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CHAPTER 19
CONCLUSION: OVERCOMING METHODOLOGICAL REGIONALISM

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The objective of *Regionalism in Modern Europe* is not merely to summarize the findings of a large number of existing case studies. Because of its comparative approach, it also aims to produce fundamental new insights. However, there are also limitations: throughout the chapters of this volume, it has become clear that many aspects of regionalism have barely been researched and that there are large differences in the various research traditions, for instance, between Western Europe, where regions are embedded within long-established nation states, and East-Central Europe, where most nation states are of a much more recent date. Moreover, there are also clear differences between the empirical case-study tradition of historians focusing particularly on the period before 1945 and the much more comparative field of political science dealing with the Europe of the regions during more recent decades. Nevertheless, we will present some tentative conclusions from the various thematic and geographical chapters contained in the volume. We will also add some reflections on the current state of the art and make suggestions for further research.

Regionalism in Europe: Some long-term trends

Not all regions and mesoterritorial units have a strong identity. There seem to be some structural factors that can at least partially explain why certain regions have a strong collective identity and whether regional movements have gained much appeal. These factors are age, linguistic peculiarities, the level of autonomy and the presence of characteristic highlights. However, most of these factors have little predictive value.

Many regions on the Old Continent go back to subdivisions from the feudal era, such as duchies, counties, margraviates, and so on. In some parts of the continent and its islands – such as Great Britain – these ancient territories were never dissolved and remained integrated into an imperial polity; in others they were replaced during or after the French Revolution by a more rational system or provinces or departments, which are more uniform and generally of a similar size. In the parts of Europe that had belonged to the Ottoman or Russian Empire, these feudal territories did not exist or had disappeared a long time ago. However, longevity does not automatically imply that a territorial identity is very pronounced. Sometimes, memories of independent statehood from the past, such as is the case in Scotland, Bohemia or Bavaria, can lead to strong regional identities and even to pleas for national self-determination. In other cases, territories with a long

history, such as for instance the Dutch province of Gelderland (which coincides more or less with the ancient duchy of Gelre) or the English county of Bedfordshire, have a rather nondescript identity.

Ethnic and linguistic differences can be an important factor as well. The *Landespatriotismus* that regardless of ethnic or cultural background had stimulated feelings of loyalty to Land and Kaiser in the Austrian Empire largely disappeared in East-Central Europe after 1918. Moreover, in this part of Europe there were many ethnically mixed regions without a clear majority, so it would have been difficult to demarcate specific linguistically unified minority regions as was the case in some parts of Western Europe. On the other hand, strong centralized states such as the Third Republic quite easily assimilated those parts of France where dialects or languages were spoken that belonged to the same language family as French, such as Occitan, Catalan or Piedmontese dialects. This was done consciously by promoting the French language in school and in the contacts with the administration, but also happened almost automatically as a consequence of the rise of new mass media such as the popular press, radio and, later, television. The Flemish- and Basque-speaking parts – where distance languages (*Abstandsprachen*) were used – were probably too small to resist the advance of the French language. This was easier in Brittany, which was substantially larger; moreover, Breton was not spoken in a neighbouring country (like Flemish or German) and was therefore less suspect. Thus, the presence of a different language did not always offer a motive to create a strong regionalist movement with political claims. However, in many other cases it led to the creation of a strong regional movement, which often spilled over into nationalism – Wales, Flanders, Brittany, Catalonia, the Basque Country, Galicia, Sardinia, South Tyrol, Macedonia and Kosovo are just a few cases that come to mind. Recently, some regions where many different languages are spoken, such as Vojvodina or Transylvania, are presenting this as their defining quality.

A significant positive factor seems to be the level of autonomy. In centralized countries like France, most departments do not have a large budget for or much interest in trying to create a strong identity in order to legitimize themselves amongst the population. The German Länder or the Spanish Autonomous Communities, on the other hand, are responsible for education and culture and, in general, subsidize projects lavishly, or even take the initiative to strengthen the specific cultural identity of the region.

