BOUNDED SPACES IN THE MOBILE WORLD: DECONSTRUCTING 'REGIONAL IDENTITY'

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ABSTRACT
Regional identity has become an important category in the 'Europe of regions', and one that is often taken as self-evident in the relations between a group of people and a bounded region. The movement of people, capital and information across spatial boundaries that takes place in the contemporary world challenges the supposed harmonious link between regions and people on all spatial scales. This paper analyses the meanings of region and identity, and the links between them. Regions are understood as historically contingent structures whose institutionalisation is based on their territorial, symbolic and institutional shaping. Regional identity is understood as an abstraction that can be used to analyse the links between social actors and the institutionalisation process. This paper suggests that an analytical distinction between the identity of a region and the regional identity of its inhabitants, i.e. regional consciousness, is useful for problematising these links. The conceptual arguments will be illustrated with analyses of identity discourses related to Finnish regions and of the mobility of the Finns between regions.

Key words: Region, regional identity, mobility, Finland, EU

INTRODUCTION

'Regional identity' has become a popular expression during the last few decades. Like the word 'identity' in general, this phrase also has positive connotations, partly as a result of the implicit assumption that a regional identity joins people and regions together, provides people with shared 'regional values' and 'self-confidence', and ultimately makes the 'region' into a cultural-economic medium in the struggle over resources and power in the broader socio-spatial system. The spatial scale of current discourses on regional identity varies from local communities to national states and extends to such large-scale economic regionalisations as Europe, Asia or the Caribbean. Thus identity has become concomitantly a conceptual tool for grasping how globalisation reinforces cultural differentiation. As Meyer and Geschiere (1999) remind

us, identity refers both to people's attempts to mark boundaries in the ongoing flux of globalisation processes and to the nostalgia of social scientists for the times when it seemed possible to isolate bounded social formations.

Whereas the State (governance) was formerly the key context for region and identity building, international markets and the emerging continental regime in Europe have now given rise to a new wave of regionalism that stresses the importance of regions and regional identity (Keating 1998). Various regional authorities (e.g. planning organisations, chambers of commerce) have also started campaigns to try to make their regions into 'products' that can be sold on the market and that will attract tourists, skilled professionals and capital. Regional identity bears a 'family resemblance' to such new keywords as social capital or learning region, which refer to the patterns of social relations, trust and solidarity that are

understood as providing regions with certain institutional capacities or 'institutional thickness' (MacLeod 1998; Keating 2001). 'Regions' and regionalism mean different things in different states, and their historical and cultural relations to 'people' vary greatly. But in spite of this, regional identity may be an important component of territoriality in various contexts and a significant element in the construction of regions as meaningful socio-political spaces.

While the proponents of the Europe of regions have accentuated the importance of regional identities, ordinary people and their regional identities have on many occasions remained marginal to the efforts of regional actors to gain resources for development plans and to make their regions into 'products'. One problem is that regional consciousness has no necessary relations to administrative lines drawn by governments. Moreover, the ongoing re-scaling of democracy and decision-making also challenges the state-based, fixed spaces of governance.

While regional identity has been for a long time an important category in geographical research, its meanings are still vague. The phrase is an illustration of what Sayer (1992, pp. 138–139) labels *chaotic conceptions*, i.e. abstractions that divide the indivisible and/or uncritically lump together unrelated elements. One example of this is the fetishisation of regions in identity discourses, i.e. regions are represented as 'actors' that are capable of making decisions and achieving societal goals. This means that the 'region' is taken for granted, since regions do not operate but social actors do. Identity is also often understood as a self-evidently positive feature – with an essence, position and direction – that people/regions already have or that people are struggling for. This view may hide social, ethnic and cultural conflicts of kinds that exist in most states. Belief in deep, fixed links between a specific group and a territory may lead to processes of social exclusion and 'othering', both inside a region (e.g. stateless nations) and in external relations. These processes are taking place to an increasing extent all around the world, where 21–22 million refugees and displaced persons are seeking somewhere to live. The element of exclusion is also evident in recent identity discourses on the Europe of regions, as these discourses have emerged concomitantly with the increasing policing of the external boundaries of the EU and the lowering of internal boundaries. These acts of exclusion are also expressions of the power of states, since the latter still construct the limits of nationality, citizenship and identity and, concomitantly, the limits of inclusion and exclusion. Discussion of the institutional and symbolic links between identity and bounded spaces is therefore of crucial importance to any study of regional identity.

