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The accident of the region. A strategic relational perspective on the construction of the region's significance.

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3 The accident of the region. A strategic relational perspective on the construction of
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24 Short Abstract
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29 What explains the strong performative of the 'region' in academic and popular
30 perceptions? This paper explores this question at two levels, namely that of broader
31 political, economic and social shifts and that of institutional and discursive
32 mediations. The assessment uses an evolutionary perspective based on the Strategic
33 Relational Approach (SRA) and recent institutional-discursive elaborations. Specific
34 attention is paid to questions of spatial-scalar configurations and economic versus
35 non-economic aspects of regional development.
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53 Abstract
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Both in academic debate and in popular perceptions the region is presented as an
important entity in economic, political, social and spatial processes. This has resulted
in a strong performative role of the region not only in mainstream debates across these
domains, but also in a wide range of political and policy processes and practices.

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3 Recent critiques have challenged certain key features of the dominant perception of
4 the region, notably its portrayal of the region as something bounded and fixed. But
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6 the region, notably its portrayal of the region as something bounded and fixed. But
7
8 what triggered the emphasis on the region in the first place? To what extent can the
9
10 significance of the region be attributed to broader political, economic and social
11
12 shifts? To what extent does it present a more accidental outcome of processes and
13
14 actions that, in combination, happened to put the region centre stage? To address
15
16 explore these questions, this paper will adopt the Strategic Relation Approach (SRA)
17
18 launched by Jessop and further developed by Hay and Sum. This approach advances a
19
20 historical perspective on the production of hegemonic concepts and also seeks to
21
22 integrate 'softer' discursive approaches within a broader, structuralist perspective. The
23
24 result is a more precise identification of how certain more structural changes and
25
26 shifts induced moments for the creation of new discursive articulations and actions
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28 oriented towards the region.
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39 Introduction

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43 Studies on region formation have strongly benefited from recent discussions
44
45 on the constructivist and relational nature of regions and scale, and on 'scalar
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47 politics' against the backdrop of globalisation (BRENNER, 1999, HAMILTON,
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49 2002, LAGENDIJK, 2002, MACLEOD and GOODWIN, 1999, SWYNGEDOUW,
50
51 1997). These accounts shed light on the proliferation of regional regimes as
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53 manifested across Europe, including city-regional regimes, cross-border
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55 regions, regional economic districts and clusters, rural development areas,
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57 various subnational/subfederal regional divisions etc. (HERRSCHEL and
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NEWMAN, 2002, KEATING, 1998, LE GALÈS and LEQUESNE, 1998, LUKASSEN, 1999). But the critical question remains how the rising significance of the region, in both an analytical and normative sense, is itself predicated upon a wider set of cultural, political, economic and policy practices. How did the region, with all its associated concepts, turn into such an apparently dominant or ‘omnipresent’ imaginary (see Jones, Macleod and Harrison **in this issue??**)?

The answer to such questions has traditionally been sought in working with either a structurally oriented or an agency-oriented approach. Structurally, the rise of the region can be seen as a logical outcome of broader trends and pervasive developments, such as globalisation, flexibilisation of production, state restructuring, and urban expansion. The analysis then focuses on how a limited set of tendencies, economic, political, social, have privileged the region in spatial and scalar developments. In agency-oriented perspectives, regions are seen as constructed, discursively and materially, through a myriad of processes, performing through their own logics, routines and practices, and manifesting their own momentum and temporarily stable outcomes. Recent so-called ‘soft’ approaches have focused on specific practices related to economic innovation and clustering, strategic spatial planning, sustainability and collaborative, inclusive approaches to planning (CHATTERTON, 2002, CLEMENT, 2000, GLASMEIER, 2000, GOVERDE, 2003, LAGENDIJK, 2005, MASKELL and MALMBERG, 1999, RAVETZ and ROBERTS, 2000, VIGAR et al., 2000).

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3 Recent theoretical work has attempted to bring these perspectives together
4 rather than seeing them as opposites. More specifically, this paper responds to
5
6 calls to embed such 'softer' notions in a more structurally and historically
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8 oriented account with more emphasis on broader political-economic
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10 conditions and transitions (GORDON MACLEOD, 2001). An intriguing question
11
12 is for instance to what extent specific practices and associated ideas can be
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14 seen as channels of mediation, or even causal mechanisms for, broad-scaled
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16 political-economic and spatial processes (cf. JESSOP, 2004a, JESSOP, 2004c)?
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18 We need a perspective, therefore, that is able to straddle both levels of
19
20 analysis, that of broader changes and specific practices. The main inspiration
21
22 for such a perspective will be the Strategic Relation Approach (SRA) as
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24 developed by Jessop, Hay and Sum, amongst others.
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34 The structure of the contribution is as follows. After introducing the key
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36 research question, the first part of the paper will discuss the SRA, with a
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38 specific focus on discursive developments. Then, Sum's perspective on the
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40 production of hegemony will be presented, which will shed light on the rise of
41
42 'regional imaginaries'. The combination of the SRA and Sum's approach is
43
44 particularly helpful since it draws the attention to the way the discursive
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46 dimension is intertwined with material, economic as well as non-economic
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48 aspects.
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53 Using this conceptual apparatus, the second part will shed light on the rise of
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55 'regional imaginaries' in more detail. By necessity, the latter is based
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57 primarily on a review of broad observations and selected evidence.
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6 The rise of regional imaginaries – an initial exploration
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10 Geographers have long been struggling with the dilemmas of structuralism and
11 functionalism on the one hand, and voluntarism on the other. In structuralist
12 accounts, regional developments tend to be read off from broader
13 developments, relegating regions to by-products of global change. In
14 voluntarist accounts, regions basically determine their own fate. Massey
15 (1979) was one of the first to discuss to what extent the region itself presents a
16 causal force or an agent, versus the wider spatial structures through which
17 regions are constituted, such as the spatial division of labour controlled by
18 corporate power. Whereas Massey focused on the role of organisations, work
19 inspired by the Regulation Approach explored the critical role of institutional
20 development at various spatial levels in shaping a temporally and spatially
21 differentiated capitalist economy (TICKELL and PECK, 1995). Marrying
22 Marxist with institutionalist approaches, the Regulation Approach is
23 concerned with how the fundamental contradictory and crisis-ridden nature of
24 capitalism is mediated through time- and space specific institutional
25 arrangements. These arrangements bear upon, in particular, labour relations,
26 the role of the state, international relations, and the money and enterprise form.
27 Recent work has also taken into account discursive aspects of socio-economic
28 development, providing a richer picture of how certain arrangements become
29 (temporarily) hegemonic (JESSOP, 2004a, LEWIS et al., 2002).
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3 Inspired by the work of Massey and the regulationist writings, geographers
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5 have further explored the role of space-bound institutions in economic and
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8 social development, increasingly zooming in on the region. The interest
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10 turned, in particular, to 'soft' institutional factors, to conventions of
11
12 communication, interaction and collective action embedded in regional socio-
13
14 economic environments or 'worlds' (STORPER, 1997). In so doing, the
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16 literature attempted to move further away from what were regarded
17
18 'structuralist' approaches, countering their insensitivity to spatial diversity,
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20 and, in particular, to capacities of local agents and arrangements to make
21
22 structural difference in the course of regional development. Both regulatory
23
24 and institutionalist and writings, hence, provide a framework for
25
26 understanding the position and significance of the region by looking how local
27
28 forms of development, interaction and agency are shaped in the context of
29
30 broader forms and changes. In such a view, regions are political, institutional
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32 and discursive *constructs* of which the development is structurally conditioned
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34 and enabled, but not fully determined, by external conditions (cf. AGNEW,
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36 1999).
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46 Despite these moves, however, determination and causality remain highly
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48 problematic issues. 'Soft' institutionalism, on the one hand, seems to have
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50 overstepped its mark by reducing the 'external' dimension to a simple set of
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52 global forces to which locally embedded, interactive agents may respond
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54 through collective forms of action (GORDON MACLEOD, 2001). They are so
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56 much focused on local (inter)action as a socio-cultural phenomenon that they
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58 ignore broader economic specificities and contingencies (JESSOP and SUM,
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2006). Comparable to neo-liberal perspectives, local development presents as
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endogenous responses to a uniform, and inexorable set of external challenges.
So, ironically, while its 'soft' tone appeals strongly to academics and
professionals committed to regional development, there is a serious danger
that the approach actually plays into the hands of local agents pursuing a neo-
liberally oriented 'competitiveness' agenda (LOVERING, 1999).