There are also regions that without necessarily having their own language and culture have a very strong and recognizable identity. This is particularly the case with rural areas where ancient traditions supposedly were still alive and which often were presented as a kind of national heartland. This was, for instance, the case with Karelia in Finland, Dalarna in Sweden, Tyrol in Austria, the Pustzas in Hungary and Andalusia in Spain. In general, they were also chosen in such a way as to clearly distinguish the country from its neighbours. Thus, Telemark, with its mountains and fjords was definitely not Swedish, while the Highlands distinguished Scotland from the low rolling countryside of its southern neighbour. Other regions received a pronounced identity because they were claimed by various rivalling nationalist

movements: Alsace, Wallonia, Northern Ireland, Upper Silesia, Bosnia, Macedonia and (with some nuances) Transylvania.

Some regions are well known because they are associated with specific agricultural products (generally alcoholic beverages such as wine or whisky): Burgundy, La Rioja or Scotland. Industrial areas, like Lancaster or the Ruhr-area, can also have a very strong brand, although nowadays they are largely based on past glories. Other regions are famous for their artistic treasures (Tuscany, Provence), folklore (Andalusia, Bavaria, Tyrol) or natural beauty (Riviera, Highlands), while some are celebrated because of their fictional literary heroes (Transylvania, La Mancha, Gascoigne). Areas that do not have broadly recognized, specific highlights tend to have a weak regional identity, both internally and externally, and the same is true for strongly urbanized or large metropolitan areas. This, for instance, is the case in Île de France, the London metropolitan area, the Autonomous Community of Madrid, the Western parts of the Netherlands, or in Italy, where urban identities seem to have largely prevailed over regional ones, particularly in the north and centre of the country.

Chronology is also of utmost importance, since the character and expressions of regionalism changed profoundly over time. Although some awareness of regional differences did already exist, clearly demarcated regional identities were only created towards the end of the nineteenth century. Regionalism, like nationalism, is therefore a product of modernity, and whereas Ernest Gellner linked the rise of nationalism to the transition from agricultural to industrial society, one could argue that regionalism is the product of the second industrial revolution of the late nineteenth century. New secondary railways, improved communications and the creation of more uniform markets made it possible and commercially attractive to market products as coming from a specific region. However, one could also argue that it was maybe not so much the technological revolution but the rise of consumer society that led producers to diversify their products. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, entrepreneurs in the tourism and agribusiness industries began to emphasize the exceptional and unique qualities of their homeland in order to stand out among the rest.

Cultural trends were crucial as well. Already during the Romantic era, the countryside began to be perceived as the national heartland, where the authentic traditions and customs of the nation were still largely intact. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there was a new interest in the authentic culture of the countryside, although its *Volksgeist* was no longer seen as representing the nation as a whole; many activists and intellectuals now argued that each region had its particular landscape, folklore and values. Regional highlights, such as historical monuments, typical landscapes, vernacular constructions and artisanal products, had to be salvaged and protected and should even inform contemporary culture, which became manifest in the new vogue for arts and crafts, neo-vernacular architecture and regional literature.

In addition to technological, economic and cultural factors, geopolitics played a major role as well; for example, the collapse of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and German Empires at the end of the First World War offered a clear window of opportunity for political entrepreneurs.[1] Territories which were seen so far as multiethnic regions,

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such as Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia became independent nation states, while Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia formed the new state of Czechoslovakia. Ukraine briefly became a nation state and Finland and Ireland – although already considered nations thanks to the previous development of strong nationalist movements – became independent. However, the indirect endorsement to the principle of national self-determination given by Allied propaganda during the First World War, as well as by President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points and the parallel appeal to national liberation by the revolutionary Bolsheviks, had even wider effects. Thus, the population of the Finnish Åland Islands requested to be reintegrated into Sweden, Belgium claimed Zeelandic Flanders and Limburg from the Netherlands, while some Swabian regionalists dreamt of creating a greater Swabian nation state that included Württemberg, Bavarian Swabia, parts of Switzerland and Austria and even the Alsace.[2] At the same time, regionalist movements in Brittany, Occitania, Corsica, Wales, Galicia and (to some extent) Sardinia became fully fledged nationalist movements.