This paper aims to reflect the meanings of bounded regional spaces in a mobile world and to deconstruct the dimensions of regional identity. The latter is not regarded here merely as a feature of individuals, i.e. a problem of regional identification, nor is it seen only as a label for the representations of a region or a group of people. Neither will regional identity be understood solely as an element of governance, politics or economic regulation. While all of these dimensions are today part of the discourses on regional identities, the aim of this paper is to problematise the links between the *region* and *identity*. Identity has been a major category in social sciences – as has region in geography – but the links between the two have not been reflected. This paper therefore analyses how people, 'regions' and the relations of power come together in diverging social practices and discourses. A further aim is to reflect on how human mobility challenges the supposed fixed links between people and regions. The conceptual arguments are illustrated in terms of the institutionalisation of the Finnish regional system, identity discourses and the mobility of citizens.

CONCEPTUALISING REGIONAL IDENTITY

'Identity' is not a new topic for geographers. Humanistic geographers in particular have considered the emotional links between human beings and their spatial contexts (Tuan 1975), and later social geographers have become interested in regional identities, especially in Europe. They have underlined the importance

of a spatially sensitive approach, since elements such as ideologies, history or social transformations – all of them constitutive of social identities and distinctions – have different meanings in different territorial cases (Paasi 1986a; Gilbert 1988; Weichart 1990; Dirven *et al.* 1993; Rose 1995; Sibley 1995). 'Regions' are only one element in social identity formation and their importance varies contextually. Gender, class, religion and 'race' have for a long time been crucial elements in the identification of social groupings, and many other identities, e.g. ones based on sexual orientation or ethnicity, claim a space in public discourse even if they do not always have specific, bounded territorial claims. Thus people normally position themselves simultaneously on many 'axes' (Brah 1996).

Most researchers do not refer to any autonomous object or property of social actors when speaking about identity, but rather consider the process through which social actors identify themselves, and are recognised by other actors, as part of broader social groupings. As far as public narratives of identity are concerned, regions are one medium of power that may be used to shape and classify social processes. 'Identity' is hence basically a form of categorisation, where boundaries are used to distinguish one areal domain or social collectivity ('us') from others. Identity and boundaries are different sides of the same coin (Conversi 1995; Hall 1996; Rose 1995). Yuval-Davis (1997) suggests that 'borders and boundaries, identities and difference construct and determine to a large extent the space of agency and the mode of participation in which we act as citizens in the multilayered polities to which we belong'.

Discourses on regional identity in the media, literature, the heritage business, academic research and political action are manifestations of power that social actors use for different purposes, mainly by organising spatial practices and meanings associated with space. These discourses may express collective strategies emerging from the social and spatial division of labour and/or from the activities of social movements. They may also be examples of individual struggles over symbolic capital in the fields of culture, the media or education (Bourdieu 1991). These strategies (individual/collective) are most evident in regionalism, the proponents of which try to (re-)shape the relations between the economy, culture and boundaries.

Discourses on regions and regional identity, in which actors invest their interests and presuppositions in things, may actually create the 'reality' that they are describing or suggesting. A fitting example is the EU, where new governmental practices and discourses on regions have increased enormously along with the number of region and identity 'builders': actors who operate with regions, write and talk about them and draw representations of them, such as maps. A region and a regional identity are social facts that can generate action as long as people believe in them. They are social facts even if people do not actively think about them, as they have a role in media and publicity 'spaces' or in governance. In these practices and discourses they shape socio-spatial consciousness and can be used to reproduce structures of domination and legitimation (Paasi 1996).

