The Desire for Regions. The Production of Space in Sweden’s History and Historiography

Published by Institut für Europäische Regionalforschungen, Interregions 1995:4
Peter Aronsson

Introduction

Questions about the character, size, societal significance, and future role of regions are accentuated in our days by processes which simultaneously suggest a reduced significance for the nation state and increased nationalism with an ethnic and religious basis.

There are signs to suggest that the development of strong nation states has now reached its zenith after 500 years of almost continuous growth. Economic processes show clear indications of globalization and reduced spatial cohesion, while cultural and political processes show a more complicated picture of several conceivable lines of development. What the two tendencies have in common is that the limits and functions of the old nation states are once again being problematized and debated. One can observe “a growing tension between old decision-making territories and new problem areas”.¹

The integration process in Western Europe has added further fuel to the debate: how is the “democratic deficit” to be handled? Which institutions will be necessary and powerful in the European Union of the future? What regional effects will European integration conceivably have, and what is desirable?

The first debate and the first planned European regionalization both started with the former large wave of integration in the European Community, at the end of the 1960s. The regional policy that was born in this phase tended rather to strengthen the national centres of power. The economic crisis after 1973 put a stop to the burgeoning design. Demands for regional autonomy continued to be heard from “radical” – and poor – regions such as Corsica, Ulster, and the Basque Provinces. In the 1980s the regional perspective once again became more topical than ever, but this time more as a quest for identity on the part of the successful, the rich, and the strong, what Christopher Harvie calls “bourgeois regions”.²

Regional demands in today’s Europe are growing not just because of the increased opportunities for communication and articulation offered by the modern world. At least as important is what has been called the economization of state power. It has increasingly come to be seen as an economic regulator, functional in relation to economic forces. The problem is that its legitimacy as exerciser of power is reduced when the cultural, ideological, and territorial dimensions of authority are toned down. We get a new territorialization of political demands, this time on a regional level, when the parliamentarism of representative central government

¹ Törnqvist 1994, p. 23.
² Harvie 1994.
is mainly viewed as a functional adjustment. Even the supranational integration process itself can, according to Tom Nairn, create a regionalist backlash among regions which are prosperous by absolute standards, but which have been relatively speaking deprived of influence and prosperity by recent developments. Demands are strongest when they can be articulated with an ethnic dimension.3

A less democratic but ever-present worry since the breakthrough of democracy has been the relation between democracy and efficiency in politics. Since the start of the twentieth century there has largely been unanimity, at least in the practical work of reform, that efficiency in the political decision-making process and administration is best achieved by increased state control, the amalgamation of municipalities, increased elements of representativity, and expert-dominated administration. At the same time, growing awareness about the negative side of this development has been evident since the 1970s. It has found expression both as a driving force behind the large-scale inquiries into local government carried out by political scientists, practical experiments with decentralization, user influence, and the like in the municipalities, and as a discussion of issues such as constitutional changes with fewer politicians and longer mandate periods on the one hand, and increased scope for voting for individuals rather than parties on the other hand. Since the 1970s there has also been a debate about the need for a democratic arena at regional level: a county or regional parliament. In the EU the sudden flaring of debate about the subsidiarity principle nourished a hope in many regions about a division of power between the EU and the regions – at the expense of the nation states.4

What role can be played by old, new, or revitalized regions in this development? What are the growth mechanisms and functional patterns of the historical regions? What patterns of culture are there to build on? What can be created by political reforms? Can the regions be solely an adjustment to patterns of economic contact?5

It is rare that anyone asks about the historical dimensions of regions, regionalization, or regionalism in the social sciences and the political debate. Is it wise or possible to ignore historical processes? This article sums up a study conducted for the Expert Group for Research into Regional Development in Sweden. A fair if not yet completely unambiguous answer to the question can already be summed up here: regions are created and changed – but not just any way.6

---

3 Europa – historiens återkomst, pp. 25 ff.
4 Different countries have interpreted the Maastricht Treaty and later specifications of the subsidiarity principle in different ways: the Continent, not least Germany, advocates regionally elected Councils of the Regions, while the UK maintains its right to handle this through centrally appointed ministers and civil servants – and far-reaching privatization of traditionally local and regional policy areas. Harvie 1994, p. 54.
5 The discussion is being held in virtually all forums, of which I mention only a few here: NordREFO, whose investigative and coordinating work is based on the programme of the Nordic Council of Ministers; Cerum reports. In Germany modern research gained momentum back in the 1970s, where it could function as a surrogate for national identification and a sense of Heimat. Dann 1983. Here, as in most places, the concept of region is still being used by historians in a way that is often naïve: the old administrative units are allowed to form the framework for an account of the history of the region.
6 For detailed notes and references see the main report: Regionernas roll i Sveriges historia (1995). I confine myself here to providing references to direct quotations and texts in English and German. Most of the sources, of course, are in Swedish. I am grateful to Alan Crozier who made the careful translation to English with short notice.
Within the general stated framework, a European cooperation project would be a relevant form of project. In it the nation state as such could also be regarded as one region among others, one which has been particularly successful in assembling resources and public functions over a relatively long time, with a relatively high degree of legitimacy, and with exclusive right to use legitimate violence. However some limits has to be made for the present purpose.