During the interwar period, both fascists and communists appropriated the flowering regional movements to their own ends. Any form of political regionalism – let alone demands for autonomy – were out of the question, but fascists and communist regimes strongly stimulated cultural forms of regionalism, particularly folkloric dresses (primarily for women who supposedly were more strongly connected to the soil and traditions of the homeland), dances and songs. Especially in the beginning, regional cultural and natural heritage received recognition and was protected by creating national parks, local museums and preserving ancient monuments. This positive attitude was sometimes even extended to dialects and regional languages. Over time, efficiency and new forms of (urban) mass culture became more important and national unity and imperial expansion prevailed over regional peculiarities.

In democratic countries, regional planning and regional development plans were initiated in the 1920s and 1930s, although the best-known example can be found in the United States: the Tennessee Valley Authority, which was part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. Cultural regionalism was often stimulated by local authorities, while political regionalism was generally seen as problem. Regional autonomy was not something that many constitutional democracies were eager to grant.

The end of the Second World War in 1945 was a genuine turning point. Because of its association with the crimes of Nazi Germany, exalted nationalism and essentialist interpretations of regional identities had become suspect. The Cold War petrified the borders of the new post-war settlement and, therefore, secessionist tendencies were out of the question, both in East and West. In addition, many regionalist movements and minority nationalists – from Brittany and Flanders to Ukraine and Croatia – had collaborated with the Nazis, but even where this had not been the case, pleas for regional autonomy were anathema. Only a few movements, such as Basques, Galicians and Catalans in Spain, as well as Sardinians in Italy, had aligned themselves with anti-fascism.[3] Everybody understood that strong nation states were needed to ward off the threat from the enemy on the other side of the Iron Curtain. Regionalism, therefore, largely disappeared from the political sphere. However, as the case of Germany has

made clear, regionalism was still very much alive in the private and cultural domain. The number of regionalist associations increased rapidly and regional movies, television series and novels reached a large audience. The often quite nostalgic identification with the homeland had a reassuring effect after decades of political, social and economic turmoil.

In the 1960s, a new generation began to criticize this state of affairs. The process of decolonization in the Third World made those who sympathized with the national liberation movements in the non-Western world turn their attention to 'oppressed minorities', or what the Occitan regionalist Robert Lafont defined as 'internal colonies', at home.[4] The thaw also lessened the pressure of the Cold War and created space for demands for more autonomy, at least in the West. In the East, beginning with the 'Croatian Spring' of 1968, demands for enlarged self-government for ethnic minorities and regions also emerged. The new emphasis on authenticity and inner feelings of the youth movement, on the one hand, discredited the artificial 'folklorism' of the traditional regionalist associations while, on the other hand, stimulating new interest in more 'genuine' folk culture. At the same time, more people became engaged in specific endeavours to protect the environment and cultural heritage of their own (immediate) surroundings. Shortly afterwards, in 1972, the European Economic Community developed a plan for cross-border cooperation in the form of Euroregions, of which there are currently about eighty. Three years later, it also created the European Regional Development Fund, thus implicitly stimulating a more active economic and administrative role of the regions in member states. In order to attract investors and tourists, regions also began to actively promote and brand their regions in the international market: both cultural and political regionalism therefore made a strong comeback during this period.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 provided another window of opportunity. The ethnic identity of many national or regional groups had been recognized under communism, and many of them even had their own only nominally independent soviet republic. This clearly prepared the way for many of these groups or republics to use the moment and become an independent nation state. This happened with the Baltic states, Ukraine, Georgia and others after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The split of Czechoslovakia into two new nation states also occurred peacefully, while the breakup of Yugoslavia led to a number of violent conflicts. In 2004 and 2007, many former communist countries in East-Central Europe became members of the European Union and therefore had to set up more autonomous regional administrations.