The Regulation Approach, on the other hand, makes a major contribution to
critical institutionalist thinking in providing a sophisticated account of how
capitalism evolves in a variety of time- and space-specific forms, and of how
these forms interrelate at macro and meso levels. The approach shows a poor
capability, however, to conceptualise the micro-level (individual,
organisational, collective) in a non-instrumentalist way, to apprehend the
relation between culture, discourses and action, and to conceptualise the
interaction between global, national, local/regional levels (MACLEOD, 1997).
Despite the interest in how institutions are mediated through time and place,
and hence in institutional plurality and socio-economic variability, current
writings continue to show a marked tendency to infer institutional
transformations from perceived changes in capitalism at the macro level
(GORDON MACLEOD, 2001, PECK, 2003). In particular, geographical work
appears to hold on to models in which, and institutional change is associated
primarily with transitions between modes of regulation (Fordist, Post-Fordist)
(GOODWIN, 2001, JONES, 1997).

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3 As GOODWIN (2001) points out, we should be very careful with translating and
4
5 projecting regulatory concepts onto the regional or urban level (cf. COLLINGE,
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7 1999). He thus advocates, in line with more sophisticated regulatory
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9 approaches (JESSOP and SUM, 2006) to perceive the notion of regulation more
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11 in terms of *process* than of structure or mode: “If we use the concept of
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13 ‘regulation as process’ rather than that of ‘mode of regulation’ (...) we can
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15 investigate issues at the urban level – such as transport, housing, social
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17 polarisation, employment change and economic development – and still
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19 maintain a purchase on how each of these is related both to each other and to
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21 wider sets of social, economic and political processes” (Goodwin, 2001, p.
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23 82). Goodwin thus concludes that: “The use of the regulation approach would
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25 lead to the conclusion that for those interested in local changes in housing,
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27 planning and welfare provision, the local state and local governance cannot be
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29 fully understood outside their roles (both positive and negative) in the ebb and
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31 flow of regulation. However, the point should also be made that neither can
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33 they be fully understood within them. The institutions and practices of local
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35 and regional government have their own histories and patterns of
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37 development” (p. 84-85). This points, once more, to the need for a
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39 sophisticated account of both more structural and agency-oriented (or
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41 strategic) aspects of spatial development.
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55 Bringing both ‘structure’ and the ‘subject’ back in: the Strategic Relational
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57 approach
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3 How can we account for spatial phenomena, and the way they are, to repeat
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5 Goodwin's words, "related both to each other and to wider sets of social,
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7 economic and political processes", and how do we assess the forms and
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9 objects of governance bearing on this kind of dynamics? The approach
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11 adopted here is the Strategic Relational Approach (SRA) initially developed
12
13 by JESSOP (2001). The SRA seeks to develop an evolutionary, non-
14
15 functionalist account of capitalist development, based on the claim that:
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19 "capitalist social formations and bourgeois social order do not pre-exist
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21 societalization. Instead, the spaces and scales on which they exist, their
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23 temporal rhythms, their crisis-tendencies, and so on, in short, their
24
25 basic features and structural forms, are the product of attempts to
26
27 envision, institute, and consolidate a more or less coherent and
28
29 manageable set of economic relations and their extra-economic
30
31 conditions of existence" (JESSOP, 2003, p.143-144)
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36 Contributing to a cultural perspective on political economy, the SRA
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38 acknowledges the value of 'constructivist' notions in assessing processes of
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40 institutionalisation, identity formation and discursive turns, and the resulting
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42 production of stable structures and (temporarily) hegemonic ideas. Such
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44 processes, through repetitive strategic manipulations, become *structurally*
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46 *inscribed* in more or less stable, selective settings. This makes structures
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48 inherently *relational* and subject to strategic manipulations.
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55 The SRA thus assigns a specific meaning to 'structure' and the role of subjects
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57 (agency). Inspired by Offe's and Poulantzas' discussion on selectivity, the
58
59 SRA sees structures as inherently concrete, rooted in space and time. Agency
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3 plays a significant role in (re)shaping structures, yet the scope for reflexive
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5 action and learning is constricted by what JESSOP (2004b, p. 9) calls
6
7 'structurally inscribed strategic selectivity': "the recursive selection of
8
9 strategies and tactics depends on individual, collective, or organizational
10
11 learning capacities and on the 'experiences' resulting from the pursuit of
12
13 different strategies and tactics in different conjunctures" (cf. Fig. 1). On the
14
15 basis of such behaviour, we may add, agents will acquire, and shape, particular
16
17 *identities* that will help to associate themselves with supportive actors and
18
19 processes. Structurally inscribed strategic selectivity will also result in the
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21 constitution of particular objects of governance (like competitiveness,
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23 sustainability or social responsibility). Grafted onto a social-constructivist
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25 perspective on action, institutions and the formation of structures, the SRA
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27 thus adopts an evolutionary approach to social change. Stable patterns, based
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29 on what Jessop describes as 'structured coherence', emerge through a process
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31 of recursive selection and retention of strategies and practices that are, also
32
33 through reflection, oriented towards 'structurally-inscribed strategic
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35 selectivity' (Jessop, 2001). As a result, strategies and practices are both *path-*
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37 *dependent* and *path-shaping*.
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>>>>>>>> FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE <<<<<<<<<<

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52 Building on Jessop's work, HAY (2002) sets out to further explore the meaning
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54 of strategic selectivity and strategic action from an agency perspective. In
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56 Hay's view, actors are intentional, but also largely driven by intuition and
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58 habits. Strategic action is based on a combination of reflexivity, learning and
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3 practical consciousness: “Actors are reflexive and strategic and they orient
4 themselves and their strategies towards the environment within which their
5 strategic intentions must be realised. Yet they are by no means blessed with
6 perfect information of that context. At best their knowledge of the terrain and
7 its strategic selectivity is partial; at worst it is demonstrably false” (p. 9). An
8 important factor in this process of strategic orientation is how the wider
9 context and the consequences of past and possible future actions are
10 *discursively* mediated and understood. In each case, only certain ideas and
11 narratives shedding light on a situation will prevail, turning into temporarily
12 ‘hegemonic’ imaginaries. The concrete *representation* of a particular context
13 thus plays an essential role in its evolution (Fig 2). One should bear in mind,
14 moreover, that the relationship between representation and the effect of action
15 is not a direct one, since the latter is also influenced by distribution of
16 resource, procedural specificities and the power agents can wield. However,
17 when certain critical conditions - economic, political or social processes-
18 underlying a specific situation are seriously misrepresented, this is likely to
19 result in failure or even crisis.