Identity and region – Geographers are understanding regions increasingly as social constructs and historically contingent processes, not naturally given, permanent elements that provide a framework for a fixed identity (Paasi 1986a; Gilbert 1988; Murphy 1991), but in spite of this the links between 'regional identity' and 'regions' have not been sufficiently well analysed. Keating (1998, p. 86) suggests that there are three important elements in regional identity and in its relations to political action. The first is a *cognitive* one: people must simply be aware of a region and its limits in order to distinguish it from other regions. The second is *affective*, i.e. how people feel about the region and the degree to which it provides a framework for common identity, possibly in competition with class or national identities. The third is *instrumental*, i.e. whether the region is used as a basis for mobilisation and collective action in pursuit of social, economic and political goals. Keating's analysis shows the complicated dimensions of regional identity, but the relation between identity and region still remains problematic. One problem is that the link between the personal and collective dimensions of identity remains unclear, and

the second is the missing link between the histories of a region and the personal histories of individuals, which do not always coincide.

It is helpful to think analytically that 'identity' is part of the institutionalisation of regions, the process through which regions come into being. This process concomitantly gives rise to – and is conditioned by – the discourses of regional identity (Paasi 1986a, 1991). Three simultaneous processes can be conceptualised in institutionalisation. All regions have:

1. A territorial shape – boundaries that emerge in various social practices and distinguish the region and identity discourses from those of other regions. The functions and meanings of boundaries vary in the sense that some spatial practices are bounded/exclusive while others are not (Allen *et al.* 1998; Paasi 2001).
2. A symbolic shape that manifests itself in practices such as the economy, culture/ media and governance and is used to construct narratives of identity. This shape includes the name of the region and numerous other symbols.
3. A number of institutions, needed to maintain the territorial and symbolic shapes, and while they usually produce and reproduce distinctions between regions and social groups ('us'/'them'), these institutions may just as well be located outside the region.
4. An established identity in social practices and consciousness, both internally and externally. An established region can be used by social groups and movements as a medium in a struggle over resources and power, or – at the other extreme – against the other. Actors involved in these struggles often use identity among their arguments.

Some analytical distinctions help to clarify the 'identities' of regions (Paasi 1986a). First, the *identity of a region* refers to those features of nature, culture and inhabitants that distinguish or, in fact, can be *used* in the discourses of science, politics, cultural activism or economics to distinguish a region from others. This occurs in the construction of regional divisions, regional marketing, governance and political regionalisation, for example.

These classifications are inevitably based on choices, where some elements are included and others excluded. Thus they are expressions of power in delimiting, naming and symbolising space and groups of people. On the other hand, we may distinguish the *regional identity* (or regional consciousness) of the inhabitants, i.e. their identification with their region. These people may be inside the region (this is the usual assumption in debates on regional consciousness) or outside it. Regional consciousness is a hierarchical phenomenon, in that identities are nested (Herb & Kaplan 1999), and this identification can be based on natural or cultural elements that have been classified, often stereotypically, by regional activists, institutions or organisations as constituents of the identity of the region. Simultaneously, regional consciousness is inevitably part of a larger cumulative spatial consciousness based on the individual's personal history and biography. It draws together personal memories and experiences from many locations and regions, and perhaps also elements of previous collective classifications. Further, a conceptual distinction between *ideal* and *factual* identity helps us to understand how the 'collective' and 'individual' come together in identity discourses (Paasi 1986a). Ideal identity points to collective, normative narratives on spatial identity, which are most effectively exploited in the fields of nationalism and cultural/economic regionalism – and nowadays also in 'regional marketing'. These narratives bring together elements from the past and the present of a region in a selective way. Sometimes they are well-documented 'written identities', and at others they are stories that exist and circulate in oral histories and folklore (Ryden 1993). Factual identity means those forms of identity that may manifest themselves in social action, e.g. in the active formation of associations, firms and organisations that actors establish in a region, which may provide one basis for 'institutional thickness' in a region. These institutions may simply be located in a region, but they may sometimes be active media in the struggle to re-define the meanings and contents of a regional space and its boundaries.

Ideal identity implies that ideologies may play a key role in discourses on regional

identities, which are potentially laden with economic, cultural and political interests, i.e. with power. Identity discourses and collective action may also be closely related, often expressing the identity necessary for resistance (Castells 1997). This is often the case with suppressed minorities, displaced persons and regionalism. Della Porta and Diani (1999, pp. 85–87) argue that identity production is an essential component of collective action, and that collective action cannot occur without a distinction between 'us' and the other. All this means that narratives of 'regional identities' are an inseparable part of the perpetual process of social reproduction within a region and bring together collective and individual dimensions.