The end of the Cold War also led to increased activities of regionalist movements in the West. After several rounds of decentralization, Belgium became a federal state in 1993. The Lega Nord was founded in 1991 in order to plead for more autonomy for Padania, a newly invented region in the rich northern part of Italy. Although the end of the traditional nation state was predicted by many analysts who saw in the consolidation of the European Union a new paradigm of coexistence of stronger supranational institutions with enforced regional and local administrations,[5] in fact by the first decade of the new century, nation states continued to play a crucial role in European politics and governance, while the project of the 'Europe of regions' seemed to have collapsed. The

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Eastern enlargement of the European Union, with microstates like Cyprus, Estonia or Malta also entering the club, had a paradoxical effect on some West European regional/ national movements: only the achievement of a state of their own would make it possible for them to have a voice in the European Union.[6]

The apparent weakening of the nation states because of neo-liberal reforms, the growing importance of supranational institutions such as the European Union and of transnational financial currents, seemed to have strengthened the appeal of identity politics. Although this also affected issues of gender, sexuality and race, another consequence was the increased interest in regional and substate identities. Many now argue that regional identities have to be protected against the levelling influences of global modernity; some even see the presence of immigrants as a threat to existing collective identities. On the other hand, immigrants also actively make use of regional identities to blend into their new national environment, for instance, by adopting a dialect, a language or other regional identity markers. Regional and subnational identities are increasingly civic and less ethnic, and may also function as a first step to integrate immigrants and refugees into European societies.

Localism, regionalism, nationalism and imperialism

However, regionalism did not develop in isolation. It constantly interacted with localism, nationalism and imperialism. And this has various consequences, also for these adjacent fields. A first striking aspect is the shifting and sometimes divergent use of key concepts such as 'region' and 'regionalism', as well as 'local' and 'localism'. Is region-building similar to regionalism? Should we distinguish between different layers of identity-building and territorial loyalty? Or should we instead accept that the limits between those layers are extremely diffuse, and hence their forms of identification are also blurred? Region and regionalism, as well as localism, have meant different things at different times in different countries.

The emphasis on regions as a form of mesoterritorial identity has tended to marginalize the emergence, consolidation and evolution of other forms of identification. Among them we may especially note two cases. The first is the increasingly important role played by cities as places of memory, as objects of identification and as generators of very specific forms of intermediate identity that link the nation to buildings, architecture and urban planning as a specific form of conquering space and nature.[7] The second is the more ambiguous place occupied by supralocal entities that vary in importance throughout Europe, but which mediate between the regional level (the imagined community that is not inherently sovereign) and the local sphere (the living spaces of daily life where physical interaction and mutual knowledge is possible). These are the *Kreis* in Germany, the *contrée* in France, the *paese* or *paesino* in Italy and the *comarca* in Spain.[8] Regions were often given priority because they were 'big' enough to generate a culture, a network of institutions involved in their maintenance and/or defence, a political claim or a historical narrative. Cities may also generate a narrative of their

own. However, the local emerges as the place where the narratives of the nation receive concrete names, shapes and figures, where a particular hero incarnates the virtues of the nation. The 'intermediate' spheres between the living space of experience and the first imagined sphere of the region have barely been researched.

In fact, different concepts and images about what a region is, its limits and its definition may compete within a given mesoterritorial entity. New departments, provinces, *oblasts* and the like have also generated mechanisms of social identification and collected support from local elites. Although many local intellectuals and civil servants looked to past territorial demarcations as their term of reference, many others did not. Instead, they played the card of province-making, or of promoting 'pride in the place'. These actors often mixed and merged the *regional* imagery with the particular *local* one. The 'invention' of a *bilbaíno* tradition in the Basque town of Bilbao since the mid-nineteenth century illustrates all these ambiguities: local identity emphasized the Spanishness and liberal character of the town as opposed to the Basque-speaking and Catholic countryside, and at the same time elaborated a peculiar Basqueness exclusive to the town.[9]

