

Title: Hard work with soft spaces (and vice versa): problematizing the transforming planning spaces

Names and institutional affiliations of the authors: 1) Kaj Zimmerbauer. Geography research unit, University of Oulu, Finland. 2) Anssi Paasi. Geography research unit, University of Oulu, Finland.

Corresponding author: Kaj Zimmerbauer. Geography research unit. P.O. Box 3000. Fi-90014, University of Oulu, Finland. E-mail: kaj.zimmerbauer@oulu.fi.

FINAL DRAFT

Hard work with soft spaces (and vice versa): problematizing the transforming planning spaces

Abstract

This article studies spaces and spatial imageries in planning from two viewpoints. First, it discusses how contemporary planning paradigms contribute to a process that can be labelled the 'softening of hard spaces'. This means that typically old, well-established (planning) spaces with relatively hard administrative borders become redefined and treated in planning practice as soft entities with fuzzier or more porous borders. Second, it discusses how new soft spaces – such as gateways, new cross-border supranational spaces and ad hoc regional spaces – tend to simultaneously harden through intensifying institutional practices and discourses, as well as because of the need to define what is included and excluded in such new spatial structures/networks. These two processes, the softening of hard spaces and the hardening of soft spaces, are then scrutinized in tandem, and a conceptualization of intermediary hybrid planning spaces is proposed. This conceptual opening, labelled 'penumbral' space/border, is then examined. The explanatory value of these arguments is demonstrated by comparing the transformation of Northern Ostrobothnia, an old, well-established region in Finland, and the mobilization of Bothnian Arc, a new soft space stretching across the Swedish-Finnish border.

Keywords: hard space, soft space, borders, planning, penumbral space

1. Introduction

Contemporary strategic planning literature and theories as well as the widespread understanding of the polymorphic nature of social spaces (Jessop et al. 2008) have pointed to the significance of ‘soft spaces’ and ‘fuzzy borders’ in region-building processes (Allmendinger & Haughton 2009; Metzger & Schmitt 2012; Haughton et al. 2013; Walsh et al. 2015; Paasi and Zimmerbauer 2016; Hincks, Deas & Haughton 2017; Purkarthofer 2018). New planning spaces are frequently seen as ‘relational’, though not inherently being opposed to ‘territorial’, but rather as being essentially interlinked. Regions are thus understood as fluid entities in the globalized and networked economy where spatial divisions of labour are constantly shifting (Davoudi & Strange 2009; Healey 2007). Scholars suggest that these new viewpoints resonate with the competition-enhancing principles of neoliberalism and globalization (cf. Haughton et al. 2013) and that they feed the ongoing tendencies in spatial restructuring.

Against this dynamic yet also somewhat chaotic background, it is not surprising that much of ongoing planning and regional research has focused on new emerging regional spaces, and given the current focus on planning policies and agendas, that new interest has focused on porous and fuzzy borders and on soft and relational spaces (see e.g. Allmendinger et al. 2015). These ideas, concepts and ideologies have circulated widely across scales between different academic and administrative institutions. This *policy transfer* (see Dolowitz & Marsh 1996) has been both a spatial and an institutional phenomenon: the diffusion of planning concepts and practices has materialized not just by virtue of the fact that some concept or practice is transferred from one place to another, but also in that institutions and ideas of appropriate spatial structures are ‘copied’ from one place to another.

Whereas soft spaces, fuzzy borders and relational approaches are currently strongly present in planning literature, less emphasis has been put on the multiplicity of spaces in planning. Emphasis on newly conceived spaces, ‘regions-in-becoming’ (Metzger 2013) or regions in the making, that is, on spatial entities that are institutionalizing (Zimmerbauer 2013), has given rise to a somewhat biased understanding that contemporary planning is about making new ‘flexible’ spaces that undermine established territorially bounded spatial entities. Similarly, the relevant and useful spaces in strategic planning are increasingly seen to be primarily soft, although scholars usually recognize that they may ‘harden’ as a result of certain ‘performative’ processes (cf. Metzger & Schmitt 2012). Good examples of such spaces are the newly conceived supra-state regions that have resulted largely from the policies of the European Union and its regional development initiatives such as Interreg or European Neighbourhood Policy. The Baltic Sea Region (Metzger & Schmitt 2012), the Northern Way (Allmendinger & Haughton 2010) and the Atlantic Gateway (Haughton & Allmendinger 2015; Deas, Haughton & Hincks 2015) are fitting illustrations of mobilized soft spaces that have gradually ‘hardened’ through planning and governance.

We argue that approaching performativity solely from the perspective of ‘solidifying’ spaces is an overly narrow perspective. While it appropriately underlines the continuous renegotiations inherent in reshaping territories, it also implicitly suggests that this process is unidirectional – moving from soft to hard – by virtue of ‘speech acts’ and various other performative processes that institutionalize social spaces and demarcate the networks that inhabit these vague spaces. More emphasis is needed on how and why hard spaces simultaneously become softened, and on what the outcome of these parallel processes is.

2. The aims of the article

Following from the above observations, our key aim is not to study *merely* how new soft spaces of planning/governance emerge or harden. Instead, we will also scrutinize how existing hard spaces simultaneously soften. The focus is thus on two ostensibly different yet actually deeply intertwined processes. Figure 1 displays our key research question: what kind of spaces and spatial structures follow from simultaneous hardening and softening processes? A wider task is to overcome the predominant dualism between planning spaces as either ‘hard’ or ‘soft’, and to analyse how such spaces become fused and may lead to the rise of ‘penumbral’ spaces (Paasi & Zimmerbauer 2016). Here, penumbral spaces are understood as ‘half shadow’, that is, contextual, delineated by multilayered borders, with some layers becoming at times more ‘solidified’ or ‘blurred’ than others. Although used here as an analytical point of departure, our aim is to move beyond the understanding of (planning) spaces as either hard or soft.

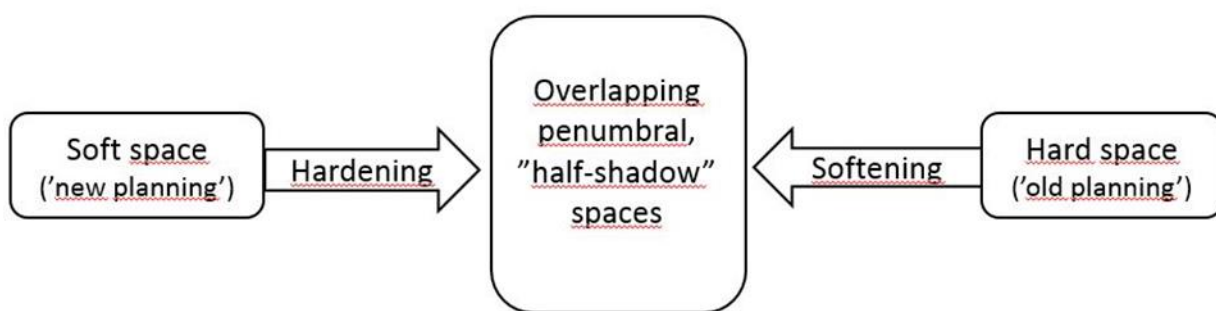


Figure 1. Research scheme

We have three justifications for this approach. First, we wish to highlight how strategic planning is not only about sketching new (soft) regions on the map, but also about deploying new planning vocabularies and practices within old, institutionalized regions (cf. Jones & Paasi 2013). Not all regional borders are as fuzzy as relational thinking often depicts them to be (Allen et al. 1998); alongside these are more clear-cut and hard borders as well, which, nevertheless, are susceptible to contemporary planning paradigms (Morgan 2007). Especially formal land-use planning tends to operate with harder, bounded spaces, instead of embracing only relational planning ideas (Healey 2007). Correspondingly, it is critical to scrutinize what actually happens when the (hard) borders of old regions become treated with new soft planning idea(l)s. Similar planning practices do not always have parallel effects on all regions. Practicing soft planning in hard regions may be challenging because borders continue to have an impact. In particular, questions of legitimate (territorial) authority and eligibility within the new spaces quickly arise.