The starting point for this study is historical research, also looking aside to see how the concept of the region is used in neighbouring disciplines, chiefly ethnology, economic history, and human geography, in order to paint a more complete picture of how science has approached the question of regions in Sweden in historical perspective. In fact, explicit regional theories are used more often in the neighbouring disciplines, although implicit studies of regions are by no means uncommon in history. As for the temporal limits, the studied period is very wide, but the emphasis is on the time before the coming of active regional policy. In the latter sphere there are a number of state inquiries, and considerable knowledge has been amassed about distinctive regional features on the basis of modern problems. This study seeks to see this knowledge against the background of the historical significance of the regions, and also to point out the more sluggish regional patterns and their characteristics. It is not certain whether the knowledge can become instrumental in a traditional sense, that is, by suggesting solutions to societal problems. The task is rather to add a temporal dimension to the debate by showing the possibilities and limitations which history has shown regional organizations and patterns of culture to have, and to emphasize the active role of the production of culture and knowledge in the creation of regions.

The fact that the historical dimension of the question has long been unarticulated in Sweden is probably because of our historical self-understanding. The Swedish self-image, deeply rooted in the citizens and in harmony with national narratives about the emergence of Sweden, speaks of a strong nation state as early as the reign of Gustav Vasa in the sixteenth century. Since then, according to the prevailing picture, the key terms have been national unity, civil obedience, and centralism. The region is viewed as relevant chiefly in connection with residual inequalities in the integration process.

The concept of region should not be given a stipulative definition in this study. The point of departure is its use in research and by the historical actors. A discussion of how different definitions have been formed and used and perhaps can be further developed will be a result of the study rather than a starting point. There is reason not only to consider the regions distinguished by research but also to look at how people go about scientifically “producing” regions.

However, a coarse delimitation of what should fall in the category of “region” is needed. By region is meant, first of all, areas held together by similarities or interactive fields of a certain identity in cultural, economic, social, or political terms. These can be found at all territorial levels, but here the discussion is mainly about those which lie above the level of “the place” and the local community but under that of the nation state. The analytical steps are local community – region – state and macro-region.7 The concluding chapter of the studie is

---

7 C.f. Europa – historiaens återkomst, p. 17 and Harvie 1994 who chooses the political interaction between nation and the next sub-level to define region.
the main text of this survey and examines the theoretical content of the concept of region. There have been many suggestions through the years: naturally perceived, historically created, or scientifically constructed; demarcated by objective criteria, subjective identities, or instrumental needs.

The upper limit is unclear, not least for early times, but it is unclear in an interesting way. The Kalmar Union, the Catholic church, and the Hanseatic League are three different examples of regional organizations on a high level which were real alternatives to the nation state project, which gradually amassed the greatest organizational capacity and power. In this perspective, the nation states could be seen as regional projects which triumphed over the Nordic or the Hanseatic projects. In the European debate there are – and have been – several visions of regions transcending national boundaries. The main emphasis has nevertheless been on the levels between the local community and the nation state, which may also have been motivated by the fact that the main focus of the contemporary Swedish debate is on the regions surrounding the big cities, but above county level: Southern Sweden as the hinterland of Malmö; Western Sweden around Gothenburg; and the Mälaren Valley as the hinterland of Stockholm. A number of less expansive areas, both in Sweden and in Europe, are opportunistically trying to transform the region into a resource. Perhaps it is more often the latter which look for contacts across national boundaries?

The analysis should inquire into how regions are characterized in the following dimensions:

1. **Territoriality and institutionalization**
   What size is the region and what degree of autonomy does it have?
   Is it seen as a natural region on the basis of territorial and geographical conventions; or is it defined with functional, political, social, and economic factors in the centre? In what spheres does it have autonomy? Where and how are the boundaries of the region set? What is the relation to the process of state formation and national development?

2. **Objective criteria: homogeneity or functionality**
   Is one decisive characteristic singled out, or complex, spatially coinciding patterns? Are these properties (the homogeneous region) or relations (the functional region)? Are things like ethnic affiliation, commuting to work, or interactive life-modes seen as criteria of region formation? How far is the social applicability stretched? Does everyone belong to the region, or just a few, a particular group?

3. **Subjective criteria: identity**
   Does identity formation play a passive or active role in the region? Is identity regarded as an unarticulated precondition, a mentality, based on similar practice and a similar life-mode distinguishing the region from other regions (regionality)? To what extent is self-understanding and the production of symbols ascribed significance for the development of the region?

4. **Historical change**

---

How do regions develop and change? Through the intervention of the state, through the restructuring of business and industry, or through new discourses – political, cultural, or scientific ones?