REGIONAL IDENTITIES IN THE MAKING: THE FINNISH CASE

Discourses on spatial identity are context-specific. This section traces the institutionalisation of the Finnish regional system and analyses how discourses on regional identities have been constructed and reproduced as part of the operation of this system and its inherent power relations. The section discusses the emergence of two spatial units, provinces and counties, which have for centuries formed the basic spatial units of Finland's territorial structure together with the local municipalities. The provinces in particular have gained a new importance as part of the 'Europe of regions'. They are regarded as areas emerging from 'below', while the counties have been viewed as 'remote outposts' of state-level governance, although in practice the areas covered by the two have often been the same.

A province has traditionally referred in Finland to the system of historical provinces, units corresponding to the territories administered from the eight medieval castles. The emergence of capitalism, the new social and spatial division of labour, the rise of centres and spheres of influence, the development of civil society and the mass media have given rise to the institutionalisation of several new provinces since the nineteenth century that have transformed the existing regional divisions. This process has occurred as part of the

gradual institutionalisation of Finland as a bounded national state (Paasi 1996). The first provincial associations were established in the 1920s, and these were active in all the provinces up to the 1990s for the development of cultural and economic life in their respective regions. Even though numerous state committees have suggested different models of provincial self-government (and regional divisions) during the last 100 years, the state-centred counties have remained the major units of regional governance and no elected political bodies have been achieved between the State and local levels (Paasi 1986b, Häkli 1994).

Nevertheless, the role of the provinces became stronger during the 1990s, especially after Finland entered the EU in 1995, and further when the number of counties was reduced from 12 to six in 1997. The provincial unions and state-based regional planning associations were merged into Regional Councils (numbering 20 altogether; see Figure 1), federations of municipalities that have a legal responsibility for regional planning, land-use planning and development programmes. These areal units represent the NUTS 3 level and promote regional co-operation and market the region. One of their major tasks is preparatory and programme work in the context of the EU. Along with their new active role, the provinces have been concomitantly 'drawn in' as part of state governance. Their councils are directly connected with the EU Committee of Regions through their representatives, and several councils market themselves on web pages as part of the 'Europe of Regions', stating that building a 'regional identity' is a major part of their activities – usually without any specification of what this might mean in practice.

The provinces are not pure instruments of governance, however, even though this function is accentuated in the EU context. Along with the reduction in the number of counties and the increasing imbalance in regional development, provincialism and collective definitions of identity have become more and more visible. One example is the type of course organised at universities, partly based on the 'Europe of regions' rhetoric and practice that aims at making regional heritage and identities into 'products', which can be
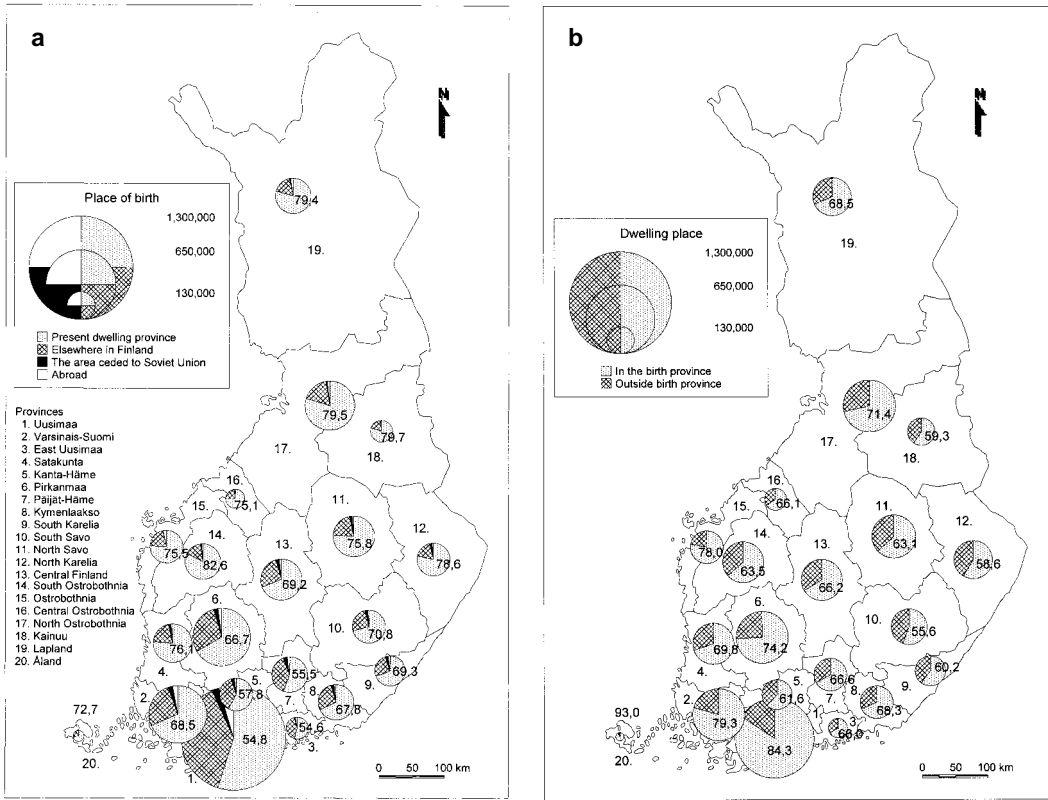
Figure 1. *(a) The places of birth and (b) present dwelling places of Finns in 1999.*
Source: Unpublished data, Central Statistical Office of Finland.