Second, there is a need to problematize the relationship between soft and relational spaces. While they are clearly interconnected, we should ask whether the relational approach in planning invariably leads to soft spaces and fuzzy borders, or whether relationality in fact leads to an increased interconnectedness of territorially defined, bounded spaces. Thus, it would be the connections and networks, not the borders (whether fuzzy or not), that actually matter and govern ‘softness’ or the lack thereof.

Third, and perhaps most notably, we have to better understand whether there is a tendency for soft and hard spaces to transmute towards each other in planning processes, that is, when soft spaces are mobilized towards hardening (to resemble old, harder regions) simultaneously as hard spaces become softened (as a result of prevailing relational planning ethos and practices). Since we understand regions as social

processes, with a beginning and an end, we argue that such transformation can take place in both directions. Although it is possible for soft spaces to disappear altogether and for hard regions to become even harder (for example, through increased immigration control and even through concrete border walls), in planning it is perhaps more common that soft and hard spaces gradually converge or ‘slide’ towards each other. It is thus useful to ask through which mechanisms and processes this phenomenon actually occurs, and what the outcomes of these processes are in terms of spatial transformation. Here, we touch upon some key questions regarding the institutionalization and deinstitutionalization of planning spaces and regions (Paasi 1991; Heley 2013; Paasi & Metzger 2017). Spatial manifestations, performativity and ‘framing’ on one hand, and inertia and stickiness of regions on the other, are significant when regions are approached from this angle.

To summarize, our objective resonates with the eternal task, recognized by Healey and Underwood (1978, p. 79) already in the 1970s, that is, to investigate ‘the way planners in practice use and relate to theories and concepts’. Hence, we try to both clarify the relations between key spatial concepts and – through an empirical analysis – will propose some refinement to current conceptual approaches. While we fully acknowledge that the spatial aspect is only one of several characteristics in planning (Table 1 introducing some others), it is our primary focus here. Spaces in planning become discussed through different spatial idea(l)s and imaginaries, based on the distinction between hard and emerging soft spaces, where the former is traditionally approached as the default spatial idea.

3. Research areas and materials

As empirical examples we will scrutinize two different but partly overlapping regional cases. The first is the province of Northern Ostrobothnia in Finland, an old region that has become institutionalized over a long historical period and has received substantial regional planning and development responsibilities after Finland became a member of the EU in 1995. The second case is Bothnian Arc, a new region that largely owes its existence to the Europeanization of Finnish planning and its emphasis on supranational integration. While Northern Ostrobothnia exemplifies the softening of hard spaces and the traditional approach on planning and planning spaces, Bothnian Arc is a fitting example of a soft space that is ‘hardening’ (becoming institutionalized) but which may also fade away (deinstitutionalize) if the policy space and interests of the respective region-builders were to change (see Allmendinger, Chilla & Sielker 2014). Bothnian Arc enables us to parse different types of regions and to develop further the idea of ‘penumbral’ borders (and regions) proposed by Paasi and Zimmerbauer (2016). Bothnian Arc is studied in relation to North Ostrobothnia to demonstrate how different spaces become (re)framed, and how their transformation appears in planning documents and in planners’ work. Our empirical data consists of documents prepared by planning and development organizations, and of seven thematic interviews, conducted between 11 September and 4 October 2018 in Finland and Sweden. The interviewees were key regional advocates that work within regional planning and development in Bothnian Arc’s member municipalities and in the Regional Council of Northern Ostrobothnia. Four interviews focused primarily on Bothnian Arc and three on Northern Ostrobothnia, although in most interviews both regions were discussed. All but one of the interviews were recorded and fully transcribed.

In the next section, we discuss the key concepts in relation to spatial planning and take a brief look at the idea of policy transfer and the depolitization of planning. These are relevant for understanding the changing planning paradigms and how planning spaces transform. The case study regions are then examined through the prism of these conceptual horizons. By problematizing borders we refine the key

arguments on soft planning and how borders relate to both old and new regions. In the concluding section, we reflect on the idea of penumbral planning spaces that are in-between hard and soft.

4. Conceptual framework

Hard and soft space are not new terms in academia: both have been used occasionally in urban design and architecture research (Trancik 1986). Soft space also belongs to the vocabulary of mathematical research on topological spaces (e.g. Shabir & Naz 2011). In current planning literature, soft spaces and fuzzy borders owe their popularity to a policy impetus to 'break away from the shackles of pre-existing working patterns which might be variously held to be slow, bureaucratic, or not reflecting the real geographies of problems and opportunities' (Allmendinger & Haughton 2009, p. 619).

In a nutshell, hard spaces refer to bounded administrative entities, whereas soft spaces are typically open functional areas. Because of their fuzziness, soft spaces are thought to better address 'real-world' challenges. This is engendered through their flexibility, something that hard spaces with clear-cut borders purportedly lack (Purkarthofer 2018). Local or supranational cross-border regions, often invented ad hoc, are examples of a new soft space imagination (Metzger & Schmitt 2012), but similar idea(l)s are also associated with sub-regional or greenbelt areas (Thomas & Littlewood 2010; Olesen 2012; Petterson & Frisk 2016).

Faludi (2010) has reflected on soft spaces in the context of European planning, proposing that soft spaces require soft planning. Accordingly, Walsh et al. (2015) write that 'soft' can refer to both the type of planning and the type of spaces (cf. Purkarthofer 2018). However, it is not clear if soft governance or planning is by default a necessary condition for soft spaces. There is, at least potentially, a causal relation between soft governance/planning and soft spaces, but the relation is not straightforward, and there can be cases where formal territorial planning produces soft spaces, and/or where soft modes of governance and planning create formal administrative (territorial) spaces. Relatedly, all cases of informal spatial governance may not involve soft spaces. Moreover, as Walsh et al. (2015) observe, soft spaces are often temporal and historically contingent. They are frequently constructed for a single purpose, and may disappear when the goals of a planning process have been achieved. Yet, they can also be temporal because they have a tendency to turn into harder spaces or solidify via various social and discursive practices (Metzger & Schmitt 2012).

Walsh et al. (2015) suggest that 'the concept of soft spaces, as introduced by Allmendinger and Haughton, is directly associated with a relational perspective on social-spatial relations' (p. 5). This is only partially true. While intertwined in planning practices, the relational perspective is more appropriate for the analysis of *relations between socio-spatial entities*; soft spaces on the other hand refer to certain *types of spaces*, typically those with contextual/unclear borders. Accordingly, the shift towards relational understandings of space does not always mean that fuzziness and softness increase; instead this shift may just refer to essentially connected and interrelated (territorial) spaces becoming increasingly articulated in relation to each other.