The thematic chapters in the survey are of two different kinds. The first ones take their point of departure in the thematization of regions in the literature, the intention being to sketch an overall picture showing which regions have been distinguished in historically oriented research. This cannot be complete. The various contexts that have given reason to emphasize the role of regions can be stated as a number of points. In roughly chronological order they are:

- The unification of Sweden: kindred-based society and the provinces competing for state power.
- The role and development of the administrative framework: provincial self-government versus state centralism.
- Settlement units: the regions of agrarian society, racial theories, and the discussion of Eastern versus Western Sweden.
- The functional regions of industrial society: the geography of proto-industrialization; town and country; regional economy; the geography of civil society; the regions of regional policy.

It is to be hoped that the principles for distinguishing regions and the more influential perspectives will be presented in this brief summary. This is done under the headings “The Regions of the Realm” and “The Regions of Culture and Work”.

To supplement this approach, the chapter “Created Regions” deals with some regions, Jämtland in the north of Sweden and Värend (a part of Småland) in the south, adopting a more dynamic holistic perspective to elucidate the complexity of the formation and dissolution of regions. The empirical part is summed up in “Regional Levels in Sweden”.

The major part of the text is then devoted to an attempt to clarify and deepen the theoretical discussion of different concepts of region.

The Regions of the Realm

The administrative regions of both the state and the church – county (län), judicial district (tingslag), municipality (kommun), diocese (stift), deanery (kontrakt), parish (socken), etc. – can be regarded from two angles. From their judicial regulation it can be argued that all public political power derives from the state and that all territorial subdivisions express decentralized or deconcentrated state power. From a more historical, practice-oriented point of view, one can see how the territorial arenas, from the parish assembly to the seat of county administration, also function as arenas where different social interests and groups reconcile their positions and resources. Even meetings preceding tax assessments contained elements of negotiation which transformed formally legal measures into micro-politics, and territorial arenas in varying degrees into political forums.
It is possible, however, to distinguish a historical line of development. In the Middle Ages Sweden was to a large extent a federal realm, held together by bonds of fidelity of varying duration. Negotiations were held between a growing central government and local communities in varying groupings at markets, assemblies, and through tests of military might. A number of important regional powers survived for a long time or were divided between the central government and rural assemblies at the level of the province (Old Swedish land, Modern Swedish landskap) or the hundred (the subdivision of English counties which corresponds most closely to the Swedish härad).

To an increasing extent, the political and judicial negotiation game between regions and central government was played in ordered forms: after the “Dackefejden” uprising in the 1540s, the provincial assembly (landsting), with its right to summon people to arms, was abolished by the central government as being too dangerous by far. The smaller hundred assemblies (hāradsting) filled part of the vacuum, with popular influence being exerted through the representatives appointed by the peasants themselves.

Although such crucial functions for the central government as the courts and the right and obligation to decide in matters concerning war and peace were not wholly monopolized until the eighteenth century, there was a gradual formalization and politicization of relations between the provinces, the regions, and the central government. The peace agreements resolving border disputes, which were concluded without central approval, and sometimes against the will of the government, shrank in territorial scope during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; from having encompassed entire provinces, they came down to the level of the hundred and finally the parish. The last popular uprising against the central government’s foreign policy was the “Daldansen” of 1742.

Political participation in Sweden developed in two arenas above all:

- the diet (riksdag), linked to the people through the petitions formulated at parish and hundred level and the election of representatives also to the peasant estate, and after 1866 to the bicameral parliament.
- the parish assembly (sockenstämma), later called the municipality, where everyday practice in problem-solving, negotiation, and gradual formalization of decision-making processes became a widespread experience among people of all the estates.

The reintroduction in 1862 of a new arena for regional politics, the landsting, this time in the sense of a county council, brought hopes, or fears, of a powerful regionalism. The name evoked the significant provincial assemblies of the Middle Ages, and to some extent the elements of political, communal negotiation at hundred assemblies and county administrations in the succeeding centuries. The hopes vested in the new county councils were soon crushed, however; the arenas that developed territorial political awareness in the time from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were mainly and increasingly the municipal and national ones.

The reason that administrative boundaries have been so little problematized by historians, instead being taken as starting points for studies of social processes of various kinds, is probably the long-prevailing view that the important historical processes and actors were to be found at the national level. This picture was a product of what was the century of history abo-
ve all others, the nineteenth century, with its Hegelian state idealism and nationalism. When this view was eroded in the post-war era, gradually being systematically questioned from the point of view of theoretical critique and local historical practice, the historical meaning of the administrative boundaries could be problematized in a more multifaceted way.

The question of spatial identity in relation to administrative boundaries has been the subject of little study. My hypothesis is that in pre-industrial society, after the break-up of the federal medieval structures, it was mostly local spatial identities that were used to relate to society at large: farm, village, and possibly parish. The next step for really distant relations was national affiliation, less often provincial origin. The hundred, to a greater extent than the county, had an identification potential and functional relations at a territorial level corresponding roughly to today’s municipalities. The nature of interaction in the latter, however, was more like that of the old village and parish levels.

**The Regions of Culture and Work**

In Sweden it has been more common to adopt a regional perspective in the discussion of agrarian society and folk culture than in narratives about the destiny of the nation. Ethnology, demography, racial research, and geography all work with regional divisions of various kinds.