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21 >>>>>>>> FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE <<<<<<<<<<<<<
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27 As Figure 2 shows, a key aspect of discursive selectivity is the role of the
28 strategically selective context. To conceptualise the more ‘structural’
29 (selective) effects of discourses, Sum proposes to draw from the work of
30 Fairclough, particularly the notion of ‘genre chains’ (CHOUILIARAKI and
31 FAIRCLOUGH, 2000). A genre denotes the way a specific professional or
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3 academic community develops and applies certain conventions and uses of
4 language (discourse) serving a particular communicative goal. In the context
5 of regional development, one can think of genres on regional-economic
6 development, democracy and political significance, social-cultural aspects and
7 sustainability. A *genre chain* represents the networks that interconnect
8 separate genres, often through processes of re-contextualisation, and serves to
9 translate ideas in specific forms (such as policy documents and strategy
10 reports). Genre chains are the key discursive vehicles for powerful agents in
11 the field (such as government departments, business organisations, core
12 associations and consultants, academics, NGOs) to define imaginaries, notably
13 economic imaginaries such as on competitiveness, innovation and workfare. In
14 the words of Jessop (2004a, p. 5)

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32 “Economic imaginaries at the meso- and macro-levels develop as
33 economic, political, and intellectual forces seek to (re)define specific
34 subsets of economic activities as subjects, sites, and stakes of
35 competition and/or as objects of regulation and to articulate strategies,
36 projects and visions oriented to these imagined economies”.

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46 When established, such imaginaries breed discursive selectivity, acquiring
47 their own performative and constitutive force. They are, in turn, an important
48 factor in producing broader strategic selectivities (cf. Fig. 2). Yet, this
49 selectivity, and the hegemony it sustains, can always be contested through the
50 ways subjects, intentionally or even unintentionally, create new varieties and
51 (re)combinations in meanings and practices. In some cases such a
52 development may come to the aid of existing forms of structural coherence, by
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3 further limiting the scope of imaginable actions and possible material and
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5 political support for alternative trajectories. New varieties may also have
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7 destabilising, path-changing effects, by mobilising sufficient discursive,
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9 political and material support to envisage and enable alternative courses of
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11 action. However, given the uncertainties and complexities surrounding social
12
13 change, achieved transformations are unlikely to be fully intentional. While
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15 they may be triggered and driven by intentional actions often of a visionary
16
17 nature, they are the outcome of an accumulation of incremental changes each
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19 guided by recursively produced strategies and tactics (JESSOP, 2001). We will
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21 now assess this evolutionary process in more detail with the help of Sum's
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23 account of the emergence of hegemonic imaginaries.
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32 The historical production of hegemonic imaginaries

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36 The production of hegemony is the result of a long-winded, unique history
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38 which can be characterised by various crucial moments of discursive and
39
40 strategic selection. Periods of gradual change, which can be explained largely
41
42 in terms of path-dependency, are punctuated by moments in which paths may
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44 change. In such moment, 'counter-hegemonic' discourses and practices may
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46 cause new imaginaries to take priority, power relations to be overturned, and
47
48 new forms to emerge. Building on the SRA and its discursive elaborations,
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50 SUM (2004) distinguishes between five crucial moments within the production
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52 of hegemony, which, in a slightly modified form, will be adopted here to
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54 reflect on the emergence of the region as a powerful imaginary (Fig. 3).
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3 >>>>>>>>> FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE <<<<<<<<<<<
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8 The *first* moment is when a window for change opens. Changes in structural
9 circumstances prompt the development of new discourses that aim at the
10 reconstitution of core objects of governance and identities of agents. Such
11 changes can be twofold. They can be triggered by a (perceived) political-
12 economic transformation *external* or *internal* to a particular process,
13 producing a turning or tipping point that open a window for change
14 (BUITELAAR et al., 2007). *Second*, new or modified repertoires of discourses
15 emerge that, however, remain constrained by overall structural conditions and
16 social relations. *Third*, this structurally inscribed strategic selective moment is
17 followed by an (inter)discursive selective moment, in which genre chains play
18 a critical role. In the words of SUM (2004, p.9): “These genre chains impose
19 limits on what can be articulated with what across different discourses. This
20 guides the combination of certain symbols that contribute to the support or
21 reinvention of the hegemonic objects, imaginaries and projects.” Genre chains
22 are mediated by key actors that set about to articulate new ‘problems’ and
23 ‘aims’ (including notions of *objects* of governance) and associated ‘solutions’
24 and ‘means’ (including notions of *subjects* of governance). These actors also
25 play a key role in translating these in general codes for wider circulation and
26 absorption. Further stabilisation is achieved by the shaping of new metaphors
27 and technologies of knowledge. These serve four prominent goals:
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29 (1) the framing of problem-solution perceptions,
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31 (2) the definition of the discursive position of ‘experts’,
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4 (3) the production of standards and scripts for assessment and documentation
5 (e.g. ways of assessing 'successful' regional performance, scripts for
6 policy evaluation, templates for drafting regional plans, etc.) and
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11 (4) building regimes of control through setting key mechanisms of ordering,
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13 labelling, categorising, and prioritising.
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17 The *fourth* moment occurs when the new discourses and genre chains become
18 somehow embodied in the subjectivities, practices and performances of agents
19 and organisation 'in the field'. New hegemonic imaginaries and associated
20 codes of practice thus start to infuse routine practices and events. *Fifth* and
21 finally, these discursive practices become regularised and institutionalised in
22 new forms of governance. These forms of governance serve to secure a certain
23 level of patterning of structural coherence, and embody new kinds of power
24 relations and social privileges.
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39 The spatial production of hegemonic imaginaries
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43 So far we have largely focused on the temporal dimension of hegemony. In
44 what sense do the SRA and Sum's approach present a spatially relevant
45 approach? This issue is met with some ambivalence. JESSOP (2001, p.1227)
46 himself stresses the inherent spatiotemporal character of the SRA:
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48 "spatiotemporal features should not be seen as accidental or secondary features
49 of institutions, but as constitutive properties that help to distinguish one
50 organization, institution, or institutional order from another." (...)
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60 "spatiotemporal selectivity of an organization, institution, or institutional