The study of the region is generally marked by an insistence upon ideological genealogy: the forms of mesoterritorial identification are interesting to historians as long as they contain *in nuce* the elements that can later be codified into the cornerstones of a national narrative by nation-builders. In other words, the region is sometimes seen as a miniature of the nation that would emerge later: thus, any vindication of the Basque *fueros* or territorial rights in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was regarded by later historians of Basque nationalism as a forerunner of later claims for nationhood. In the process, historians become captives of the nationalist narrative trap: accepting in a more or less teleological way the hierarchy of loyalties imposed by nationalism as the logical one, without necessarily considering how contingent these hierarchies may have been. The scarce available attempts at a comparative view of the role of region-building in two or more nation states arrive at important conclusions: it is problematic to maintain that a *pattern* of *normality* has ever existed in the relationships between the nation, the state and the region (and/or other subnational identities).[10]

Moreover, focusing on the dynamics of region-building and local identity has also meant studying state and/or substate nationalism from below. National consciousness was a multidirectional process; it can flow from the bottom up, through the dynamics generated by civil society. This helps to create spheres of everyday experience that contribute to the shaping of a *national culture* in a broader sense. From this angle, region-builders were often nation-builders: they linked the abstract narrative of the nation (from above) to more concrete forms of everyday experience (from below).[11] Related to this, we may advance the hypothesis that the diverse processes of territorial identity-building were not necessarily mutually exclusive or mutually complementary. The challenge is to find out the precise form of interaction that these identifications of 'changing geometry at different scales' may have had in each particular case and time. This leads us to question some broadly accepted (or at least commonly assumed) generalizations, such as the implicit association between democracy and federalism/regionalism on the one

hand and between dictatorship and localism on the other. Yet there have been diverse conservative, and even traditionalist, Ancien Régime-type federalist proposals such as the 'organic federalism' put forth by French and Spanish conservative intellectuals in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even fascist dictatorships occasionally incorporated some form of regional demand or decentralization within their cultural and political practices.[12] Localism was also instilled in people by radical Republicans, who made communes and municipalities their preferred sphere of political agitation and imagined it as the privileged place where authentic grass-roots democracy could be built.

How do different layers of territorial identification and loyalties interact at the micro level, or even the personal level? There is some agreement on the need to distinguish multiple (or 'nested') identities from hybrid identities, such as German-Turkish or British-Pakistani. While double, multiple and shared identities can be understood as layers around a core, hybrid identities are harder to grasp, their lines of demarcation are diffuse and their hierarchy is unclear; they are more of a collage, an eclectic combining or even a fusion of traits. The buffer zones of shared identities can also relate to other types of non-territorial identification, such as religion or gender, and the hierarchies between those identities may vary. Nationhood may be confused with sentiments of local identity; provincial identification may overlap with regional/mesoterritorial identity. The transition moves us from the concept of national identities as a crucible or melting pot – to use a classic definition from immigration studies – where all elements combine into a new, singular identity with a precise shape, to a more flexible 'salad bowl' concept: the components remain identifiable but can flavour each other and combine to make the distinct flavour of the salad as a whole. Alon Confino has rightly suggested that individuals see the world through a multiplicity of experiences and social representations, and the challenge for historians consists in being able to grasp them.[13]

The region and the local sphere should be treated as nested identities and understood within the framework of European overseas expansion and empire formation. Empires have contributed to the consolidation of European nation states. They also provided a way to integrate different spheres of identification, by offering ways of combining subnational territorial allegiances that could also claim to be alternative national identities (from Scotland to Catalonia and Ukraine) within a broader imperial worldview, where more flexible models for integrating diverse territories had a better chance of being framed. Such models varied from overseas to continental empires, with diverging effects on the 'regional integration' of the territories in the imperial core.[14] However, a question still to be definitively answered is whether 'integration' and centralization in the imperial core was really necessary, rather than a more general tendency towards a varied geometry of relationships among different territories, regions, localities and ethnic groups around a monarchic or imperial 'centre'. Here, the example of Spain's imperial crisis of 1898, which led to gradual regional 'disintegration', could be compared to those of Britain, Belgium and France, where the overseas empire tended to integrate different ethnic groups and territories within the national project (or at least within a shared project). Another point