The ethnological concept of the bygd (roughly a settlement unit comprising a local cultural community) could be used on several territorial levels. The southern limit of transhumance, coinciding with the northern limit of the oak, the ox, and the nobility, is an example of an almost nationally perceived settlement boundary based on both physical and human geography, and with socio-cultural implications.

Inspired by theories about the diffusion of innovation and with cartography as a method, regions were also distinguished as based on centres of innovation: a Stockholm-centred Eastern Sweden and a Malmö/Copenhagen-centred Western Sweden. The division into Eastern and Western Sweden (sometimes with the addition of separate divisions for Norrland in the north and Skåne, Halland, and Blekinge in the south) was charged in the course of the twentieth century with stimuli from various quarters: demographic observations of differences in nativity give rise to attempts to distinguish regions based on race and later to a debate among
historians about differences in social control, family formation, political culture, level of civilization, churchgoing, club activities, urbanization, and so on. The question of regional identity has not had a prominent place in these discussions. Perhaps this is because regional identities do not have any great significance for the East and West Swedish regions which have gradually been perceived as functional?

The historical provinces were more deliberately emphasized by institutions and associations from the end of the nineteenth century: from Skansen and the elementary school reader to today’s tourist brochures, the genuine province has been cultivated, with symbols being produced of a kind and on a scale which the administrative or functional regions cannot match. What this meant for the creation of patriotic sentiment at the turn of the century, and what it means for orientation and identities in the new Europe, are questions that the scholarly community has only just begun to wonder about.

The regions of industrial society are likewise perceived as mainly having an objective foundation, but now related to the demands of a new society. The criteria of a region are now changed to functional relations of a market character: service, labour, and goods create different regions and relations between town/centre and hinterland/periphery.

In pace with improved communications and with immaterial value (knowledge) accounting for an increasingly large share of the total production, the concept of the region has met competition from “networks” as the key word for spatial relations.

Scientists, above all geographers, play a very active part in the creation of tools for a new perception of region that is wholly instrumental. Statistics Sweden draws up regional divisions adjusted to existing units for data collection; municipalities are amalgamated on the basis of scientific measurements weighing up commuting distances, tax base, service index in central places, and so on.

On a more general level, modern regional policy, from the 1960s on, has constantly modified its regional development areas in the attempt to refine methods for levelling out the distribution of jobs and incomes. Evaluations of its long-term effects are notoriously difficult to make, since history cannot be re-enacted. In economic development itself there appear to be cyclic forces for concentration and deconcentration. It cannot be doubted, however, that in the present day it is the city regions which contribute via the state budget to the levels of income and service in sparsely populated areas. Whether this should be regarded as a small repayment for previous and current gains obtained by colonization (hydroelectric power, iron ore, timber) or as a result of successful lobbying by skilled Norrland politicians is above all a political question. But it is also, and not least of all, a question of historiography.

The creation of regional perspectives has had normative purposes, particularly in relation to the power of the state. Perhaps the efforts have ultimately had an integrative function in the creation of the nation state of Sweden.

**Created Regions**

Without doubt there are regions in the history of Sweden. They do not, however, have an independent existence. Regions must be discovered, invented, or concealed. Historiography has
mostly had the latter, negative, function, while other cultural sciences have functioned as instruments or inspiration for cultural regionalism. It is then evident that a regional cultural struggle arose parallel to nationalism in the second half of the nineteenth century. This cannot be regarded as naturally arising from the soil or from a folk culture, although such threads can be discovered.

Here I can only make preliminary observations and interpretations. Federal relations between peripheral regions and central power are the subject of increasing interest in research. They were obvious and strong in the Middle Ages, after which they were counteracted in a highly systematical way by the central government. A regional opposition, represented by the provincial assembly, county governors, clergymen, in-migrating élites, museum people, and historians, can be discerned to varying extents throughout history.

Educated regional élites appear to have played a prominent role in the articulation of regional sentiment in the introductory phase of modern nationalism. The territorial “outsiders” were strikingly numerous. The local culture and history movement that emerged slightly later reinforced even more explicitly the patriotic currents at the turn of the century. National forces managed in various ways to take over or lead this cultural struggle along paths which actually strengthened national integration.

In the regional history of Jämtland we can clearly see the relation to the centre and the power of the state becoming one of conflict. Competition with neighbouring regions was a prominent feature already at the start of the twentieth century. None of this took on the same distinct political form in Värend in southern Sweden. Cultural regionalism was not politicized in a national context.

A reasonable interpretative context that has been suggested is the increased class polarization in the late nineteenth century. Many measures were taken to prevent the established order from collapsing. One of the pictures that emerges in both culture and politics is the necessity of retaining a strong, steadfast, and loyal peasant class. Many nations create images of themselves and their folk identity with a heavy bias towards the agrarian features. This should probably not be seen as nostalgia but as short-term politics which also led to a number of reforms around the turn of the century to support small farms and to encourage the establishment of new owner-occupied smallholdings. Times of crisis caused by rapid expansion or quick population decline provide a seed-bed for a higher degree of politicization of the regional cultural struggle as shown by the example of Jämtland.