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3 ensemble involves the diverse modalities in and through which spatial and
4
5 temporal horizons of action in different fields are produced, spatial and
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8 temporal rhythms are created, and some practices and strategies are privileged
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10 and others made more difficult to realize according to how they 'match' the
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12 temporal and spatial patterns inscribed in the structures in question" (see also
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14 HAY, 2004).
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19 Jessop focuses, in particular, on the notion of *spatio-temporal fixes*.
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21 Conceptualised at the meso level, such fixes present the sites where economic
22
23 and non-economic elements are aligned to secure the stability of actual modes
24
25 of regulation and where capital can be valorised along structural and strategic
26
27 lines. *Structurally*, spatio-temporal fixes are formations that facilitate mobile
28
29 capital to turn into spatially embedded assets connected with essential
30
31 economic, notably and non-economic factors. This takes place within a
32
33 broader context of societalization and the search for institutional compromises,
34
35 through which the 'market economy' is embedded in a 'market society'
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37 (JESSOP and SUM, 2006). *Strategically*, agents and groups will pursue specific
38
39 aims in the interest of particular forms of capital (international, national or
40
41 local) and social positions (civil society, labour). Such fixes can thus be seen
42
43 as the outcome of structurally inscribed strategic selectivities that, in a
44
45 reiterative confrontation with economic and non-economic conditions, create
46
47 relatively and temporarily coherent and stable configurations. Such interests,
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49 and their privileging and articulations, are supported by imagined 'general
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51 interests' and associated spatial imaginaries. These can range from the local
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53 level ('industrial districts', 'science parks') and regional ('growth poles',
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3 ‘clusters’) to the national (‘gateway’, ‘knowledge economy’) and even
4
5 international level (cf. Europe’s Lisbon Agenda). Under global capitalism, it is
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7 *economic* imaginaries that prevail, although most imaginaries also address the
8
9 broader embedding of the economic in social (political, ecological)
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11 formations. Imaginaries serve to define subjects and objects of regulation and
12
13 to articulate visions underpinning particular strategies and projects. So it is
14
15 here where we can see ‘regulation as process’ at work.
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22 Yet, some authors have criticised the SRA for providing only a limited
23
24 conceptualisation of the relationship between strategic selectivity and the
25
26 regulation of territorial development (MACLEOD, 1997, UITERMARK, 2005).
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28 So, in addition to spatiotemporal fixes, other notions of spatiotemporal
29
30 selectivity have emerged. One is *scalar selectivity*, stemming from the way
31
32 particular forms of activities become organised, and dominate, at different
33
34 spatial levels. The result is that, in terms of COLLINGE (1999, p. 568), certain
35
36 levels take priority over other levels, due to "the power which organizations at
37
38 certain spatial scales are able to exercise over organizations at other, higher or
39
40 lower scales". Yet these other levels may acquire important subsidiary roles,
41
42 such as regions in global production networks, or the international level in the
43
44 pursuit of nationally oriented interests. Collinge makes a useful distinction
45
46 between ‘dominant’ and ‘nodal’ (subsidiary) scales. Within the context of the
47
48 discussion here, a key question is how discursive scalar representations –
49
50 which scales are deemed dominant – face up to the organisational and material
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52 needs and constraints of scalar structuration, an issue to be further explored
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54 below.
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6 Closely linked to scalar selectivity is *spatial selectivity*, the prioritisation of
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8 certain places in a wider territory, notably that of a state or configuration of
9
10 states (e.g. EU). JONES (1997, p. 849) asserts how, through both material and
11
12 discursive practices, "the state has the tendency to privilege certain places
13
14 through accumulation strategies and hegemonic projects", such as large urban
15
16 agglomerations or core regions. This happens intentionally through decisions
17
18 on spatial planning, infrastructure, physical investments, regional policy and
19
20 the design of multi-level governance structures. It also happens
21
22 unintentionally, since most political decisions and policy outcomes are
23
24 spatially biased, advantaging some areas while disadvantaging others. The
25
26 state, in this context, should not be read as a unitary organisation, or be reified
27
28 in substantive or functionalist terms (BRENNER, 2004). Rather, following an
29
30 SRA line of thinking the state is considered as a *social relation*, itself a
31
32 product of structurally-inscribed strategic selectivity. Structural inscription is
33
34 born both internally, through the way the political system and state apparatus
35
36 is organised, and externally, through the way the state is connected to other
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38 societal domains, notably business and civil society, and thus affected by shifts
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40 in societal governance and the role of capital. Such a relational (and relative)
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42 perspective on the state allows for a strong variety in state roles and effects.
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51 Close to Gramscian thinking, it explores the state in an inclusive sense,
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53 through its close ties with civil society and capital interests, while it also
54
55 allows for major contradictions between economic and political orders
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57 (JESSOP, 2004c). Inclusiveness, relationality and relativity, however, do not
58
59 mean a loss of the state's centrality. The state remains a key agent in allocating
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3 material resources and (co)producing development strategies, hegemonic
4 projects and critical imaginaries.
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10 A final point concerns the role of economic vs. non-economic aspects of
11 (spatial) developments and their representation. In conjunction with
12 conceptualising the role of the state, Regulationist writings have aspired to
13 assign more significance to non-economic factors than Marxist approaches, an
14 important agenda further pursued by Jessop and other scholars working on the
15 SRA. However, as illustrated by the characterisation of spatio-temporal fixes
16 and the state, economic tendencies and factors remain imperative. What is
17 problematic is not so much this pervasiveness as such, but the fact that it is
18 perceived in terms of abstract tendencies rather than concrete processes and
19 imaginations. On assessing the role of selectivities and fixes, economic
20 'forces' should not be reified or naturalised. Their role and determination
21 should be seen as shaped and endorsed by particular actors, selected forms of
22 knowledge and concrete courses of action, subject to specific economic
23 conditions and constraints. Economic imaginaries should not be seen as the
24 symbolic translations of material necessities. Rather, they are concepts that,
25 leaning on the hegemonic position the economy has in the *discursive*
26 articulation of societal processes and spatial development, serve a variety of
27 economic and non-economic interests of capital, the state and other powerful
28 actors. A critical question is thus to what extent the role and significance
29 assigned to economic factors presents more of a *discursive* than a strategic
30 selectivity (GIBSON-GRAHAM, 1996, HAY, 2002). With this caveat in mind, we
31 will now discuss the rise of regional imaginaries following Sum's model.
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8 The rise of the 'region': from the windows of change to discursive-selective
9 moments
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15 Of Sum's five moments, one could argue that recent literature on regional
16 formation has largely been oriented towards the latter two, and especially the
17 last one, that of institutionalisation and the shaping of new forms of (regional)
18 governance. PAASI's (1991, 2001) conceptualisation of region formation, for
19 instance, runs from the concrete imagining of regions as bounded and
20 somehow distinct territorial units (fourth moment) to the development of
21 regional institutions and the establishment of a region in the consciousness of
22 the wider community (fifth moment). More than reflecting historical and
23 cultural entities, or direct responses to 'global' structural change, as Paasi has
24 compellingly argued, regions result from processes of regionalisation that
25 should be understood in terms of social construction, with emphasis on the
26 narrative dimension of such construction. Like other elements of social space,
27 regions are "both products and constituents of social action" (PAASI, 2001, p.
28 13), sustained by four basic processes, namely territorial, institutional and
29 symbolic shaping, and internal and external recognition ('establishment').
30 Regions are perceived as 'action spaces' (SCHMITT-EGNER, 2002), territorially
31 bounded on the basis of (sometimes self-induced) discursive and institutional
32 processes. In the words of another prominent theorist on region formation,
33 BLOTEVOGEL (2000, p. 500): "the region is a social construct as well as
34 vehicle of goal rationality and power". The nurturing of a collective ('we')
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3 identity forms an important part of boosting internal and external recognition,
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5 and the way regions are seen and treated as 'bounded'. But, as Blotevogel
6
7 indicates, there are serious limits to what processes of identity shaping can do,
8
9 notably when they are driven by the allegedly strategic actors in processes of
10
11 region formation: "it is striking with how much thoughtlessness and outright
12
13 imprudence politicians, planners and particularly marketing 'experts' seek to
14
15 construct regions and regional identity" (BLOTEVOGEL, 2000, p. 502).
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22 KEATING (1998), on the other hand, pays more attention to the wider political,
23
24 economic and social context in which regions have emerged and settled. Yet,
25
26 his analysis remains confined to explaining, in rather broad terms, the regional
27
28 phenomenon against the backdrop of grand economic, political and societal
29
30 shifts, complemented by more specific institutional reviews at national levels.
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32 This does not explain how strategic choices and practices in the production of
33
34 narratives and imaginaries privileging the region have actually worked. Other
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36 authors have provided partial clues to this question, by addressing some of the
37
38 aspects within the realm of the first three moments (e.g. G. MACLEOD, 2001).
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40 Yet, there remains considerable scope for a more systematic analysis of how
41
42 the rise of the region as eminent objects and subjects of strategic action came
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44 about. Following Sum's framework, such an analysis should start several
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46 moments back, when the windows of change open and inter-discursive
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48 selectivity manifests itself.
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58 Various windows of change can be identified that, from the 1980s onwards,
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60 have had a major impact on the discursive and strategic position of the region.