While the fundamental idea of soft planning is *not* to institutionalize new territorial spaces, even softer, more fuzzily bounded ones, soft planning doubtless has a degree of territory-effect. As Painter (2010) notes, territory can be best understood as the effect of networked relations (p. 1093). Territories are thus effects of both human and nonhuman actor networks (Metzger 2013). Furthermore, although territories can be porous or fluctuating, they are typically bounded social spaces, 'demarcated by clear boundaries

rather than amorphous frontiers' (Painter 2010 p. 1094). Thus, although territories have a degree of inertia and stickiness, they are never complete or fixed, but become (de/re)territorialized as a result of networked relations, generated by (and depending on) the territory-effect. This 'process of performativity' is ultimately behind the hardening of soft spaces.

The transformation of planning 'modes' and planning spaces can be explained by the increasing motivations to look beyond administrative boundaries. These motivations are connected to the ideas of depoliticization and geoeconomization. As Olesen and Richardson (2011) state: 'fuzzy spatial representations become an effective means to camouflage spatial politics and depoliticize strategic spatial planning processes'. The ulterior aim of depoliticized planning is thus to reach a consensus by both engaging more stakeholders and other actors in the planning process and representing the planning spaces as fuzzy, and therefore less exclusive. This blurs the politics of strategy-making and (at least seemingly) depoliticizes planning processes in order to circumvent tensions and conflicts. However, the new soft planning practices and fuzzy representations are not inevitably less political, since consensus-seeking can itself be a highly political strategy: engaging more actors in planning may work to head off claims of side-lining, but it may only lead to a multiplicity that is later turned into a singularity by the most powerful actors (Metzger et al. 2015). Regarding geoeconomization, the emphasis is to organize space according to 'a political rationality accentuating competition in all spheres of society' (Moisio & Paasi 2013, p. 275). As Moisio and Paasi (2013) state, this rationality, echoing wider policy debates, is germane to soft spaces and fuzzy boundaries. Thus, the discourse of competitiveness re-orchestrates and compels (state) spaces to the direction of soft (city)regional spaces in the name of stimulating economic growth. Soft spaces that go beyond the existing administrative regions are hence regarded as both tools and engines for increasing competitiveness, and eventually for economic success.

We see the key ideas related to soft planning and soft spaces ultimately *essentially* as results of politically motivated policy transfer. They are hence often outcomes of processes in which 'knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions, etc. in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place' (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996 p. 344). Hegemonic ideas and practices are often taken as given, since they offer a convenient 'one size fits for all' solution without the risk of going against the grain (cf. Stead 2012). It is also a perfect way to assign new spaces to the Anglo-American and Pan European planning and development ethos. Policy transfer often leads to a sort of institutional isomorphism, and as has been shown in the case of the EU, this can be used as a source of legitimacy (Radaelli 2000).

The key assumption of this paper is that the old 'spaces of regionalism' (Jones & MacLeod 2004) do not simply soften to conform to the newly conceived planning spaces, but their borders can instead become a hybrid of hard, fuzzy and 'shadow' borders, while the region in question – as an institutionalized structure – becomes hardly any softer. Thus, regions may be represented in regional plans as much softer than they are in practice. Likewise, the adoption of the popular ideas of soft spaces and fuzzy borders may be a headache for planners who operate within established administrative spaces where borders represent the limits of power (cf. Luukkonen & Moilanen 2012).

But can old regions be converted into soft spaces and does it have anything to do with the different planning mechanisms? As Olesen and Richardson (2011) state, following the lead of Healey (2004): 'It remains uncertain whether these new fuzzy spatial representations do in fact indicate changing geographical understandings of spatiality among planning practitioners, or whether new relational

conceptions of space and place are more or less unconsciously brought into a discursive melting pot full of various spatial conceptions and logic' (p. 358). Having this notion as a guideline when approaching the empirical analysis, we summarize the differences between hard and soft spaces and their planning modes (Table 1).

	Hard spaces	Soft spaces
Spatial organization	Bounded, territorial	Open, networked, cross-border
Institutional form	Stable, old	Fluid, new
Agents (subjects and objects)	Population at large, inhabitants, activists, planners	Planners, advocates, stakeholders
Aims	Multiple Culture- and community-driven	Single ad hoc, multiple Economy-driven
Historical perspective	Tradition-oriented Slowly changing Old	Future-oriented Dynamic, ad hoc New
Presumed planning 'mode'	Formal, statutory 'hard' planning	Informal, 'soft' planning
Presumed spatial politics	Politicized	Depoliticized

Table 1. Hard and soft regions and planning (Modified from: Terlouw 2009, p. 456)

While the distinctions in Table 1 structure our empirical analysis, the categories are not exhaustive or exclusive. Rather, such an analytical approach helps us to identify the key features behind different planning regions and their transformations. Moreover, discussing how the ideas/approaches related to new/soft spaces and planning are brought to formal planning of old and fully institutionalized spaces is not just a theoretical issue: soft spaces do not exist merely 'beyond and in parallel to the statutory scales of government' (Haughton et al 2013, p. 218) but also challenge the particular scales of governance and territorial arrangements. This challenges planners to reflect on their approach to their respective planning spaces and their borders.

5. Softening the hard, hardening the soft: the cases of Northern Ostrobothnia and Bothnian Arc

5.1 Northern Ostrobothnia

Historically, the word 'province' (*maakunta*) has referred in Finland to regional units that have been located between the state and local scale. For almost a millennium ago Finland was – under Swedish governance – understood to be comprised of local and regional ('tribal') communities: the antecedents of provinces. Provinces were first mentioned in historical documents in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century.

Ostrobothnia¹ is one of the nine historical provinces that constituted the earliest regional structure of Swedish Finland. The view of provinces as cultural entities has been advanced since the nineteenth century.

The first attempts to establish a modern governmental level between the state and the municipalities (which were established mostly in 1865) were expressed in the nineteenth century, and often the idea was to use the provinces as the backbone of the administrative structure of the country. While provincial associations had been established since the 1920s, more ambitious plans to create a 'mid-level' governmental structure did not proceed, since they were politically contested. Alongside the original aim of strengthening regional cultures, a parallel task of the associations was to strengthen the attachment of population to their regions. Regional associations or councils, operating as joint municipal authorities, encouraged the use of regional symbols, such as coats of arms, songs and other symbols, which have been introduced since the end of the nineteenth century. These efforts resonated well with the objectives of the Association of Finnish Culture and Identity, established in 1906 'to awaken and to strengthen the sense of national identity' and 'to promote Finnish education and culture' (Suomalaisuudenliitto.fi). This association helped to strengthen the provinces in the 1950s–1960s, with new demands of provincial self-government.

It was, however, not until the early 1990s that the provinces were given the responsibility for regional development: regional councils acquired regional development as their statutory task in 1994, which preordained that the councils would define the planning and development objectives but also outline more 'practical' strategies that guide the implementation. The objectives and strategies became formulated into plans, which are currently typically linked to national and EU programmes. Since 1994, regional councils have focused largely on regional and land-use planning, and more generally on the promotion of the regional interests of both provinces and their member municipalities (Paasi 2013). Regional councils, which 'represent' provinces, are also key players in development and planning due to their statutory regional planning tasks. The groundwork for planning is provided by the Regional Development Plan, which is a long-term scheme implemented through Regional Strategic Programmes and Regional Land Use Plans. The definition of policies in the Regional Plan has both direct and indirect effects on decision-making and the economic life of the region. Regional Strategic Programmes define the priorities for the development work and outline criteria for funding, whereas Regional Land Use Plans steer the local authority's land-use decisions and systematic community development (Pohjois-Pohjanmaan liitto 2015).