Over much of Western Europe we see similar patterns in the nineteenth century. The national assembly was seen by Adam Smith and most national liberal politicians in the nineteenth century as the natural form for economic policy in line with capitalist modernization. Regionalism in their eyes was an obsolete phenomenon which was defended only by reactionary Italian city-states and German principalities.

A partly different movement, perhaps actually less antagonistic to the nation than it may at first sight appear, was cultural regionalism. We have seen some examples from Sweden. They could be supplemented with examples from Britain: Yorkshire takes shape through the destinies of the Brontës; Dorset becomes a tourist attraction thanks to the novels of Thomas Hardy. In Scotland the regional literature was by no means reactionary, but it did not become politi-
cal. According to Harvie, there must be an interventionist state and a local élite which wants to remain that if this transformation is to occur. We have good examples of this in Scandinavia: although the Norwegian and Finnish cultural struggle would not have viewed itself as regional but as national. The Nordic context is in fact not unlike that in Britain, except that two Nordic regions managed to develop or recreate themselves as nations. The German development is perhaps the best example of an intimate and clearly integrative interaction between historiography at regional and national level and the process of state formation.9

The general conditions necessary for organized regionalism which Seymour M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan formulated in the 1960s have not been fulfilled in the Swedish regions studied here:

I. a spatially concentrated counter-culture;
II. a region that is sufficiently separated from the centre quantitatively and qualitatively;
III. economic independence of the centres of politics.10

Perhaps it is the second point that has the greatest general scope because of the inclusive Swedish political culture? None of the criteria is satisfied by Norrland, where there have otherwise been many rebels in the post-war era. The “regionalism of rich regions” of today has greater chance of being decisive for all three dimensions.

**Regional Levels in Sweden**

The way regions are distinguished in research is influenced by several factors: The problem definitions that have a strong position in the contemporary social debate exert an influence. These are in turn associated with the ongoing historical development of society. An agrarian society is intimately associated with the topography and the distribution of soil types. The boundaries between forest and plains, coast and inland or between climate zones, provide the foundation for the economic and cultural geography of agrarian society.

The greatest economic investments of an industrial society are the relocation of settlement from the countryside to the towns and the consequences of this; new communications make the overlapping networks increasingly free in relation to physical space, access to communications becomes more decisive than distance on the map. The concept of network challenges the region as the basic form of spatial organization.

Internal scientific traditions influence each discipline. The dominant role of nations as the primary and virtually the only legitimate region to study was, until recently, an inescapable maxim in Swedish historical research. As in geography, there is a development from realism and naturalism via instrumentalism to constructivism: regions are first viewed as consequences of physical geographical conditions; later the criteria for regions focus on characteristics (such as demographic differences) or relations (such as commuting to work).

---

9 Harvie 1994, 18 ff. Recent German research findings in, e.g. Regionalgeschichte: ein Ansatz zur Erforschung regionaler Identität (1993).

A consequence of the broadening of the criteria is the emphasis on the arbitrary or instrumental way in which boundaries are drawn: the value is determined by how well they answer a question that has been raised. Today a subjective side of the region is often brought into the argument: identity, culture, and the historic tradition. In one way, some research is returning to a stress on natural regions, but viewed as changeable in slow historical processes.

With this in mind, the features of continuity, especially as regards institutions, seem remarkable. Medieval forms of organization, as well as place systems, appear vigorous through their combination of stable forms and flexible content. It is essential to arrive at a better understanding of how this relative continuity is maintained and reconstructed through shifts of identity, changes in the meaning of concepts, and their interplay with the changed demands and opportunities of technology and labour.

Spatial identity is enacted on a number of territorial levels and on the basis of a number of principles: size plays a role, the degree of overlap or the sharpness of the boundaries between regions; the intensity of interaction within and between regions; the degree of institutionalization; legitimacy and power structures do not just complicate the discussion but are also the reason that the question is interesting in the first place. The number of possible combinations, however, means that the region cannot have a perfectly sharp outline, neither in practice nor in theory, especially if the ambition is to survey a long temporal perspective. I shall nevertheless attempt to discern a rough pattern, a tentative summary of the results of this study, which can serve as a basis both for discussion and for further research. It has been possible to show only certain parts of the outline in detail above.

Regional identities can be drawn as a series of concentric circles. This ignores the fact that these are broken by other concentric bases for identification and their inner segmentation: class, gender, etc.

Regionality may be developed on six different levels:

I. local community (municipality, settlement unit)
II. functional region (market relations etc)
III. county, province
IV. nation
V. culture circle
VI. mankind

In general it can be said that for identities on a close spatial level (region I) the predominant factors are functional relations and existential living conditions connected with work, neighbourhood relations, organic community, local self-government. The institutionalization of social bonds can be strong, formal, or informal. For a long time, however, they are expressed in a rich but relatively undifferentiated community such as the diverse but superficially uniform institutions of the church congregation or municipal self-government. Through time there emerge the forms of organization of civil society, formally richly differentiated club activi-
ties which are actually more uniform in content in that, for example, belonging to a sports club is about much more than the activity, say, football, that it is concerned with. To some extent, municipal politics, sports, the temperance movement, and work can be interchangeable as expressive creators of local community with a scope for what has been called “ideal revival”.