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3 The first window can be understood in terms of the widely debated transition
4 from a Fordist to post-Fordist forms of regulation and accumulation. This
5 transition is seen as being accompanied by a fundamental shift in the basic
6 focus of regulation from the wage relation to dynamic competition (JESSOP
7 and SUM, 2006), affecting, in particular, the distribution of wealth and
8 management of demand. Regulation thus moved from an interventionist
9 'Keynesian' financial transfer from capital to labour, to one focused on
10 innovation, fostered by close links by research and business activities, flexible
11 work practices, and novel forms of financing and financial management, for
12 instance through venture capital schemes. Because of the increased
13 significance of specialisation and networks, one can add to this list a
14 regulatory need for more communication, coordination and strategic
15 orientation. While old 'Keynesian' arrangement continued to play a major
16 role, although in a reduced form, in securing basic macro economic conditions
17 at the national level, these new regulatory practices have been developed and
18 tried out in the context of new forms of *regional* governance. In Jessop and
19 Sum's (2006) terms, these forms thus present the loci of the search for new
20 spatio-temporal fixes. Such fixes should not be understood as fully substituting
21 for national 'fixes', but as particular arrangements that play a specific role in
22 the overall regulatory processes, subject to a wide range of specific mediations
23 and strategic manipulations (JONES, 2004).
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55 The conceptualisation and practicing of governance forms and institutional
56 fixes at the regional level are dominated by attempts to articulate the economic
57 with the non-economic. This affects, in particular, the shaping of localised
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3 systems of production. Regional governance and institutions serve to build up
4
5 and sustain specialised assets that can not be easily subjected to ‘pure’
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8 economic coordination and calculation, but that are vital for the creation of
9
10 innovative potential and increasing productivity. Such assets include high
11
12 levels of education, interactive processes of innovation and flexible
13
14 production, the attuning of spatial-environmental factors, and the more
15
16 advanced regulatory demands as documented above. Moreover, the emphasis
17
18 on ‘institution building’ and the nurturing of ‘governance capacity’ at the
19
20 regional level has been pushed by the disapproval of direct forms of state
21
22 intervention and subsidies (CERNY, 2006, GUALINI, 2001). Rather than
23
24 (sectoral groups of) firms, territorially defined entities such as regional
25
26 clusters, networks and partnership turned into popular objects of economic
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28 support.
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36 Parallel to the first window, a second window can be identified which stems
37
38 from developments in state governance. The post-war rise of the welfare state
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40 has resulted in a countless number of regulatory ‘interventions’ and practices,
41
42 posing major problems of coordination and control. The sheer number and
43
44 complexity of these interventions have meant that state apparatuses in Western
45
46 countries have lost much of their strategic overview and administrative
47
48 capacity to manage societies. Supported by calls for ‘modernising’
49
50 government, states feel the urgent need to search for new ways to coordinate
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52 and align policy processes, in what can be called new forms of ‘meta-
53
54 governance’ (JESSOP, 2004c). This includes the advocacy for more market-
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56 conform and market-oriented forms of policy-making, more public
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3 participation in all stages of policy-making, and a better use of modern
4 technologies (such as ICT) to enhance effectiveness and reduce policy
5 fragmentation. Through their potential to realign and reorganise policy
6 domains, spatial-scalar strategies represent appealing instruments to meet such
7 intricate demands. Regions, in particular, feature as domains where new forms
8 of policy effectiveness, public participation and, as a result, legitimacy can be
9 cultivated and tested (GUALINI, 2004). The problem of coordination is
10 compounded, moreover, by the rising importance of supranational bodies and
11 treaties. The EU, in particular, has turned to the region as a site to align its
12 territorial strategies with that of the national and local levels. From a more
13 negative point of view, such new state spatialities and selectivities can also be
14 read as attempts to offload difficult responsibilities and financial burden onto
15 lower levels in order to reduce the administrative and financial distress for
16 central state levels.
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39 The local-regional level itself provides a third window, or more precisely set
40 of windows due to a number of recent developments. Changing physical
41 conditions and usages, notably in transport and land-use patterns, have
42 increased the need for coordination at the inter-municipal or city-regional
43 level. Urban sprawl, fiscal crises in core cities, congestion, land shortages and
44 other territorial problems require the build-up of coordination and planning
45 capabilities at supra-local levels. In many cases, this is not easy to achieve,
46 since there is often much distrust and rivalry between adjacent local
47 authorities, notably between core cities and suburban municipalities
48 (HERRSCHEL and NEWMAN, 2002, PORTER and WALLIS, 2002). On a more
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4 positive note, regional governance and strategy making has been fostered by
5
6 the advocacy of sustainable territorial forms of transport, housing, energy use
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8 etc. Images of sustainable regions and 'eco-regions' have made major inroads
9
10 into the vocabulary and practices of regional planning (HAUGHTON and
11
12 COUNSELL, 2004). A final impetus stems from a cultural-political drive
13
14 through which the imagining of regions and the creation of regional
15
16 governance is advanced by notions and expressions of territorial identity and
17
18 difference (KEATING, 1998, PAASI, 2001). In the words of Agnew (1999, p.
19
20 93), "[r]egions both reflect differences in the world and ideas about
21
22 differences. They cannot be reduced to one or the other. Observers and people
23
24 in the world use regional designations to make sense of the world and these
25
26 draw on real differences between parts of the world but they cannot claim total
27
28 fit to the world because they are based on ideas about regional differences that
29
30 are not simply about those differences per se but also about ideas of how the
31
32 world works".
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41 These various windows, with their embedded selectivities, are being framed,
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43 performed, and associated by variety of genres and genre chains. As explained
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45 before, genre chains provide the re-contextualisation of prevailing
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47 communicative ideas and conventions, and serve to translate these in specific
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49 forms like policy-making processes, in what is called an 'inter-discursive
50
51 selective moment'. Genres that have made a major contribution here include
52
53 the emphasis on competitiveness in a 'globalising' economy, grafted onto neo-
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55 liberal economic perspectives, the emphasis on participatory and integrative
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57 forms of policy making associated with a shift from 'government' to
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3 'governance', debates on the 'nodal' region embedded within 'global' flows of
4 capital, goods, and knowledge, and sustainable perspectives on territorial
5 development. The critical question is how these ideas and issues have been
6 sutured into the canvass of the region. Who and what mediated the selection?
7
8 What kind of metaphors, knowledges and technologies become dominant?
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10 What presentations of 'problems' and 'solutions' are adopted in policy
11 processes? How are policy outcomes and associated territorial developments
12 monitored and relayed? And to what extent are these aspects differentiated in
13 space and time?
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27 There is no space here for responding to these questions in detail (see also
28 other papers in this issue SPECIFY??). What is especially interesting for the
29 purpose of this paper is the outcome in terms of *discursive* selectivity. How is
30 strategic selectivity perceived and translated into strategic ideas and actions?
31
32 What kind of ideas and translations are feasible and pressed forward? In other
33 words, how are genre chains constructed and performed? What we are after, in
34 particular, is how, in a complex environment, specific multiplicities emerge
35 and evolve, how certain themes are articulated, and how these are associated
36 with particular, powerful imaginaries. For the conceptualisation of the region,
37 this will be debated by focusing, in the light of the windows just presented, on
38 two aspects: the spatial/scalar dimension and, as a major substantive issue, the
39 articulation of the 'economic' and 'non-economic'.
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58 Spatial-scalar configurations
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4 Scale presents a core theme in the literature on the region and wider
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6 geographical debate. What is interesting for the discussion here is the way the
7
8 region is associated with both scalar and non-scalar perspectives. All windows
9
10 identified above give rise to *scalar* perspectives. They all provide accounts of
11
12 how governance aspects are scaled ‘down’ or ‘up’ to the regional level to
13
14 make the latter ‘strategically selective’. From an economic angle, the
15
16 coordination of economic support, notably on the supply-side, is seen as partly
17
18 shifting from the national-sectoral to the regional level. The state governance
19
20 window advances similar shifts in terms of strategic responsibilities for policy
21
22 integration and planning. Amongst the territorial windows, an upscaling of
23
24 core competencies is envisaged from the local to the region levels. Initially,
25
26 this debate was centred on a political notion of *devolution*, in which regions
27
28 would gain substantial political autonomy against a ‘hollowed out’ central
29
30 state, with Spain and Belgium as exemplary cases. More recent observations,
31
32 based on for instance experiences in England and Eastern Europe, or
33
34 discussions on multi-level governance in the context of Europeanisation, point
35
36 at policy *decentralisation*. This means that, under a continued role of the
37
38 nation state as a central orchestrator, the region becomes part of a nested
39
40 system of policy-making and implementation (GUALINI, 2006, JONES, 2004,
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42 MCMASTER, 2006). Scale management then becomes an intrinsic part of
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44 detailed forms of state regulation (JESSOP, 2004b).
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55 *Non-scalar* perspectives do not start from a territorially compartmentalised
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57 and nested worldview. They focus on the spatiality of socio-economic
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59 practices, with emphasis on flow and connectivity. In an economic sense,
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3 regions are seen as hosting novel forms of socio-economic governance, able to
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5 position their territories strategically in wider circuits of economic and
6
7 political interaction. Well-known, iconic examples of such territories are
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9 Silicon Valley, the Italian industrial districts and various high-tech clusters
10
11 across the globe. These regions do not fill preordained scales but present, to
12
13 use Storper's label, 'worlds' of action operating in the context of global flows
14
15 and networks. Interestingly, also in policy debates and agendas, regions are
16
17 associated with spatial configurations not in a 'partitioned' or 'devolved'
18
19 sense, but as the basis for new, often network-oriented, policy practices.
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21 Examples include the experimental regions hosting novel forms of economic
22
23 and territorial governance in Germany and The Netherlands (GUALINI, 2004),
24
25 and the advocacy of (city)regional nodes and gateways as part of network
26
27 perspectives on spatial development and as responses to specific territorial
28
29 problems (PORTER and WALLIS, 2002). In all these cases, spatiality is
30
31 constituted primarily through the specific policy practice, rather than a
32
33 premeditated aspiration to engage in scalar structuration and patterns of state
34
35 spatiality (BRENNER, 2004). In the Dutch and German case, for instance, the
36
37 experimental regions have emerged at levels and in configurations that differ
38
39 markedly, and explicitly, from well-established regional partitions, such as
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41 'Provincies' and 'Bezirke'. Obviously, engagement with scalar politics may be
42
43 inevitable once policy practices become more established.
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55 As discussed in much more detail in Jones et. al (THIS ISSUE??), scale is
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57 subject to a hefty theoretical and political debate. While some authors tend to
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59 see scalar and non-scalar perspectives in strongly oppositional terms, the
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3 position adopted here (and throughout this issue??) is one of exploring and
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5 advocating the articulation and mutual constitution of both perspectives. For
6
7 assessing the inter-discursive moment for producing hegemonic notions of the
8
9 region, such a complementary view is certainly most relevant. One could
10
11 argue that, in the intersecting of the three types of windows identified above,
12
13 the *compatibility* between both perspectives is critical. It is the way more
14
15 innovative, strategic ideas based on notions of nodes-in-network and territorial
16
17 forms of policy-integration are embedded in multi-scaled accounts privileging
18
19 regional governance that provides a major source of inspiration and rhetorical
20
21 strength for the articulation of regional imaginaries. And it is, moreover, the
22
23 economic orientation of such accounts that have contributed to this strength, as
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25 will be discussed now.
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36 Economic vs. non-economic orientations