Due to their long history, Finnish provinces are typically old regions that have become institutionalized through various formal and informal processes, practices and discourses. Since their imagined cultural origins are in medieval 'tribes', provinces are typically understood as both cultural and administrative units. As if to emphasize their territorial character, their borders follow the municipal borders, which have traditionally been very clear cut, particularly in the administrative context. However, historical (cultural) and administrative provinces sometimes differ, as in the case of Ostrobothnia: the historical region was much bigger than the current Ostrobothnia province, from which Northern and Southern Ostrobothnia have been separated over the course of time.

¹ Here without the division between Northern and Southern Ostrobothnia and different from the current Ostrobothnia, which comprises only a small strip along the west coast of Finland.

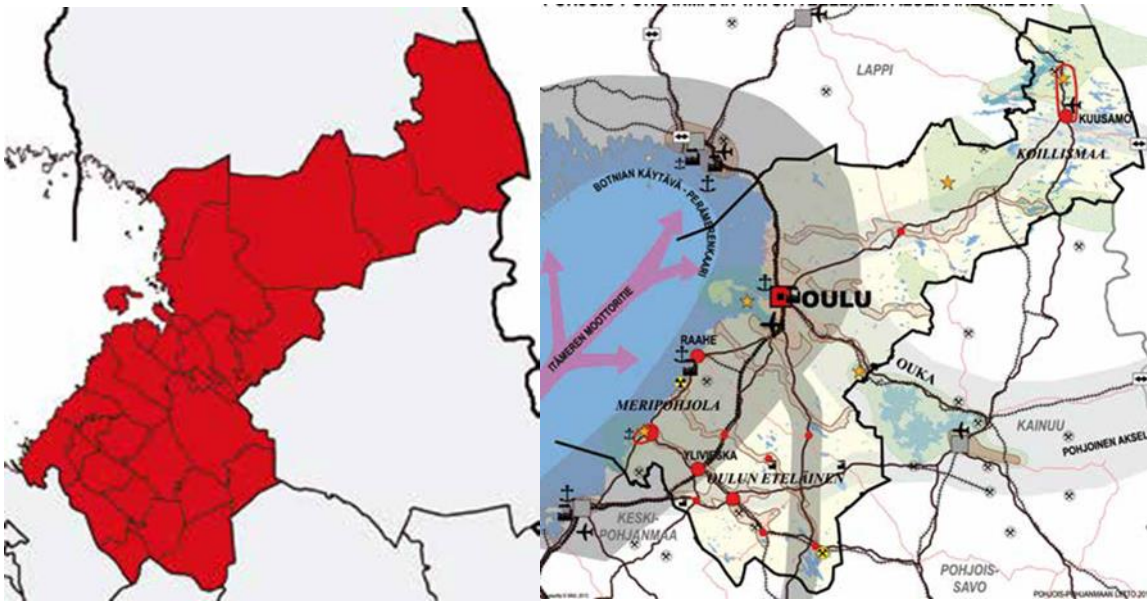


Figure 2. 'Hard' and 'soft' Northern Ostrobothnia (source: Regional Development Plan 2014–2017)

The two pictures in Figure 2 represent Northern Ostrobothnia both as a territorial and a relational entity. It is thus simultaneously an administrative region sharply defined by the borders of its member municipalities and an assemblage of – or some kind of stage for – growth and transportation corridors, such as the Northern Axis (*Pohjoinen akseli*), Bothnian Corridor (*Botnian käytävä*) and the Baltic highway (*Itämeren moottoritie*). Other gateways overlapping with Northern Ostrobothnia and mentioned in the Regional Development Plan include Barents Transport Corridor, Arctic Corridor and Northern Lights Route. Maps with different 'framings' were also mentioned in the interviews with regional informants. Said one interviewee:

So through those maps we shape the world, and in a way... such representations have an impact on how we outline the existing and the forthcoming. [...] Those maps are made and shaped in-house but they are also reactions to what comes from outside, how things come from outside. (I-1)

This shows that while provinces are firmly established bounded regions, characterized by the notion of inclusion/exclusion, they have not been immune to the diffusion of international planning idea(l)s like soft space(s) and fuzzy borders. Yet, this has spurred not only efforts to soften old hard regions, but also to combine old and new, or hard and soft. Thus, the new soft spaces are embedded in old regional structures, leading to hybrid structures with parallel soft and hard spaces that interact, sometimes fluently, but often in friction, due to their different operation logics.

Paasi and Zimmerbauer (2016) discussed the softening of hard spaces and argued that the dialogue between different spatial rationalities leads to a 'planning paradox': 'in strategic planning, planners need to think increasingly in terms of open, porous borders despite the fact that in concrete planning activities, politics and governance the region continues to exist largely in the form of bounded and territorial political units' (p. 75). Respectively, planners often experience external pressure to move beyond formally bounded regions and to represent planning spaces as fluid and relational, and yet at the same time they are unable to escape territorially embedded planning practices. While this leads into an 'inherently complex and messy landscape of planner's regional imaginaries and spaces' (Paasi & Zimmerbauer 2016, p. 85), it also

illustrates that territorial and relational – or hard and soft – planning spaces can be incommensurable and at times contradictory. In the case of Northern Ostrobothnia this, as well as the contextual nature of regional borders, is evidenced in recent difficulties to cooperate with the neighbouring provinces:

Let's just say that recently, during the last months it [the border of the province] has been more visible. This is based on the simple fact that we have been working on quite many common projects with Kokkola [the regional capital of a neighbouring province] and the Regional Council of Central Ostrobothnia is at the moment incapable of using its planning tools that it has been given. (I-1)

Regions are often characterized by an inertia that makes their 'softening' a contested process. Borders that have served as a basis for identity and as dividing lines for administration and legal systems (but also often as 'frontiers' where one language or culture transforms gradually to another) are difficult to make softer, no matter how fascinating the idea of fuzzy borders and soft spaces is. If the border is actually multilayered as has been claimed (Schack 2000), some layers may even become harder while others are removed. In planning, therefore, soft spaces do not appear as soft as they would at first seem to be. As Paasi and Zimmerbauer (2016 p. 87) observe, 'even though borders might be porous (or even 'fuzzy') in the maps and texts presented in plans, in practice they are often hard, mainly due to their administrative nature'. Further: 'a clearer distinction should perhaps be made between borders in plans and borders in planning practices' (p. 87). This inconsistency between spaces/borders in plans and in (planning) practices is important to acknowledge, as it shows that much planning is done on the assumption that spaces are inherently relational and soft, whereas they are in fact territorially bounded. This means that spaces in planning are inseparable from a territorial ontology which fundamentally underlines formal organization, hierarchy, borders and thus a degree of closure (see Axford 2006).