Region II for a long time had a strong institutionalized form in the district-court area. This could coincide to a greater or lesser extent with the ecclesiastical deanery and the state bailiwicks. The community was not confined to judicial matters but helped to resolve conflicts in a broad spectrum of social issues and in relations between the local community and the state. A regional centre in the form of a town or market allows an opportunity for functional relations of the town/hinterland kind, which can acquire a region-forming character with the declining significance of the district-court area as a generator of community. Clubs and associations later often form another unit, the district, at this level. With the municipal reforms from the 1950s to the 1970s, the political/administrative level catches up with this development, but on the other hand leaves both higher and lower regional levels with a weak institutional articulation, especially in the political dimension.

It is probable that the county (region III), despite its institutional continuity, reinforced by the establishment of the county council and later local radio, has not developed into a region to the extent that might have been expected. If this is true, it may be worth bearing it in mind in attempts to create new parliamentary units with broad popular support and involvement.

The province as a regional identity is perhaps the most baffling and most interesting. From having played a highly significant role throughout the Middle Ages as a competitor of the state, it has, precisely for that reason, been deprived of its political and judicial institutional capacity in modern times. This level nevertheless appears to be decisive not least for the representation of individual belonging in national contexts. To identify oneself as a Jämtlander, Värmlander, or Smålander is charged with more symbolic meaning than to say that one comes from Östersund, Karlstad, or Kalmar. The constructive and conscious production of symbols plays a much greater role here; a regional historical consciousness is linked to and emphasizes elements in a homogeneous regional perception which especially articulates cultural unity.

National identity (region IV) has been weaker in Sweden in the post-war era and more critically articulated than in many countries, perhaps because the country has not been seriously threatened by neighbours for a long time, or perhaps because relative homogeneity or at least an unusually small degree of antagonistic regional identities has developed at lower levels. In an earlier phase there developed a strongly nationally oriented culture production which interacted with a regional cultural struggle led by regional élites. Parts of the national identity and distinctiveness were here weighed together in an intensive exchange of opinions which has not been seen again until the 1990s.

In the identification with the culture circle (region V) there is in Sweden, as in the rest of Western Europe, a feeling of being specially selected and a profound self-criticism. In earlier decades, this was especially channelled in the form of a critique of capitalism, but now it more often takes the form of environmental awareness. Both these trends open the door to

---

identification with a global community which, whether one affirms it or not, goes hand in hand with the globalization of the economy and parts of mass-produced culture (region VI).

The complexity of relations between local, regional, and national affiliation can be found in every country, but it naturally looks different depending on actual differences between countries, and particularly because of ideology production. France, for example, can simultaneously have one of the most centralized political systems in the western world, with administrative boundaries which demonstratively avoid coinciding with cultural regions and regional cultures which have remained alive through the ages. This is despite the strong emphasis of the educational system and not least of historiography on the shared (radical) national destiny. Or perhaps it is precisely because the official national historiography has been so strong in order to bridge over regional differences. In any case, this cloven soul appears to be reproduced in the social sciences in what C. Harvie has called “academic apartheid”: the political science sees no regions, no local politics, while cultural studies are pioneers in the regionalization of knowledge about the country.12

Regionality is formed in a complex interplay between structural and dynamic forces. An ostensibly stable structural tension is found between the central government and the local community: competing wills for sovereignty, with their different territorial identifications and resource bases, lead to an unfinished tug of war over boundary-drawing in a broad sense. This is also determined by the means or strategies that are chosen or developed in the struggle. Which will dominate: conquest or integration through participation and consensus?

In a dynamic perspective, societal development changes the content of regional identity. There have been many attempts to thematicize the change in detail. Perhaps one of the classical dichotomies is the most apt description of the regionality as it has evolved: the development from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft as the predominant principle of organization. Close-knit, homogeneous regions are assumed to have been replaced by rationally calculated, negotiating, contract-based relations.

Without doubt, this expresses a dominating developmental trend. The new ethnic problems of recent years – or rather the ethnicization of recent years’ problems – and also the continued role of the province in identity formation, along with the weak position of the county, suggests that the identity aspect of regionality makes development less clearly calculable than might be believed. Some people in their longing and bewilderment look for formulations in spatial categories as well. This cannot be easily overcome.

Feudal society meant, among other things, that a complicated network of rights defined the possibilities and obligations of the individual. The modernization process and the prerequisite for capitalism was that these rights were tied together more and more tightly into an individually summed-up right of ownership. An object or a natural resource could be controlled and handled in all respects by one owner. This made it possible for private persons to act as individual owners on the market without constant negotiations with a number of interested parties in interwoven and overlapping communities. Space could be increasingly mastered by means

of territorially defined ownership. During this epoch, the state was an absolutely essential body in determining and centralizing the right to settle this struggle. For its own exercise of power, territorial principles and rational bureaucracy were two important elements enabling the state to penetrate what had formerly been peripheral territories. The aim was to create in this way a land where all people were equally far from each other or equally close to the power of the state. Regions were created as a means for territorial control.