exploited in business life and for attracting new residents (or for avoiding out-migration).

Regions are integrated not only through the practices of various institutions and organisations, but by numerous regional symbols and narratives. In addition to traditional symbols such as coats of arms or songs, new symbols are perpetually being invented. Thus a flower, fish, bird, animal, tree and stone have been named for each province during the last few decades. Since the county reform, provincial symbols have been exploited more effectively as part of the landscape, which makes these units more visible for ordinary people. Regional and local education materials have also been important in the creation of narratives of region, both in the provinces and in the municipalities (Paasi 1986b).

New regional entities normally enter the daily lives of people through narratives in the media, but they may also have a more concrete impact through new forms of governance and legislation. A fitting example is the reduction in the number of counties to six in 1997. This was preceded by an intensive debate, dominated by politicians and organisations of civil society, in which 'regional identity' was a major topic. While some actors argued that counties did not have any identity, others were of quite the opposite opinion. The reform also gave rise to considerable regional(ist) activism. To take one example, in North Karelia, a province with less than 180,000 inhabitants, 70,000 names were gathered of people opposing the plan. This campaign showed the instrumental power of written identities for

resistance, since notable cultural personalities and academics published emotional papers in provincial and nationwide newspapers to save 'their' county and its identity. In this case the resistance was not successful, since North Karelia was included in the new larger county of Eastern Finland.

The Finnish regions as units of regional identification – It is obvious that strong narratives on identity require strong regional media that exploit regional arguments in order to delimit the territories concerned. Provinces are often represented as obviously important regions in Finnish identity discourses, and their historical roles and the existence of provincial institutions such as newspapers, voluntary organisations in civil society and regional symbols are noted. Provincial newspapers in particular are important in the construction of written identities, the past, present and the future of regions. These are powerful first because a large proportion of their articles emerge from their respective regions, and second because it is not rare for more than 80%–90% of households to subscribe to one of the major newspapers, and because their circulation areas usually have very sharp boundaries. Newspapers do not have any explicit causal role in the construction of identities, but rather, following the *agenda setting* approach, they disseminate a collection of regional information among their readers (Paasi 1986b, 2002; Hujanen 2000). On the other hand, the newspaper discourses can promote 'regional' feelings and ways of thought in the articles published and lay stress on the collective characteristics of the region, its landscapes or its people by comparison with other regions and their inhabitants. Articles also often 'fetishise' regions and present them as collective *actors* engaged in competition with other regions. Regional novels have also been important for the creation of regionalist images and dichotomies in Finland (Karjalainen & Paasi 1994).