Why, then, despite all the challenges and problems, are hard spaces nevertheless being softened? One explanation is that softening occurs because it is thought to be useful to have (at least on the level of images!) a region that is highly relational, networked and fluid. This harks back to the hegemonic planning idea(s) that have become widely distributed as a result of effective policy transfer. Utilizing the dominant planning vocabulary is a safe bet as it precludes the risk of becoming side-lined. Also, through circulating the relational language of soft planning, planners can feel (and make others feel) that they are riding on the crest of the wave, being well aware how current sociospatial relations occur:

Yes. Those [ideas] come precisely from international influences and it seems that every now and then we get some new [ideas] that spread across the country. Earlier they arrived in the tow of certain civil servants in the ministries that had been doing Finnish regional policy for decades. They visited the OECD and brought such breaths of wind with them, asking what could we do, how might this taste? It [the new idea] would be discussed and developed for a few years and then it would start appearing in documents. (I-1)

But, for sure, these modish terms and trends come from the direction of the EU. (I-2)

One reason for circulating the fashionable keywords is of course practical: adopting the right terms from the powerful authorities and feeding them back to them in the plans not only shows that planners are up-to-date with their vocabularies, but might also prove useful in securing funding for the region. One more obvious reason is that old regions such as Northern Ostrobothnia are simply expected to increasingly cooperate and interact (although they paradoxically face increasingly severe competition between regions

at the same time), and spaces truly are therefore more relational in terms of connections. Moreover, softening and alleged depolitization go hand in hand, for when participation in planning is increased, borders simply need to be softened and region 'opened up'. Thus, the depolitization discourse contributes to softening, too, although in Northern Ostrobothnia softening and depolitization both seem to remain incomplete:

The borders of provinces really aren't so hard... But we face them, in a way, on frontier zones. (I-1)

5.2. The invention of Bothnian Arc

In comparison to the long history of the province of Northern Ostrobothnia, Bothnian Arc (BA) is a relatively recent invention. BA collaboration began in 1998 and was funded initially by the EU Interreg II programme (Baltic Sea Region) and the Swedish and Finnish national governments. The first joint projects managed by the current BA administration started in 2008. The key rationale behind the initiative was that it would serve as a primary step in promoting broader cooperation to connect the Baltic Sea region to the Barents and Karelian regions and, eventually, the rest of Europe.

Bothnian Arc straddles the Bay of Bothnia, at the top of the Baltic Sea. The area consists of seven Swedish municipalities and four Finnish sub-regions, one town and one province. The population of this area is about 710 000. The road distance from one end to the other is more than 500 kilometres (i.e. from Skellefteå, Sweden to Ylivieska, Finland) (Mattsson & Pettersson 2005). BA is one of the cross-border organizations in Nordic countries that are financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers. BA is described on its homepage as a *coastal zone* that serves as a link and a meeting place, improving communications, and enabling social, cultural and economic exchanges. It is also expected to contribute to the development of the whole of northern Europe, thus ostensibly making an impact well beyond its official spatial borders.

The main vision of Bothnian Arc is 'to become the most functional and integrated border region in Northern Europe – with strong economic growth, high-quality social welfare and a sustainable, clean environment' (Bothnianarc.net). Likewise, according to their website, cross-border cooperation within this region intends to 'open up new opportunities to build a strong and competitive region that sets high international standards in technology, enterprise, tourism, expertise, and networking. This development process should also ensure that the people of the region have security and a good quality of life' (Bothnianarc.net).

Table 2 shows that Bothnian Arc had a robust start with several projects being established with the support of Interreg II and IIA funding. These projects focused on a number of societal activities such as innovation policies, business promotion and connections, logistics, energy issues, food production and distribution, culture and identity, and tourism. Some of the recent, already finished projects include: Cross-Border Regional Innovation Policies, Bothnian Green Logistic Corridor and Bothnian Arc Innovation Collaboration. However, more culturally focused projects have also been implemented.

Project	Aims to	Funding source and period
ENERU-efficient energy management in Barents Region	Strengthen cross-border cooperation in energy management to increase business cooperation in South Kola region in Russia, Finnish Lapland and Norrbotten Sweden	Kolarctic ENPI CBC, Regional Council of Lapland, Länsstyrelsen i Norrbotten. 1 Sept 2013–29 May 15

Food sea to sea	Develop food supplies and networks across borders between NF, NS and NN	Interreg IV A. 1 March 2013 – 30 June 2014
Bothnian Arc Innovation Collaboration	Connect the actors in Bothnian Arc region to cooperate across borders in innovation strategies	Interreg IV A. 1 Jan 2014–30 June 2014
Cross border regional innovation policies	Develop models and recommendations on innovation strategies for national actors and decision makers	OECD. 1 Sept 2012–28 Feb 2014
Bothnian Green Logistics Corridor	Increase the integration between the northern Scandinavia and Barents, with its natural resources and increasing industrial production, with the industrial chain and end markets in the Baltic Sea Region and central Europe	Baltic Sea Region Programme. 8 Aug 2011–31 Mar 2014
Barents logistics 2	Develop logistics competencies and educational cooperation between the universities and educational institutions, together with public and business organizations in the Barents Region	Kolarctic EMPI CBC–programme. 2011–2014
Boundless Bothnian Bay	Strengthen and promote Bothnian arc region and its islands region as tourism destinations	Interreg IV A. 01 May 2011–30 April 2014
Livelihood services Haparanda–Tornio	Connect and coordinate cross-border business know-how and develop joint business concept with local and regional companies. To improve competitiveness of existing firms.	Interreg IV A. 1 Sept 2012–30 April 2014
Nordic business link 1 and 2)	Develop small SMEs business export maturity and netsales in NF, NS, and NN	Interreg IV A. 2008–2010 and 1 April 2011–31 Dec 2013
Music on top (1 and 2)	Maintain and develop musical and cultural competences in Northern Calotte area	Interreg IV A. 2008–2010 and 1 Aug 2011–30 June 2014

Table 2. 10 most recently finished projects listed on the Bothnian Arc website (<https://www.bothnianarc.net/-en/finished-projects/>) (accessed 2.7.2018)

Bothnian Arc is an appropriate example of the adoption of a new, soft spatial imaginary. It can be understood as a distinctively relational, soft space of governance, as opposed to the territorial governmental space that the Northern Ostrobothnia region represents. This is evident in the promotional material of BA, where the region is regarded not only as a coastal zone, but as an ‘important intersection for transport and communications’ in Northern Europe, and as a region where ‘the main artery of this communications network is a combined road and rail corridor which runs along the coast’ (Bothnian Arc

Brochure 2017, p. 2). Diverse spatial and contrasting understandings of Bothnian Arc were discussed further by the interviewees:

So, [the Bothnian Arc] is in any case a network but I have tried to push it as a region for 10 years. (I-3)

Of course I would naturally like to speak about it as a region... but it is certainly easy to erode my talk so that it is not a real common region, it is more a network. (I-4)

These excerpts demonstrate that the language of relationality is persuasively attached to the idea(s) of soft space. Relatedly, they also illustrate “how planning has changed from a truly territorial, hierarchical, nested structure and activity towards becoming truly multi-scaled, networked assemblage of practices” (Haughton & Allmendinger 2015, p. 4). In this sense, old territorial structures have been ‘opened up’ for negotiation, perhaps to be then closed down again to make way for new spatial system. More likely, though, is that as the new, relational soft spaces pay only limited attention to existing territorial borders, the result will more likely be a regional mess (see Frisvoll & Rye, 2009) consisting of multiple regional imaginaries, ‘each competing to present itself as a “natural” and meaningful scale around which policy actors can cohere to undertake strategic work supported by an appropriate institutional governance infrastructure’ (Haughton & Allmendinger 2015, p. 3). As each spatial imaginary involves a performative function, the relationship between more historical ‘hard’ territorial spaces and new ‘soft’ spatial constellations becomes reconstructed.