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41 Discourses on the region, and the imaginaries they sustain, tend to be strongly
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43 oriented towards economic aspects of regional development, both in circuits of
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45 practitioners and academics (LAGENDIJK, 2006). This dominance has been
46
47 documented, in more detail, by Jones (2004) for the English regions, De
48
49 Bruijn et al. (2005) for the EU and Jensen and Richardson (JENSEN and
50
51 RICHARDSON, 2004) for a wider variety of regions and policy domains. This
52
53 does not mean that economic development, notably its neoliberal connotation
54
55 of ‘competitiveness’, is always framed as the primary goal or condition. It can
56
57 also present a strategic aspect that needs to be ‘accommodated’ in the light of
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3 non-economic social, ecological or territorial objectives, induced by the
4
5 second and third set of windows identified above. Accordingly, what prevails
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7 in the inter-discursive moment, through the articulation of genre chains, is the
8
9 interweaving of economic notions of the region with symbols and stories on
10
11 sustainability, social cohesion, community development, governance building,
12
13 and participative and strategic forms of planning (JENSEN and RICHARDSON,
14
15 2004, LAGENDIJK, 2005). Especially the EU has been a key mediator of genre
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17 chains that link 'competitiveness' aims to conditions of sustainability and
18
19 spatial-social cohesion ('balanced development') (DE BRUIJN and LAGENDIJK,
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21 2005). It has also been a core catalyst in nurturing process of institutional
22
23 change and network building. To a varying degree, many other (supra)state
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25 organisations have played similar roles, with in their wake a large number of
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27 consultancies, advisory councils, business associations, regional organisations
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29 and figureheads, and not to forget, academics (LOVERING, 1999)
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39 This articulation of economic and non-economic aspects happens at various
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41 levels, from goal-setting and strategy-making to concrete operations. First, the
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43 level of *goal- and agenda-setting* is inspired primarily by the more socially
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45 and ecologically accommodating perspectives of neo-liberalism, in which the
46
47 emphasis on the economy has been somewhat tempered (CERNY, 2006). The
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49 latter helps to respond to pressures coming through the second and third
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51 window, supported by different state bodies (from local to international
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53 levels), to include non-economic orientations and demands. Second, at the
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55 level of *strategies and practices*, the economic primarily plays a conditional
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57 role. The preferred modes of action and coordination are based on notions of
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3 social interaction and governance (collaboration, partnerships, institution
4 building) and even planning (programmes and projects). This is not the result
5 of external pressures, however, but of the discursive selectivity of the first
6 window itself, in which the embedding of non-economic assets and values is
7 seen as critical for economic performance. From the policy side, another
8 combination arises. Pushed by neoliberal perspectives on state management,
9 non-economic interests in effectiveness and legitimacy are blended with a
10 strong emphasis on financial prudence, efficiency and accountability. The final
11 level is that of specific *initiatives and projects*. This is also subjected to the
12 mix of effectiveness and efficiency/accountability conditions carried over
13 from the strategic level, now interwoven with notions of internal
14 communication and project management.