The Finnish provinces are not unambiguous units in the regional consciousness. Empirical surveys show, first, that there are major differences in the intensity of identification, so that the number of those who do not identify themselves with any particular region is con-siderable, while some provinces are relatively well established as units of identification and others have a weaker profile. Inhabitants identify themselves strongly with such provinces as Kainuu, North Karelia or South Ostrobothnia, whereas identification in Uusimaa, for instance, seems to take place at the municipality level. Also, the arguments for identification vary, although in most regions personal 'geohistory' ('roots') and social networks dominate rather than the features of the regions themselves. Second, people use many regional labels to name the provinces, not only the established names, and even name units existing on different regional scales as their home province, in many cases even local municipalities. Lapland is the extreme example, where the inhabitants have 13 different names for the province (Paasi 1986b, 2002). One explanation for this situation is that provinces are based on many 'building blocks' emerging from the nation's history. The historical provinces and the areas under the jurisdiction of the provincial councils and innumerable other institutions are all fused in the current regional imagination.

While the regional media in particular struggles to promote identities, the following comment on the power of regional identity captures something of the ambivalent role of the provinces:

> Regions have raised their profile in many European countries and they have their own committee in the EU. Regional identity has not gained support in Finland, not only because the country corresponds in terms of population with a small region in the context of the EU, but above all because no natural regional identity has arisen in any Finnish region. Due to historical facts, Finland is a strongly unified state with a homogeneous population that is not used to emphasising regional identities (Antola 2001, p. 1).

Antola's argument is that the current 'regions' are not based on historical provinces but have been created for the purposes of governance and regional planning. This is a very problematic argument, since regions and narratives on their identity are perpetually 'becoming' –

they cannot be reduced to some specific historical period that would provide a 'natural regional identity'. Another problem is that he relies on one basic myth of national identity politics, the homogeneity of a nation and the simultaneous tendency to homogenise provinces (Paasi 1996). Antola's comment on the missing political representation on the provincial scale is more correct, since citizens do not have any channels for exercising political influence on the development of these areas, so that the instrumental and political roles of regional identities (Keating 1998) have only a limited potential at this level. This is the key background to the fact that no real political regionalism has emerged in Finland and that the provinces are not clear units of regional identification.

CROSSING BOUNDARIES: IDENTITIES ON THE MOVE

While the links between identity and boundaries have been emphasised in the literature for decades (Eisenstadt & Giesen 1995), researchers have now questioned the supposition of closed local/national cultures and paid attention to the dynamic links between spatial contexts and cultural flows. The contemporary world is characterised on all spatial scales by mobility, which challenges the fixed links between a territory and a group of people, and forces us to reflect spatial identities in more dynamic ways. Thus identities are understood as processes of perpetual 're-writing' of the self and of social collectives (Fog Olwig & Hastrup 1997); it is therefore very problematic to speak of 'an existing identity' as something that is already constituted and fixed (Brah 1996, p. 124). Major backgrounds for these tendencies are doubtless to be found in economic and cultural globalisation and the re-scaling of state power (Brenner 1999), which challenge the supposed homology between specific (bounded) spaces and culture/identity on all spatial levels (Massey 1995). These processes will also erode the narratives of a homogeneous national and regional 'we', both being expressions of a belief in the (causal) power of spatiality in determining identities. While much of the new literature has celebrated the disappearance of bound-

aries and the hybridity of identities, more cautious comments emerge from the observation that boundaries have not disappeared, even though their meanings have changed, and that people still seem to rely on collective identities (Pratt 1999). Accordingly, researchers cannot simply 'write' away the links between space, boundaries and identity in academic studies, but instead have to address the changing meanings of these connections.

To show how mobility challenges the existing identity narratives, I will analyse briefly how people and regions 'fit together' in Finland. We saw above how narratives of regional identities have been created as part of the institutionalisation of provinces and how they are going through a renaissance in the Finland of the EU. The inhabitants of regions are usually the major factor that the narratives of regional identity rest on. This emerges from the assumption that living together in the same region/place and social circumstances for a long time will cause individuals to develop certain dispositions, or 'roots', and will provide them with certain shared ways of perceiving things, adopting attitudes and communicating, i.e. a certain *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977), or certain structures of expectations (Paasi 1986a).