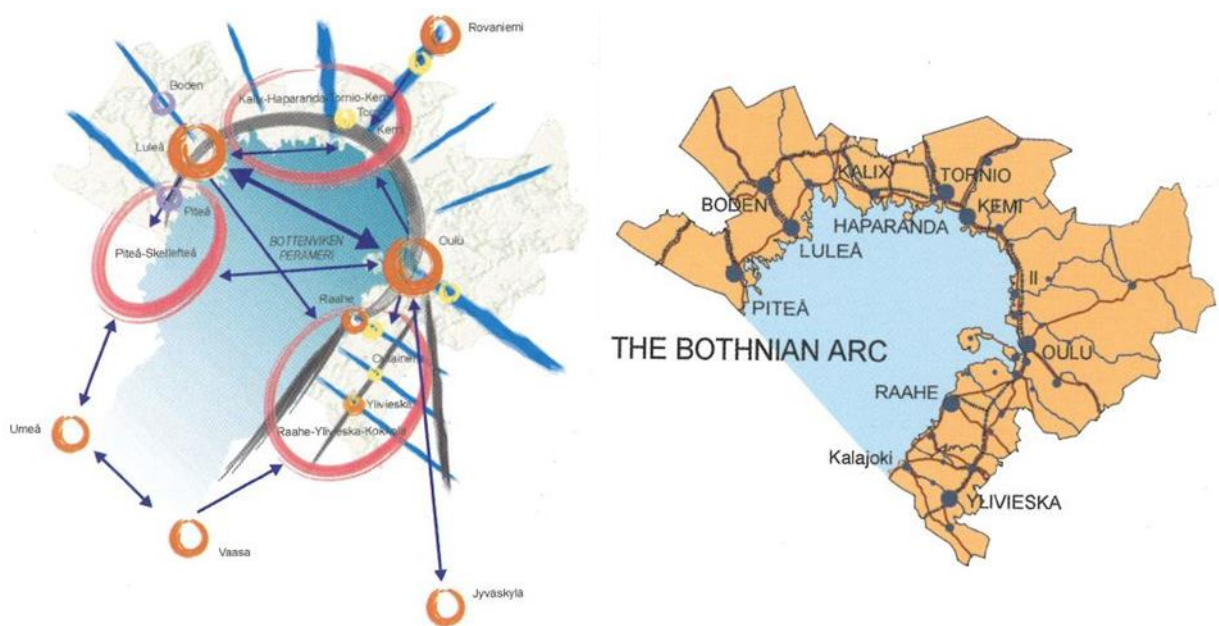


Figure 3. Soft and hard Bothnian Arc. Source: Bothnian Arc – A region of the Future in northern Europe (Promotional leaflet)

Despite being a soft space, Bothnian Arc is nevertheless continually in a state of becoming (possibly) hard or solidified (Haughton & Allmendinger 2015; Metzger & Schmitt 2012), and in fact it has already partly done so. Thus, even though new spaces in planning are often initially ‘launched’ as soft ones with fuzzy borders, they tend to ‘harden’ through their borders which seek to ‘hold onto’ and became locked onto

existing regional institutional structures. This means that soft spaces with fuzzy borders might not in fact jar or transcend against established boundaries, but instead seek to become 'buoyed' by existing (administrative or other) borders they can lean on. Thus, soft spaces tend to become hardened by attaching to existing spatial structures and borders. Moreover, they can find support from borders that were originally developed over the course of regional history for other purposes. Perhaps these borders have become quite insignificant, but new practices – performed by old or new regional actors and institutions – increase their relevance. In these practices, old borders become 're-performed' in a different context and for different purposes, like municipality borders in the context of BA:

If you think about these new types of regions, they are based on a certain functionality. And this is the way to search for competitiveness. But then, if you back up and think about who the actors are, you'll see that new regions do not generate new actors but rather they are novel ways for old institutions to think and shape things. I would even argue that Bothnian Arc is not an entity, even if it has been registered as an organization that could be viewed as a serious actor in regional development. It has more to do with the fact that those old actors find a common denominator which perhaps crosses old borders. But, correspondingly, in a sense, they create new borders, perhaps a bit softer. But, at any rate, I think that a border is a juxtaposition, so, respectively, it brings to those that are outside something that they have to react to or at least position themselves in relation to. (I-1)

As can be seen, even though Bothnian Arc exemplifies the contemporary idea of soft space with fuzzy borders, it in fact is defined through already existing territorial borders that, despite being quite insignificant in many practices, are rather clear cut. As the border between the two nations states has faded further with membership in the EU (Paasi & Prokkola 2008), BA has come to lean quite strongly on the municipal regional structure in both Finland and Sweden. Thus, the initially fuzzy and vague borders of this region have become tied up with the existing spatial (municipal) system, making the region inevitably harder with clear lines of inclusion and exclusion. While the borders of municipalities are irrelevant in most social practices, they largely define who is eligible to participate and who is not, who is eligible to take advantage of the (potential) funding sources for the region:

And then, on the Lapland side, in Rovaniemi (town) they are annoyed because Kemi-Tornio is located in the growth corridor and they are not. There has been a feud for 200 years and it is continuing. (I-3)

Well, frankly (laughing), it took a long time to convince in Rovaniemi that this Bothnian Arc exists... Because Rovaniemi felt that Oulu is a competitor. There, in the centre of the province (of Lapland) they did not at all appreciate this cooperation... it was negative... as it cuts across the borders of several provinces. And it was a bit... at the scale of Lapland there was perhaps a conflict of interests, that where is the money going and what is the angle? (I-5)

Questions of inclusion, exclusion and eligibility push soft spaces to embrace the harder borders 'below' them. One obvious reason is that governance and administration need borders to operate functionally: borders delineate where the power of one governing institution ends and the power another begins. Furthermore, if a soft space is being developed, it likely requires resources. When money is being applied for, the question of what is included and excluded is particularly significant. At the latest when the money is being distributed, the participating actors need to be spatially indexed. Moreover, the border-producing

practices are often related to regional promotion. When a soft space is being launched and promoted, cartographic representations are typically created, and although representations can lean on the imaginings of fuzzy borders, they often rely on 'framing' in relation to existing spatial systems (as illustrated in Figure 3). Although the imagery of soft space may remain, it does so concomitantly with more exact framings. Framing is, ultimately, about border-drawing, and border-drawing can be done for many reasons, promotion included. Bothnian Arc unquestionably demonstrates this:

At any rate this is linked to the European Union, that we went into it, and that there were these kinds of similar regions. And when we had been members a few years, we started to outline this region [BA]. And we saw that this could provide one way to enter the European Union's agenda and to participate in emerging development projects. To strengthen in some ways regional marketing. (I-6)

Well, it was at that time when we were speaking about 'development bananas'. Such units existed all over Europe, drawn on maps. So we also took this model that we also have such a development banana here in the North. (I-4)

Soft spaces such as Bothnian Arc may not always be intentionally hardened, not at least to the same extent that hard spaces are softened. Yet, soft spaces have an inherent tendency to 'solidify' simply by virtue of the establishment of the institutional practices and discourses through which they manifest themselves and are articulated and/or 'performed'. This is related to broader questions of legitimacy, operationalization, and processes whereby spaces are turned into 'viable' regions through various socio-spatial practices. This has much to do with the fact that in cases when newly conceived spaces turn out not to be short-lived, they are typically made more legible and calculable (Dodds 2010). This occurs largely through the use of indicators and indexes that are often keyed to specific jurisdictional borders. In order to make themselves legible, calculable or readable (typically for the purpose of intervention and/or management, see Dodds 2010), regions seek to adhere to some already existing spatial systems and delineations. Thus, soft spaces emerge as imaginable, then viable and then calculable/legible constructs/structures. In this process, spaces solidify and their borders become more clear-cut.