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17 Like the spatial-scalar theme, the topic of economic vs. non-economic
18 manifests the multiplicity of ideas underlying the shaping of 'regional
19 imaginaries' and associated practices. What is different, however, is the nature
20 of discursive selectivity. Not only is a certain economic orientation
21 inescapable, this also applies to non-economic aspects. Because of this double
22 constraint, achieving some form and degree of coherence poses a major
23 challenge. The situation is compounded by the fact that the regional setting for
24 strategy making and project development only presents a fragment in a much
25 wider 'policy space' (GUALINI, 2004), which subjects them to additional sets
26 of constraints and interdependencies. A major handicap, partly resulting from
27 this, is the spurious nature of many regional knowledges, and their
28 incompatibilities once they are put into practice (PAINTER, 2002). In terms of
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3 Fig. 2, long feedback loops and a high of misrepresentations, reducing the
4 potential for effective strategic learning and .
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13 Towards the configuration of subjects and institutionalisation of regions
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17 In constructing imaginaries, regions, and core agents and processes associated
18 with regions, are framed as both objects and subjects of governance. More
19 specifically, state agents including local, national and international state
20 organisations, as well as non-state regionally dependent actors, such as
21 businesses, community actors and NGOs employ the genre chains discussed
22 above to charge regions politically and strategically (JONAS and PINCETL,
23 2006, JONES, 2001). This charging is double edged. On the one hand, it comes
24 with strong discursive and strategic selectivity, in the form of specific
25 ambitions ('balanced development'), categorisations (e.g. EU's NUTS-II
26 partition), knowledges (SWOT, innovation, sustainability, etc), and governing
27 procedures technologies (scripts for writing strategies and funding
28 applications, etc). On the other hand, embedded within this selectivity is the
29 notion of the region as a prominent *subject* of strategy making and orchestrator
30 of policy initiatives and projects, and as a globally active broker to obtain
31 ideas, partners and funding. The exemplary agent caught between manifold
32 demands and the urge to be proactive and strategic is the Regional
33 Development Agency (MCMMASTER, 2006).
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3 In regulatory terms, such double-edged subjectivisation can be attributed to the
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6 move from an interventionist state dealing directly with economic and social
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8 subjects, to a more 'distant' state facilitating and regulating sites of
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10 governance such as local communities (e.g. for social policy), sectors or
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12 clusters (e.g. for labour market and economic policies) and regions (e.g. for
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14 innovation policy and all kinds of territorial management). It is in this context
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16 that regions have been constructed as specific, novel new regulatory sites
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18 endowed with a strategic form of agency. At a concrete level, while there are
19
20 strong similarities in selectivities, one should note the differences in the ways
21
22 such constructions have worked out notably in specific nation states. For
23
24 instance, regionalisation in Spain and Belgium, driven by community and
25
26 identity interests, differs markedly from developments in England, led by a
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28 centralised political agenda, or most East European countries, where the
29
30 administrative processes of EU accession have played a dominant role.
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32 Similarly, means of control and funding vary from high levels of autonomy
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34 (Spain, US) and contractual approaches (France) to detailed centralised
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36 budgetary control (England, Netherlands) and meticulous accounting practices
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38 (EU). Accordingly, these various types come with different, although often
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40 comparable practices of shaping the territorial, symbolic and institutional-
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42 political form of the region (PAASI, 1991, 2001).
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53 Taking the argument one step further, the question is to what extent regions, or
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55 more precisely, regional engagement in 'regulation as process', can be
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57 associated with new spatio-temporal fixes. Put differently, what kinds of
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59 strategic positions and selectivities result from the discursively hegemonic
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3 position of regional imaginaries? Beyond doubt, strong positions have been
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5 achieved by regions that, as sub-states, form part of (semi)federal states. These
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7 regions have generally benefited from the devolution of major regulatory
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9 powers, which does not rule out the possibility that the distribution of certain
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11 responsibilities and resources can be strongly contested. A less clear-cut
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13 picture emerges for regions in non-federal countries. Here, regulatory practices
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15 tend to remain heavily dependent on external knowledges, sources and control.
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18 'Regulation as process' takes the form of complex, multi-layered networks in
19
20 which regions only present a fragment in wider chains of political actions and
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22 policy-making. While they may be endowed with significant roles of
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24 experimenting and synthesising, notably of 'soft' kinds, it does not present a
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26 good basis for achieving 'structured coherence' in a regulatory sense.
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34 There is a certain tension, accordingly, between the discursive and strategic
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36 aspects of region construction. Discursively, the region tends to be portrayed
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38 as a dominant site and scale of 'advanced' and 'globalising' capitalist
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40 development, both in how it can support economic dynamism and how this is
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42 embedded in a territorially bounded social-institutional formation. Discursive
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44 selectivity, to use the terminology of COLLINGE (1999), points at the region as
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46 a 'dominant' scale of regulation. This selectivity strategically serves the
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48 interests of other sites and levels, notably that of the nation state, but also
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50 points at the role of strategies pursued by local and international capital
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52 (JONAS and PINCETL, 2006). Although regional positions vary strongly notably
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54 across regions, in a regulatory sense their role is generally confined to a nodal
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56 one. In effect, as recently manifested by the English case, the way regions tend
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3 to be portrayed as generic 'powerhouses' for addressing socio-economic
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5 problems from the local (inequality) to the national level (competitiveness)
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7 presents a form of *regulatory conceit* based on a double misrepresentation
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9 (JONES, 2001). First, the way economic dynamism is projected onto a single
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11 (regional) scale is highly problematic. And second, in JONES' own words:
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13 "This philosophy is doubly misleading if it then assumes that all regional
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15 governance structures can effectively intervene in the economy, regulate its
16
17 contradictions, and ensure economic growth" (JONES, 2001, p. 1196).
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25 There is, however, another side to the way regional governance is subjected to
26
27 external imperatives and constraints, namely that of strategic action initiated
28
29 by regional agents themselves. By employing alternative repertoires of
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31 regional discourses and action, potentially resisting economically imperialist,
32
33 'global' accounts (GIBSON-GRAHAM, 1996, MASSEY, 2004), regions may at
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35 least partially become their own author of subjectivities. One example of such
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37 counteraction is the way certain American city-regions and even states have
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39 taken (sometimes legal) action to conform to the Kyoto agreements on
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41 greenhouse gas reduction, against the Washington doctrine of non-compliance.
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45 Another example is the drive of semi-autonomous regions like in Spain or
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47 Belgium to stretch the boundaries of their political autonomy, also by
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49 subverting the present political and institutional division of power and
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51 resources (KEATING, 1998). Obviously, such local shifts in discursive and
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53 strategic selectivities do not automatically come with a window for (positive)
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55 change. Structural constraints, notably of a material kind, may impose strong
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57 limitation on actual possibilities for developing alternative tracks of action.
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3 Moreover, like with state selectivities, such shifts may prioritise certain
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5 interests and scales at the expense of others (for instance social vs.
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7 environmental, or a wealthy, powerful region against weaker ones).
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10 11 12 13 14 15 Conclusion

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20 How can we understand the rise of the region as an apparently ‘omnipresent’
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22 phenomenon? And what does that mean for regional governance and
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24 practices? Recent contributions to this debate have been criticised for
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26 overemphasising ‘soft’ aspects of regional socio-economic developments, thus
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28 losing sight of the broader picture as provided by ‘harder’ approaches as
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30 inspired by Regulationist ideas. Also, although ‘soft’ approaches are keen to
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32 explore discursive aspects of regional development, due to an inward-looking
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34 nature they do not shed much light on the ‘omnipresence’ in a broader context
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36 of political-economic developments and policy-making. In response, this
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38 paper has sought to reflect on the unfolding of specific regional practices and
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40 forms within the light of broader changes and tendencies. Core concepts for
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42 this approach have been drawn from the Strategic Relational Approach and, in
43
44 particular, Sum’s evolutionary model of ‘discursive hegemony’. A core result
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46 is the linking of socially constructive and institutionally oriented notions of
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48 region-building as advocated by Paasi (corresponding to the latter ‘moments’
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50 in Sum’s model) to the role of structurally inscribed strategic selectivity and
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52 associated discursive selectivities (corresponding to earlier ‘moments’). The
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latter are, in turn, embedded in a regulatory perspective on political-economic development.

The 'omnipresence' of the region, we may conclude, presents a form of discursive hegemony associated with strategic selectivities manifesting complex spatial and scalar (and often non-regional) orientations. From a historical perspective, the region presented an available window to experiment with new regulatory forms and 'fixes'. This has been aimed, in particular, at improving economic performance through its embedding in the non-economic, and on accommodating non-economic targets (cohesions, sustainability). On this account, it is not so much the regional spatial configuration or scalar reconfiguration, but the need for a 'blank' (sub-state) level of governance that has given a major impetus to regional discursive 'hegemony'. At the level of regulation as 'process', on the other hand, practices and forms of governance have evolved as fragments in a much wider space of political actions and policy-making. It is in this wider (national and international) space that multiple ideas and scripts are circulated and combined with the help of genre chains. Through these chains, regions are portrayed as core sites to promote policy integration and territorial coordination, and, last but not least, innovative (but also 'balanced') forms of economic development. The result is enacted significance, but not coherence. On the contrary, with the exception of regions where coherence is institutionally induced (like in federal systems), these fragments are themselves torn in many directions. Regions are continuously subjected to multiple spatial and scalar selectivities of state and other dominant organisations. It comes down to organisations like RDAs to