The idea of the following examples is to show how complex the relation between regions and their inhabitants is, and not to argue that people can identify themselves only with their areas of origin. While people's 'roots' are typically associated with their place of birth, they can of course identify themselves with new home regions, too. When families move, there can also be differences in the forms of identification that emerge from the diverse experiences of various generations. With these reservations in mind, we can note that while the major part of the population in all Finnish provinces has been born in the respective area, there are considerable variations between regions (Figure 1a). The flows of migration, which in Finland tend to move from Northern and Eastern Finland to the southern areas, have had different effects on these proportions, however. The province of Uusimaa has received so many new residents, mostly moving to Helsinki and the surrounding major suburban areas of Espoo and

Vantaa, that the proportion of those born in this area is less than 55%, whereas the highest proportion is in South Ostrobothnia, more than 82%. This area has a very clear identity in Finland, partly maintained by a strong regional press. Figure 1a also shows that the population that was evacuated to Finland from the Karelian areas ceded to the Soviet Union after the Second World War, still comprising some 115,000 people, live all over the country, but mostly around the capital. This group of refugees can be compared with another group, that of foreign immigrants. Finland has perhaps been the most closed state in Europe with respect to immigrants, refugees or foreigners in general up until recent years, mostly as a consequence of an exclusive im-

migration policy, which has been criticised severely in many parts of Europe, especially in the Nordic countries. There are thus less than 100,000 people of foreign origin, less than 2% of the population, mainly living in the southern part of the country, especially in the Helsinki area. While the number of foreign citizens is extremely low, there have been violent attacks against immigrant groups, with motives voiced mainly by young extremists, often in the name of defending the bounded and exclusive spaces of *national* identity – not regional (Paasi 2000).

Figure 1b shows how the population is divided by current place of residence, i.e. those who live in the province of their birth and those living elsewhere. Almost half of
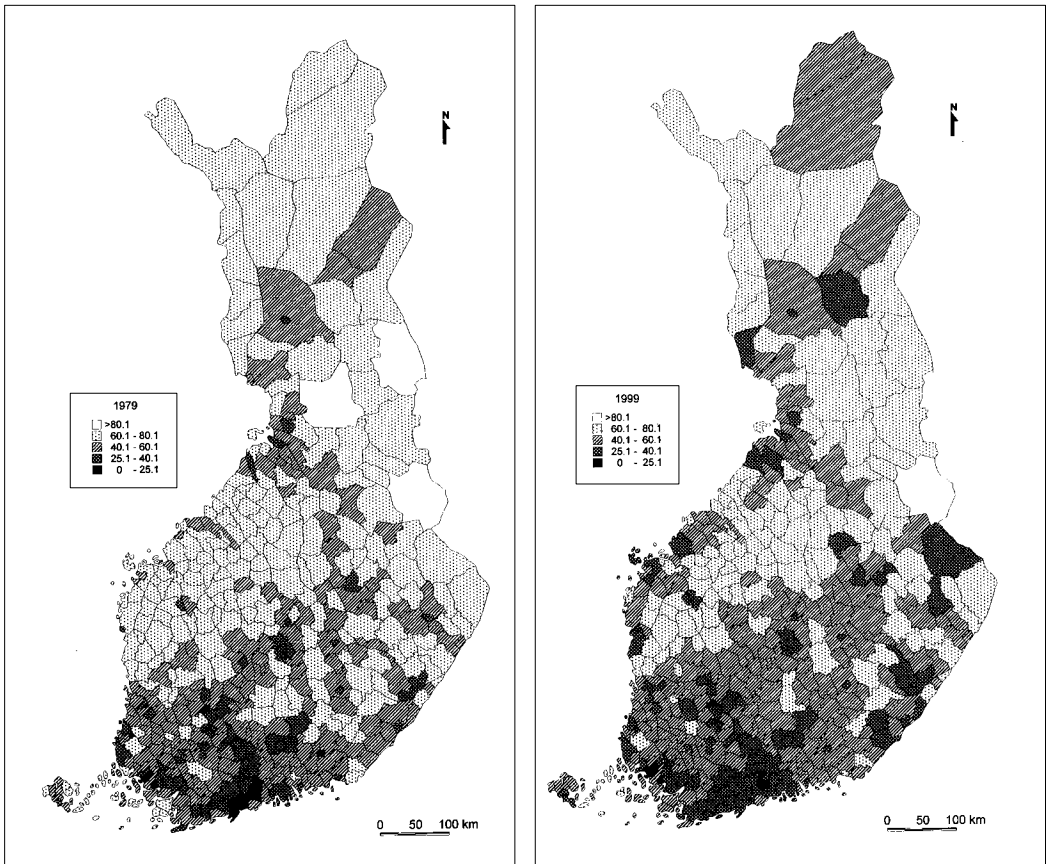

