there were frustrations on all sides, revolving in part around the cultural differences alluded to earlier, but also because of different levels of expectations concerning the project: generally, the German side wanted more cooperation than they were receiving in presenting the region to the outside as a single, unified location fit for global investment, while the Czech and Polish sides were concerned that the German side was acting in its own self-interest.

In spite of frictions, though, the overall sense of interconnections and a shared economic fate across borders appears to have engendered a functioning, if not flourishing, transboundary space. The major newspaper in Saxony has blessed the project by covering the aspirations of the region with the headline: 'Region aspires to Central European "tiger region"'.¹⁷ Regional officials' reactions, meanwhile, range from enthusiasm to ambivalence about the levels of cooperation and effectiveness. A government official in Saxony said:

Cooperation with the Czech Republic functions very well, whereas unfortunately with the Polish side there are often delays, and difficulties because the administration is much too complicatedly constructed. The central level and the regional level are quite intermixed, and even within the Polish side there are conflicts between central and regional, so that the implementation of programmes is often problematic. (Interview with official in State Chancellery of Saxony, March 2007)

The Czech responses are more measured than those on the German side:

I would say [our cooperation] isn't ideal, but it also isn't problematic. After 1990, there was a boom when people thought transboundary cooperation could save us. Everyone said, 'we work together with the Saxons, or the Czechs,' but I think after 2000, it let off a

bit. The Germans were more cautious, then people said it didn't interest us anymore. Now, the Saxons are interested in this again because the [German] subsidies [for east Germany] are getting less and less, and because the Czech side now receives subsidies [from the EU], the Saxons see the possibilities of cooperation again. (Interview with Euroregio official, Usti, CZ, March 2007).

Such cross-border cooperation tells us something about scales of exchange and interaction. Local and regional officials in this border area have become thoroughly international in their thinking and orientation, and they have become skilled at deploying funds from the EU and other sources in order to pursue their own localized strategies for making the region competitive under harsh global conditions. Hence, the value in looking beyond existing territorial structures to the geographies of 'unusual regions' becomes apparent on the ground. Contrary to a Brennerian image of state power being rechannelled through lower levels of governance, my research suggests that the agency lies as much at those lower levels of governance themselves. In the German context, certainly, the 'national' project of fixing the East is an always-present backdrop to regional officials' decisions regarding cross-border initiatives. But unlike the conventional hierarchies of the federal state, looking across international boundaries allows regions to break out, be innovative and calculating, all with minimal input and imprint by, in this case, Berlin.

As a methodological aside, it is important to point out the seemingly obvious point that the appropriate entry-point into understanding transboundary regions and their relevance to territorial restructuring is not in Brussels or Strasbourg where the general guidelines for regional policy are set, but rather in the institutions which implement 'regions'. These include local and state governments, economic development agencies, and NGOs. EU documentation, while offering important insights into the macro-goals of regional policy and cross-border regionalism, has limited explanatory value for understanding how and why regionalism is implemented in the field, particularly since the EU has virtually no way of compelling regionalism other than financial incentives. Thus the challenge, methodologically speaking, comes in identifying the appropriate institutional level responsible for putting regions into practice and taking the time to gather information on the ground. Because such regions are often located along borders which also represent stark linguistic divides, this presents an immediate research complication. This may help to explain why this particular scale and the interesting politics happening there have not yet risen to the top of scholarly inquiry into territorial restructuring in Central Europe.

Conclusion

If Jönsson et al. (2000) are correct when they write that regions are created by social processes which result in 'shared ways of thinking', then regionalism built upon highly uneven engagement (some might say unidirectional) is inherently problematic. Moreover, it would be incorrect to assume that regionalism occurring with the financial blessing of the EU is simply the regional scale (transboundary place) being activated by another scale (EU) to create success stories at yet another scale (global). Such a narrative, which is fairly typical in the literature on European

regionalization, paints a neater picture than my own research supports. In fact, regionalization in this part of the EU is not only mediated, but also actively coopted by local and regional actors for their own purposes – ones not always in line with the stated goals of regional policy (breaking down borders, fostering cultural integration, etc.).

There is much to be gained by incorporating transboundary regionalism into studies of territorial politics in Europe. Evidence from eastern Germany suggests that the cross-border scale is critical in our attempts to understand how a given scale is constructed to a given (economic) end. As John Agnew (1997) has pointed out, political and economic change often occasions competing visions of the scales that are appropriate for organizing particular political and economic activities. The current process of querying space in Germany to identify those scales that are best-suited for the globalized economy offers insights into the socially constructed nature of this particular scale. More broadly, such inquiry also helps illuminate the ways in which scalar lenses help us to understand the geographical aspects (and consequences) of strategies for coping with structural changes.

At the same time, this is by no means a conclusive analysis, and it may in fact raise more questions than it answers. One obvious concern emerging from it is how successful in the long term such region-building can possibly be, and to what degree transboundary spaces represent a challenge to the extant political framework of national states. This is indeed an important question, but one we are ill-equipped to answer given our limited empirical basis. Could these new European regions in future become a ‘new scalar axis which could offset the momentum characteristic of changes in spatial governance at other scales’, as suggested by Deas and Lord? They continue:

Even if the assumption that such spaces really are functioning, integrated economic entities is largely illusory and rooted in nothing more than policy-maker aspiration, the existence of these new regions, and the substance of the policy approaches they embody, does provide a further indication of organic desires from policy and business elites for politico-institutional territories which relate to their views of the governance and regulation of economic space at different scales, from the EU as a whole down to more disaggregated regions. (Deas and Lord, 2006: 1865)

What is clear is that national boundaries are at the very least being called into question by the European project, but whether European regionalism is complicit in returning the continent to a pre-Westphalian political geography of medieval-style patchwork jurisdictions and fluid boundaries, overlaid with networked linkages, is very much up for debate (Ruggie, 1993; Zielonka, 2006).