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3 cope with such centrifugal forces and instabilities. Accordingly, together with
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5 local business, state and community organisation, they have to weave an
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7 image of coherence, functionality and identity through a myriad of
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10 programmatic activities.
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15 Is the region an accident? As an object of governance, the region turned out to
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17 be at the right place and time, responding to, and bringing together, various
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19 windows of opportunity. Perceived from that background, the ‘discursive
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21 hegemony’ sustaining the region’s significance, including the emphasis on its
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23 regulatory position, seems far from accidental. However, although facilitated
24
25 and framed by this hegemony, the rise of a large variety of concrete, regionally
26
27 oriented forms and practices of governance and policy-making can be
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29 attributed to numerous accidental combinations of economic, political and
30
31 institutional developments and representations. While privileging the region,
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33 they may also constitute forms of centrifugal instability opening the window
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35 for other spatialities and forms of governance. Whither the region?
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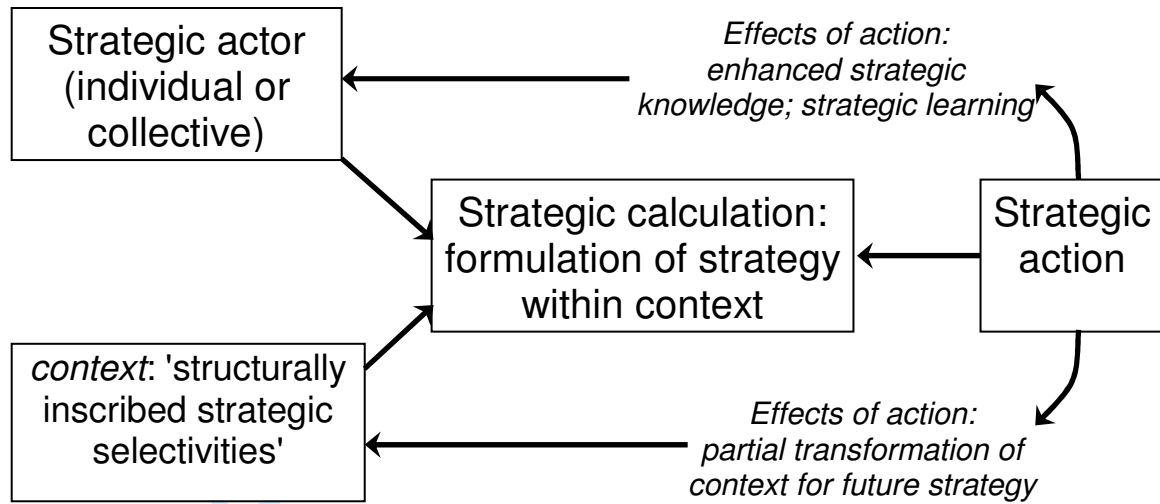


Fig 1 The strategic relational approach (after Hay 2002)

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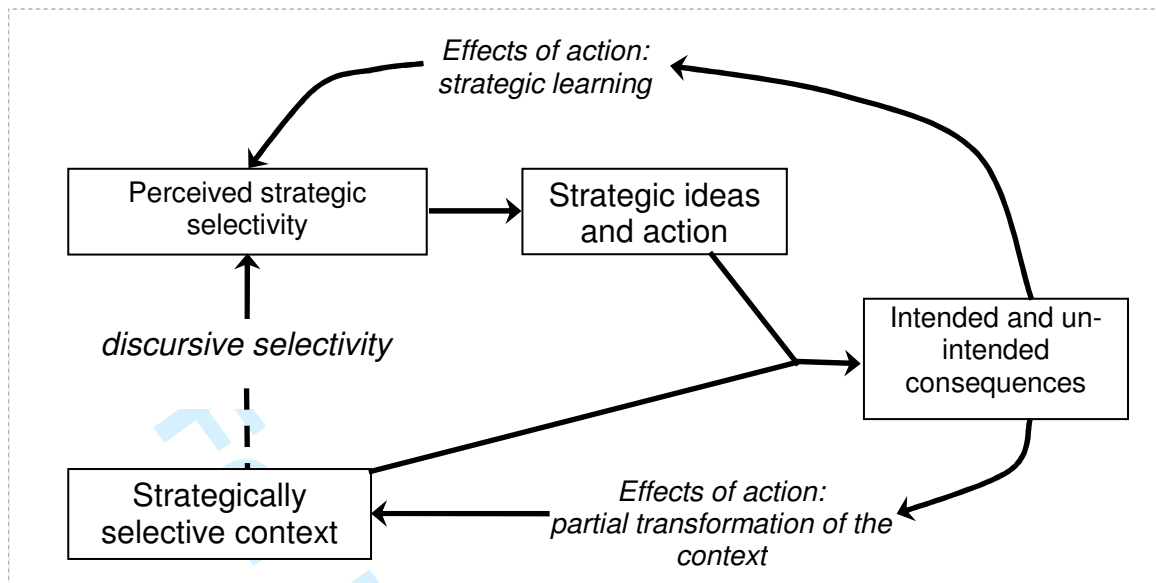


Fig 2. Discursive selectivity, after Hay (2002)

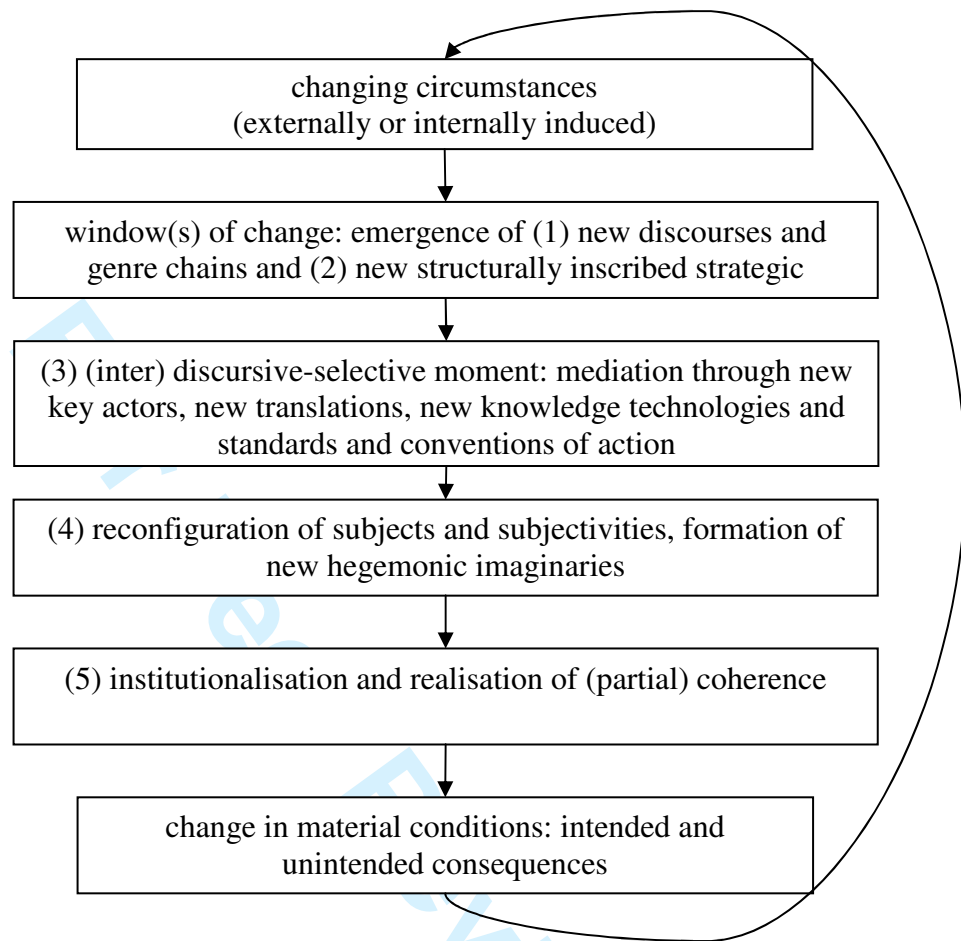


Figure 3 The production of hegemony, after Sum (2004)