Figure 2. Percentages of people living in their municipality of birth in 1979 and 1999.
Source: STV 1980 and unpublished data, Central Statistical Office of Finland.

those who were born in some provinces of Eastern Finland now live elsewhere, whereas as many as 84% of those born in the Uusimaa area are still living there, although the number of 'others' who have moved there from the outside is almost as large in absolute terms. The Finnish municipalities are even more illustrative of the power of mobility (Figure 2). One extreme among the 448 municipalities consists of those where less than 25% of the population were born within the same areal unit, while on the other hand, there is one municipality in Northeastern Finland where 80% of the current population were born locally. The data from 1979 and 1999 show that mixing of the inhabitants of the municipalities has increased markedly during this period of 20 years. These examples on two scales suggest that we have to analyse critically any discourse of 'regional identity' or 'our identity' that is based on roots or common heritage, since these often hide the influences of mobility.

DISCUSSION

This paper discusses, what 'regional identity' means in the contemporary mobile world where:

1. this phrase is used in numerous ways;
2. 'the people' and 'the region' do not coincide neatly in a culturally 'pure' way on any regional scale; and
3. where a number of actors participate in the production of spatial images and identity discourses which may differ radically in different contexts.

The paper suggests that it is useful to understand discourses on regional identity as part of a process in which 'regions' are constructed, i.e. become institutionalised as spatial units. Regional identities are collective narratives on who and what 'we' and 'our region' are and how these differ from others. The definition of social identities always includes a normative element of power. Important questions are therefore who makes regional distinctions and classifications, how do they express the relations of power, and whose identity is a specific identity discourse describing? Is it the identity of ordinary people? Or is it a 'written identity'

created by scientists, politicians, administrators, cultural activists or entrepreneurs? These actors often provide 'guidelines' for understanding the collective meanings of regional symbolism, the elasticity of boundaries and the images of who 'we' (and the Other) are. This occurs by maintaining established territorial practices and discourses, by inventing new ones and perhaps actively forgetting some others. Whatever the motives behind identity discourses may be, they are always expressions of 'power geometries' (Massey 1993), i.e. people occupy different positions when making and reproducing spatial representations and boundaries or social distinctions between 'us' and 'the other'.

Analysis of the institutionalisation of Finnish provinces shows that the vision of regional identity as a harmonious balance between a region and individuals (who can call themselves 'us') has been important in regional discourse. It also shows how problematic the narratives of fixed regional identities are, because of personal mobility. People have more and more diversified regional backgrounds, and the personal histories and processes of identification in any region become 'mixed'. It is therefore important to analyse the rhetoric through which the narratives of regional identities are created, and also what 'region' and narratives of identity mean in the construction of personal and group identities and practices of inclusion and exclusion. It is obvious that the narratives of regional (and other spatial) identities are increasingly being contested in a world characterised by voluntary and forced migration. This paper suggests that it is beneficial to make an analytical distinction between the identity of a region and the regional identity/consciousness of people. The former points to those elements of nature, culture and regional life that are used to distinguish a region from other regions, and the latter to the regional consciousness of individuals. While these exist simultaneously as part of the broader process of social reproduction, this analytical distinction helps us to understand and analyse both the structural (and power) elements hidden in discourses on regional identity and individual regional consciousness. The latter is more and more often a combination of the experiences

and narratives emerging from several spatial contexts that are important in the biographies of subjects.

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