6. In lieu of conclusions: towards penumbral regions?

As Allmendinger and Haughton (2010) note, 'there are multiple spaces and scales that planners must negotiate, some of which are more fixed and formal than others' (p. 813). Similarly, Cochrane (2018) states that territorial and relational elements are both important in territorial governance. Thus, there may exist regions with dissimilar histories and purposes; they may have different functions, meanings and identities, and they may be mobilized differently in planning. Nevertheless, much, probably most planning activities are framed by administrative borders, which are not fuzzy but rather clear-cut. Spatial planning thus has to operate within the realities and complexities of bounded spaces.

Many new regions may start off as ad hoc soft spaces: appearing more as sets of institutional projects that are not firmly institutionalized as regions and do not have clear-cut borders like territorial, hard spaces have. Soft spaces can be temporary 'project spaces' that have a specific 'life-course', often connected to the existence of specific projects. However, as Bothnian Arc illustrates, due to the territory-effect and various territorial functions, soft spaces may become 'hardened', typically through the activities of various coalitions, spokespersons and their 'speech acts' (Metzger 2013). This transformation is often related to the use of cartographic techniques that produce a visible territorial shape to capture the complex set of

institutions and symbols that is the region. Thus, the borders of newly conceived 'flexible' regions tend to harden up as the regions gradually become institutionalized, that is, embedded into various strategies, regional promotion, or other practices where borders are 'performed'.

Although concentrating on soft spaces, the focus of this paper has likewise been on enquiring what happens when established territorial ('old') regions with ostensibly hard (administrative) borders become softened and are fused with soft planning. It seems that the introduction of a new planning vocabulary (e.g. fuzzy borders, soft spaces) may be problematic as old borders (or some layers of these borders) tend to remain relevant in many practices, defining contextually what is included and excluded. Thus, while there might be genuine efforts to soften old regions and to make their borders fuzzier (often reflecting policy transfer or depolitization), old borders may keep on 'haunting' and affecting in quite material ways what can and cannot be done *in practice*.

Sometimes soft planning idea(l)s are transferred to old regions and planning processes are expected to adjust. However, in old institutionalized regions planning practices are tied to established politico-administrative structures, which often generates a certain stickiness that may prevent old regions from turning into soft spaces. The softening of hard spaces can thus be more complex and frictional than the hardening of soft spaces, which can happen almost unintentionally or at least without much effort, as is the case with various 'framing' speech acts and illustrations. While some softening of hard spaces might occur, due to cross-border and supra-regional initiatives, for instance, the borders continue to appear as relatively clear-cut in many practices, despite allowing for 'leaking' across them in some other practices.

Consequently, borders might not become fuzzy, but they can become more porous. The province of Northern Ostrobothnia, for instance, has become increasingly relational in the sense that its economic and cultural institutions are evermore connected to those of other regions. In this situation borders remain important and their precise locations may be undisputed despite that some social processes can cross them quite effortlessly. Hence the borders of old regions can be rather easily 'punctured' in order to arrange cooperation in certain practices, but even in those cases the free flow of many things can be blocked by specific layers of old borderlines, either in the form of an administrative and thus legal obstacle, or by being a cultural, social, linguistic (etc.) obstacle, discouraging cooperation more informally, for example through different operating cultures. This leads us to conclude that a clearer conceptual distinction between fuzzy and porous borders is needed: borders can be porous such that they are relatively insignificant in many practices and yet not inevitably fuzzy because – depending on the layer – in some practices it needs to be clear what is inside and what is outside. This means that the territorial borders of provinces have become not imprecise but 'penumbral'. Penumbral means, Paasi and Zimmerbauer (2016) suggest, that borders are not necessarily fuzzy, but can be relatively clear cut in *some* practices, but not important in *all* practices and *all* the time. Thus, such borders may be partly temporary and hidden, yet also multilayered so that only some layers (e.g. administrative) are meaningful at certain times. They become significant only when established in practices and discourses where a distinction between inside and outside is needed for some purpose. Conceptualized as 'half-shadowed', penumbral can be understood as 'in-between' spaces of planning and governance. These may not have much popular support in or connections with citizen's 'lived' spaces but they are the spaces where soft and hard are elementally threshed over and navigated.

This means that planners have to navigate both soft and hard spaces in their planning activities. This is not to say that spaces are unequivocally either soft or hard, however. Instead, both soft and hard spaces are transformed to involve elements of each other. Moreover, the same space can be soft and hard at the

same time, as is the case with Bothnian Arc (exemplified in Figure 3). Thus, planning spaces seem to be a system of penumbral regions and borders, overlapping regions (and spatial systems) with all kinds of borders and borderings (Figures 2 and 3). As a result, we conclude, the transformation of planning spaces, with the simultaneous softening of hard and hardening of soft spaces, may lead to a 'regional mess' of hard spaces with soft elements and vice versa.

Our examples show that the processes of softening and hardening include various practices of 'framings' (i.e. the production of visual/cartographic representations). Yet it is still relatively uncertain what the actual purpose of these framings is. More empirical evidence is thus needed on how such spatial ideas become tangible in planners' work. Through this, more attention can be placed on the distinction between spaces in practices and spaces in idea(l)s, and how the latter may often create an overly biased impression that soft has simply replaced hard.

Funding:

This work was supported by the Academy of Finland [RELATE CoE, grant number 307348].

References:

- Allen, J., Cochrane, J. and Massey, D. (1998). *Rethinking the Region*. Routledge, London.
- Allmendinger, P., Chilla, T. and Sielker, F. (2014). Europeanizing territoriality – towards soft spaces. *Environment and Planning A* 46, 2703-2718.
- Allmendinger, P. and Haughton, G. (2009). Soft spaces, fuzzy boundaries and metagovernance: the new spatial planning in the Thames Gateway, *Environment and Planning A*, 41: 617 – 633.
- Allmendinger, P. and Haughton, G. (2010). Spatial planning, devolution and new planning spaces. *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*. Vol. 28, 803-818.
- Allmendinger, P., Haughton, G., Knieling, J. and Othengrafen, F. (eds.) (2015). *Soft Spaces in Europe. Re-negotiating governance, boundaries and borders*. Routledge, Oxon.
- Axford, B. (2006). The dialectic of borders and networks in Europe: reviewing 'topological presuppositions'. *Comparative European Politics* 4, 160-182.
- Bothnianarc.net (2017). <http://www.bothnianarc.net/en/peramerenkaari> (accessed 12.2.2017).
- Bothnian Arc Brochure (2016). <http://www.bothnianarc.net/-en/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/BA-esite-broschyr-201705-Eng.pdf> (accessed 13.3.2018).
- Cochrane, A. (2018). Relational thinking and the region. in Paasi, A. Harrison, J. and Jones, M. (eds.) *Handbook on the Geographies of Regions and Territories*, 79-88. Cheltenham, Elgar.
- Davoudi, S. and Strange, I. (eds.) (2009). *Conceptions of Space and Place in Strategic Spatial Planning*. London, Routledge.