At the same time, this provided a model for action which could be used by forces and communities who had other purposes, who wanted to achieve autonomy and satisfy their wishes through organization at a more local or regional level. A more distinct division between state and region arose, which means that they are often seen as two different organizational principles, as part of the state-society dichotomy.

Development in the twentieth century has been seen as a refeudalization in more than one way: expanding corporativism; the dissolution of bourgeois public spheres; late-modern tendencies to divide and trade in genes, forms, and expectations, is in a way dissociating the unambiguous and individual property right once again. Refeudalization can also be observed in the distribution of rights at different levels of society: it is not as self-evident as it was a few years ago what type of rights and powers should be associated with which territorial level. The internationalization of ties of dependence means that power and regionality are no longer so closely tied to each other. Perhaps we will see the state shedding parts of its “natural” competence to parallel organizations. The idea of the corporative society is slowly being reinvented by the social scientists!\(^{13}\)

This does not mean, however, that the ties have ceased to exist. However, the power for regionalism will come less from conflicts between state and society and will more concern community-creating processes associated with people’s views of the good life.\(^{14}\) This in turn makes the question of the kind of regionality that is articulated into a highly subjective, political, and ideological question. It has always been this, but it will be seen more and more as objectively being the case as this process continues. It is no coincidence that it was in the 1980s that nations and nationalism were “exposed” as being “imagined communities”.\(^{15}\)

**What is a Region? Attempts to Define a Theoretical Field**

**Idea and Reality**

In every discussion of the reality that people help to create, there occur positions which either place the whole process in the human mind, as a mental process, perhaps even as a categorial prerequisite for observations and experiences, or else see it as a wholly objective phenomenon in material reality. This applies in high degree to space.

---


14 Taylor 1989. See also the discussion and references in Aronsson 1995a.

15 See note 43.
In both Aristotle and Kant, space is a category which is so fundamental for thought and perception that we cannot think without it; it is thus a mental precondition more than just one experience among others. With Descartes in the seventeenth century, the gap between the thinking self and the material world was widened, and space became the most fundamental characteristic in the objectively existing physical world.\textsuperscript{16}

These extremes in the perception of the nature of space were carried on in all reasoning about spatial limitations, including regions: are they mental constructions or properties of reality? There have been many attempts to settle this either-or question in modern scientific theory (which grapples with the same question on an abstract level) and in the discussion of concrete expressions of regionalization and regionalism.

In this chapter we shall try to follow and understand the changes in perspectives on the region. Scattered observations in previous chapters will be singled out for thematization in a theoretical and historiographical perspective. From this there also follows a plea for the fruitfulness of a constructivist perspective which emphasizes the creation of identities and underlines the role of societal institutions and the sciences in that process. By using arguments based on history, I hope that it will be possible to avoid letting constructivism develop into a freely hovering bird – far from everything can be achieved by ambitious constructors.

**The Concept of Region**

The concept of region appears to have been unknown in the Middle Ages. The word itself comes from Latin *regio*, which means “direction, point of the compass”, but later develops by association with *regere* “to rule”.\textsuperscript{17} The exercise of power and territorial control are linked together in one concept. In political and administrative contexts the word *provincia* (from *vincere* “to conquer”) is used in Latin for areas brought under the control of another power; this use continued. It is no coincidence that the concept of region in Western Europe did not take shape until the great success of the nation states at the start of modern times, from around 1500.

The region is conceived as being in relation to a centre, not infrequently in opposition to it, perhaps as an alternative national project which failed.

We must eliminate the taken-for-grantedness of our knowledge of 500 years of successful state-building, with relatively stable nation states as the final products, and realize that it was not a given historical mission that was accomplished. This is precisely how it has been seen by many historians ever since the nineteenth century.

If we succeed in cleansing our vision, we gain several benefits:

- we can avoid automatically viewing the role of the region as peripheral, as the loser in a struggle for nationhood, and instead problematize this view;
- in the study of the dynamics of regions, we can in part employ the analytical tools and concepts used by modern research into the nation state;

\textsuperscript{16} See e.g. Lefebvre 1991.

\textsuperscript{17} Hellquist, *Svensk etymologisk ordbok*. 
• both nation-building and the regions can be partly viewed in relation to each other and seen as a dynamic whole – not as simple opposites nor as a functional, harmonious whole.

Sverker Sörlin, in a survey of the use of the concept of region in the history of ideas, has made a rough but useful categorization of the way it has been defined by scientists. An older definition which nevertheless survived until the 1960s regarded the regions as basically essentialist, while a younger definition, to which we shall return, has a basically constructivist outlook. According to the former view, regions actually exist, they can be marked on the map, and they can be studied as objective entities which determine people’s experience. This view often has its chief advocates among critics of civilization and scientists from a broad political spectrum. Erasmus of Rotterdam saw small communities as a positive alternative to aggressive central powers.