If it is crucial to engage with transboundary regionalism in our assessments of territorial restructuring in Europe, then it follows that scale is an important methodological tool for understanding these processes. Without employing scalar analysis, particularly a

conceptualization of scale that emphasizes its constructed, produced and political natures, transboundary space might be viewed simply as discrete territorial constructs alongside many others. But as I have argued here, transboundary regionalism is in fact deeply imbricated with territorial restructuring strategies occurring within states in Europe. In sum, the scalar politics are so transient, so fixed to the short-term wants of political and economic decision making, that what is required is a more robust and sophisticated conceptualization of scale, and emphatically not its abandonment as a concept at our disposal (Leitner and Miller, 2007; Marston et al., 2005).

My purpose here is not to put the transboundary scale at the ‘top of the list’ of scales where territorial restructuring is occurring, nor is it to suggest that the national scale is unimportant to neoliberal restructuring. Rather, my concern is that only by integrating analyses of different scales can we arrive at a thorough understanding of what makes Europe tick. Olivier Kramsch (2002: 170) argued in a recent article that Europe’s contemporary political and economic landscape finds itself in a:

... heady and magical time of scalar movement and flux, characterized in part by a transition from the space of relatively fixed forms of nationally oriented, centrally planned strategies of policy intervention to those of fluid, network-based forms of decision-making operating above, below and within the cracks of interstate hierarchies and markets.

Transboundary space forms one important part of the puzzle of spatial ‘queries’ employed by local and regional elites in response to globalizing trends. Regional and substate actors view their cross-border regions as a means of ‘liberating’ themselves from the national scale as they attempt to go global. More attention to this phenomenon is merited in our efforts to understand the changing spaces in Europe.

Notes

1 It would be illogical and highly unfair to hold one author accountable for the arguments of another scholar. Instead, I am drawing attention to an example of the reification of Brenner’s methodological and theoretical approaches by other scholars.

2 This last claim has been made not only by Gualini, but also by Benz (1998). As regards the historical-cultural bases of German Länder, I would caution that one must distinguish between on the one hand North Rhine-Westphalia and Baden-Württemberg (results of postwar fusions), and on the other hand Bavaria and Saxony where little doubt can exist of their cultural-historical bases. Bavaria’s postwar and Saxony’s post-Cold War borders are not perfect reflections of earlier iterations, but their cores bear continuity.

3 Of course, no article can address all complexities associated with a particular case-study. Yet how are we to understand spatial redistribution in Germany without mentioning, for example, the

historical context in which this tradition developed, i.e. thwarting political sympathies for communism found just over the border?

4 He writes ‘multi-level governance research [is] largely entangled in [the] territorial trap’ (Gualini, 2004b: 331).

5 The blind spot identified here is complicated by yet another empirical limitation, understandable as it is lamentable, in both Gualini’s and Brenner’s analyses of FRG: the elephant in the living room representing the former East Germany. I would argue that the New Federal States (die neuen Bundesländer) would offer both supporting evidence for their theses as well as important complications. Whereas Gualini mentions the East briefly (2004b: 334), Brenner seems to ignore this crucial piece of the puzzle altogether, as if reunification were not crucial in understanding the contemporary dynamics of any state policy of the past two decades in Germany.

6 When it comes to city-regions in Germany, the borderbusting potential of European integration seems to be highly skewed towards the networked integration of cities rather than actual territorial integration. For more on the tension between territorial and networked integration in contemporary Europe, see Jönsson et al. (2000)

7 To emphasize, there are many excellent studies of crossborder regions. My point concerns a particular body of research into scalar restructuring that one would expect to engage such regions but does not.

8 I am grateful to one reviewer for the important point that smaller-scale cooperative arrangements, especially so-called Euro-regions, are often the sites of meaningful cooperation on issues such as regional marketing.

9 As one reviewer points out, many Poles and Czechs, in particularly those of older generations, are concerned about increasing German influence in regions that were once German-speaking. It does not take an expert on Central European history to know that historical and cultural geography matter, and they matter not least because of relatively recent histories of hegemony and war in the region.

10 Here I must concede my ‘outsider’ status as a non- European. I believe my observations would be confirmed on any Main Street throughout the EU.

11 The first official transboundary arrangement came much earlier: 1958 along the German–Dutch border between Enschede (Netherlands) and Gronau (Germany) (Perkmann, 2003: 154).

12 With subsequent changes in emphasis and enlargements of the EU, the details of current regional policy differ substantially compared with those of 1988, but the general goals remain the same.

13 Solidarity within the European Union is rooted in, as argued by Berezin, stronger labour orientations as well as ‘paternal aristocratic and bourgeois legacies’ (2003: 22–4). Compared with the United States, Europe has always had ‘a more finely honed sense of the social’, and, as John Agnew writes, a major piece of the ‘European project’ has been to ‘reorganiz[e] uneven development from a national to a Europe-wide scale’ (Agnew, 2001: 34).

14 This is not to suggest that NUTS are ideal geographical representations of coherent, consistent, ideally comparable geographies (see Casellas and Galley, 1999).

15 Good examples of studies of cross-border regions include Blatter, 2004; Fall and Egerer, 2004; Kaplan and Hakli, 2002; Kepka and Murphy, 2002; Kramsch and Hooper, 2004; Krätke, 2002a; Perkmann, 2003.

16 In the current funding framework, the name Interreg III-C has been replaced by the term ‘Territorial Cooperative objective’.

17 ‘Konferenz: Region soll mitteleuropäische “Tigerregion” werden’, Sächsische Zeitung (30 June 2006).

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