- Deas, I., Haughton, G and Hincks, S. (2015). 'A good geography is whatever it needs to be': the Atlantic Gateway and evolving spatial imaginaries in North West England. In Allmendinger, P., Haughton, G, Knieling, J. and Othegrafen, F. (eds.). *Soft spaces in Europe. Re-negotiating governance, boundaries and borders*. Oxon, Routledge.
- Dodds, K. (2010). Flag planting and finger pointing: the Law of the Sea, the Arctic and the political geographies of the outer continental shelf. *Political Geography*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 63-73.
- Dolowitz, D. and Marsh, D. (1996). Who learns what from whom: A review of the policy transfer literature. *Political Studies* 44, 343–357.
- Faludi, A. (2010). *Cohesion, coherence, cooperation: European spatial planning coming of age?* Routledge, London.
- Frisvoll, S. and Rye, J.K. (2009). Elite discourses of regional identity in a new regionalism development scheme: the case of the 'Mountain Region' in Norway. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift* 63, 175-190.
- Haughton, G., Allmendinger, P. and Oosterlynck, S. (2013). Spaces of neoliberal experimentation: soft spaces, post-politics and neoliberal governmentality, *Environment and Planning A*, 45: 217-234.
- Haughton, G. and Allmendinger, P. (2015). Fluid spatial imaginaries: Evolving estuarial city-regional spaces. *International journal of urban and regional research*. DOI: 10.1111/1468-2427.12211.
- Healey, P. (2004). The treatment of space and place in the new strategic spatial planning in Europe, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 28(1), pp. 45–67.
- Healey, P. (2007). *Urban Complexity and Spatial Strategies: Towards a Relational Planning for Our Times*. London: Routledge.
- Healey P. and Underwood J. (1978). Professional ideals and planning practice. *Progress in Planning* 9, 73-127.
- Heley, J. (2013). Soft spaces, fuzzy boundaries and spatial governance in post-devolution Wales. *International Journal of Urban and Regional research* 37 1325–1348.
- Hincks, S., Deas, I. and Haughton, G. (2017). Real Geographies, Real Economies and Soft Spatial Imaginaries: Creating a 'More than Manchester' Region. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 41(4), 642-657.
- Jessop, B., Brenner, N., and Jones, M. (2008). Theorizing socio-spatial relations. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26, 389-401.
- Jones, M. and MacLeod, G. (2004). Regional spaces, spaces of regionalism: territory, insurgent politics and the English question. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 29, pp. 433-452. DOI: 10.1111/j.0020-2754.2004.00140.x
- Jones, M. and Paasi, A. (2013). Regional world(s): Advancing the geography of regions. *Regional Studies* 47:1, 1-5.

- Luukkonen J. and Moilanen H. (2012). Territoriality in the Strategies and Practices of the Territorial Cohesion Policy of the European Union: Territorial Challenges in Implementing “Soft Planning”. *European Planning Studies*, 20:3, 481-500.
- Mattsson, M. & Pettersson, Ö. (2005). Cross-border collaboration in the North. Viewpoints of municipal representatives and firm managers on the Bothnian Arc project. *Fennia* 183: 2, 97–107.
- Metzger, J. (2013). Raising the regional Leviathan: a relational–materialist conceptualization of regions-in-becoming as publics-in-stabilization. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 37.4, 1368–1395.
- Metzger, J. and Schmitt, P. (2012). When soft spaces harden: the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region *Environment and Planning A* 44.2, 263–280.
- Moisio, S. and Paasi, A. (2013). From geopolitical to geoeconomic? The changing political rationalities of state space. *Geopolitics* 18:2, 267–283.
- Morgan, K. (2007). The Polycentric State: New Spaces of Empowerment and Engagement? *Regional Studies* 41, 1237-1251.
- Olesen, K. (2012). Soft Spaces as Vehicles for Neoliberal Transformations of Strategic Spatial Planning? *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*. 30:5, 910-923.
- Olesen, K. and Richardson, T. (2011). The Spatial Politics of Spatial Representation: Relationality as a Medium for Depoliticization? *International Planning Studies*, 16, 355-375.
- Paasi, A. (1991). Deconstructing regions: notes on the scales of human life. *Environment and Planning A* 23, 239-256.
- Paasi, A. (2013). Regional planning and the mobilization of ‘regional identity’: from bounded spaces to relational complexity. *Regional Studies*, 47(8), 1206–1219.
- Paasi, A. and Prokkola, E-K. (2008). Territorial dynamics, cross-border work and everyday life in the Finnish-Swedish border. *Space and Polity* 12 (1), 13-29.
- Paasi, A. and Zimmerbauer, K. (2016). Penumbral borders and planning paradoxes: Relational thinking and the question of borders in spatial planning *Environment and Planning A*, 48:1, 75-93.
- Paasi, A. and Metzger, J. (2017). Foregrounding the region, *Regional Studies*, 51:1, 19-30. DOI:10.1080/00343404.2016.1239818.
- Painter, J. (2010). Rethinking territory. *Antipode*, 42:5, 1090-1118.
- Pettersson, F. and Frisk, H. (2016). Soft space regional planning as an approach for integrated transport and land use planning in Sweden – challenges and ways forward. *Urban, Planning and Transport Research* 4:1, 64-82.
- Pohjois-Pohjanmaan liitto (2015). http://www.pohjois-pohjanmaa.fi/regional_development_and_planning (accessed 11.03.2018).

- Purkarthofer, E. (2018). Diminishing borders and conflating spaces: a storyline to promote soft planning scales. *European Planning Studies*, 26:5, 1008-1027.
- Radaelli, C. M. (2000). Whither Europeanization? Concept stretching and substantive change. *European Integration online Papers (EIoP)* Vol. 4, N. 8 (<http://eiop.or.at/eiop/pdf/2000-008.pdf> accessed 14.11.2018)
- Schack, M. (2000). On the Multicontextual Character of Border Regions. In: van der Velde, M. and van Houtum, H. (eds.). *Borders, Regions and People*. 202–219. London, Pion.
- Shabir, M. and Naz, M. (2011). On soft topological spaces. *Computers & Mathematics with Applications*, 61:7, 1786-179.
- Stead, D. (2012). Best practices and policy transfer in spatial planning. *Planning Practice and Research* 27, 103-116.
- Terlouw, K. (2009). Rescaling Regional Identities: Communicating Thick and Thin Regional Identities. *Studies in ethnicity and nationalism* 9:3, 452-464.
- Thomas, K. and Littlewood, S. (2010). From green belts to green infrastructure? The evolution of a new concept in the emerging soft governance of spatial strategies. *Planning practice & research* 25:2, 203-222.
- Trancik, R. (1986). *Finding lost space. Theories of urban design*. New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Walsh, C., Jacuniak-Suda, M., Knieling, J. and Othengrafen, F. (2015). Soft spaces in spatial planning and governance: theoretical reflections and definitional ideas. Conference paper. <https://3ftfah3bhjub3knerv1hneul-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/walsh-et-al.pdf> (accessed 02.12.2018)
- Zimmerbauer, K. (2013). Unusual regionalism in northern Europe. Barents region in the making. *Regional Studies*, 47:1, 89-103.