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of comparison were the continental empires, where substate nationalisms competed with other versions of territorial identity (regional, supraethnic) that were usually considered more compatible with imperial loyalty.[15] The relationship of the regions with the European Union would follow some astonishingly similar dynamics, since Brussels and the EU institutions have been sometimes considered as a form of 'informal empire' whose rule over the regions reminded that of imperial centres in the past.[16]

Conclusion

To conclude, it can be argued that region-building processes in Europe have involved historical dynamics somewhat similar to nation-building processes. The tendency has been to build regional identity upon arguments (history, tradition, the people's will) similar to those incorporated or defended by elites in pursuit of their own political or other interests. The theoretical difference between the region and the nation, and therefore between regionalism and nationalism, must be found in the notion of *present-day* collective sovereignty, which is exclusively ascribed to the nation. Thus, the difference does not necessarily lie in the principles of collective identification with a territory, since the mechanisms of nation and region-building may be quite similar. The differences must be sought in the *outcome* of these building processes, particularly in the presence or absence of a territorial foundation of sovereignty. This may also be a result of historical contingency, which is directly linked to the breakdown of multinational empires before and after the First World War, and again after 1989. The border changes sanctioned by international politics contributed to the legitimization of some of them as 'natural'. However, the identity-building processes before and after those changes were not necessarily different in nature, but rather in outcome.[17]

There are several European cases that illustrate how these dynamics may converge or diverge over time, but they remain deeply interrelated due to their similar historical origins. Although not all forms of regionalism, localism or ethno-territorial vindication have actually led to the emergence of a new substate nationalism, it is hard to find a nationalist movement that has not emerged from a previously existing form of collective identity or *ethno-territorial* mobilization. The egg did not always produce a chicken, but it is rare for a chicken not to have come from an egg: a complex relationship between regionalism and substate nationalism emerges, especially within a single political system or at the frontiers of a single state (or empire). Concurrent ethno-territorial movements within the borders of a single political entity introduce more intricate dynamics that may turn 'cultural regionalism' into political regionalisms and even contribute to the emergence of new minority nationalisms. The history of multinational empires reveals concurrent, local, 'pre-modern' identities based on different forms of *Landespatriotismus* and ethnonationalism. These translate into a fight between the perceived relics of old-fashioned imperial rule based on dynastic loyalty and religious belief, and the new 'modernity' based on the principle of nationality, as became evident before the outbreak of the First World War.[18]

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While regionalism or mesoterritorial political mobilization did not imply an inherent contradiction or opposition to nation-building, in some cases it threw decisive elements of ideological and cultural friction into the mesoterritorial political arena, which may have resulted in the development of a distinct peripheral nationalism. In other words, region-building may be, but is not always in conflict with nation-building: it depends on the precise and particular articulation of both processes, each with their own social interests and cultural worldviews, as well as their interaction with political and social movements that would 'territorialize' their projects and aims. Once again, this is more the outcome of historical contingency than the necessary result of a set of given social, cultural or ethnic preconditions. Historical research on subnational identities definitively supports methodological constructivism.

Last but not least, this is a book on regions and regionalism *in* Europe. But some of its findings could perhaps also provide inspiration for similar research on regional movements and identities elsewhere in the world. First of all, it is striking that methodological regionalism is dominant here as well: comparative studies are largely lacking and generally there are no references to classical monographs on regionalism elsewhere in the world. Most studies are dedicated to 'unhappy' regions, such as Kashmir and Assam in India, Patagonia in Argentina or the South in the United States.[19] While in India and Africa the focus is very much on ethnic and religious cleavages, in the Americas there are already various studies on more political forms of regionalism.[20] The construction of regional identities has also been thematized for various high profile regions, such as the tourist island of Bali in Indonesia, the coffee region of Cauca in Colombia and New England and New Mexico in the United States.[21] The field of regionalism studies would highly profit from a global comparison, which underlines the differences and similarities between European regionalisms and those of other parts of the world. This challenge will hopefully be taken up by others.

Notes

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