One line with many modern spokesmen is found in the federalist Proudhon and in the Scottish sociologist Patrick Geddes, whose vision of Europe as modernized, planned conurbations of peaceful provincial towns has led to one stance in today’s arguments about the EU. The late representatives of the Scottish Enlightenment developed and combined the region as a locus for solving the difficult problems of the times, both the late nineteenth century and the inter-war years: the resolution of international conflicts through federation; the opposition between state and society, which is reduced in regions that arise directly from the practice of civil society; the ecological problems of the new urban regions which must be solved by regional planning.18

A partially progress-friendly tradition is represented by the anarchist Peter Kropotkin, by British Fabians, and by the Swedish advocate of small farming, Per Jönsson Rösiö, who charged the concept of region with communalist hopes: small-scale industrialization with a thriving countryside were seen as a possibility already during the early decades of the industrial breakthrough.19

Region was used not just as a designation for unsuccessful or weak states such as Italy and Spain, but also as a positive picture of liberal diversity when nationalism around the turn of the century took on a more distinctly conservative character.

More common, however, especially among French geographers and sociologists, is a more explicit critique of modernity in which the region is seen as the steward of genuine, popular, and stable traditional values. The critique of civilization combined with regionalist thinking also has its advocates, formulated today especially in terms of environmental issues and resistance to the EU.

There are thus several forms of regionalism: one proceeding directly from the communal practice and topophilia of local life-modes; a utopian communitarianism as an undercurrent in socialist (mostly cosmopolitan) and conservative and liberal (mostly national) ideologies alike. In our days we also have a rationalist regionalism which originated in the demands made of the nation state by weak territories and has been seen in recent decades in attempts to go beyond what is felt to be the restrictions of an obsolete national level. “The four motors”, Ba-

---

19 On Rösiö see Toler 1993.
den-Württemberg, Rhône-Alpes, Catalonia, Lombardy, and since 1990 also Wales as an “affiliated” region, have successfully implemented direct agreements on economic cooperation and technological, cultural, and educational exchange, and have had their strategy placed high on the EU agenda. Here it is not a matter of a firmly rooted cultural identity trying to find expression, but local élites collaborating with multinational corporations such as Kodak, IBM, Porsche, and Bosch in the search for new paths in an internationalized economy where their position is stronger than their national influence.  

**Region and Power**

Regions stand in relation to each other. How can the power aspect in this be regarded? The German historians Gert Zang, Wolfgang Hein, and also Michael Hechter have developed a historical materialist approach in which the region not only plays a historical role but also will presumably play an increasing role: according to them, it is only as a result of capitalism that regions become provinces, peripheral in relation to an accumulated centre. This is a national specification of the global theories of the dependence school. We saw above, not least in the chapter about Jämtland, how a regional cultural struggle developed in many places where identity is created inwardly, where demands are made of the state, but where the profiling of the region is also intended to distinguish it from neighbouring regions. There is not room for an unlimited number of regional centres.

Christopher Harvie notes that the new bourgeois regionalism that emerged in the 1980s appears to be championed by the strongest who are looking for other units than the old national ones for developing cooperation and in particular their property and strength. In this connection, regions are held up not only as alternatives to the state, as small and better states, but also assert a different organization and ethos by viewing themselves as expressions of “civil society” and as such in opposition to the state – as was also seen in the debate in the 1980s in Sweden.

It may be wise to distinguish between the demands of regional movements for political self-determination, state attempts at administrative division, and an analytically defined concept of region. Steen Bo Frandsen suggests **regionalism, regionalization, and region** for these three different senses. As the study above has shown, it is striking how much interplay there nevertheless is between these three categories: developments in Jämtland once again sum up very well the interaction of the three. This does not mean that they cannot be distinguished analytically, just that a deeper understanding of the links between them is ultimately the most important scientific task.

---

What is striking about Sörlin’s broad survey of Western Europe is how much Sweden deviates from the Continent in that radical regionalism is so weak in science, art, and literature alike. This judgement is certainly correct in broad outline. However, a partly different picture has emerged from the present study: popular resistance to central government; arenas for political and judicial action as generators of identity; regional historiography; the local culture and history movement; and commercial strategies are just some examples of regional ambitions which need to be studied more. Just as research into nationalism makes a distinction between cultural, agitational, and massed political phases in the movement, it should likewise be possible to distinguish different degrees of articulation in regionalism.

It remains to raise the question whether the less prominent regional line of argumentation in Swedish political culture can be explained from other perspectives than the predominant one: is the explanation really the strong Swedish state which has centralized power and crushed all resistance? I have argued that an integrationist political culture with strong popular support is a significant part of the explanation.25

Region and gender is another field of study that has been considered even less, but it has great theoretical potential. Most of the regional boundaries mentioned above are more or less exclusively connected with male activities. It is not yet known what regional patterns can be observed in women’s activities and patterns of interaction. It has been pointed out that these shortcomings also have a practical political significance, for example, in the shaping of regional policy.

The Regions of Science

Geography is a sister science to history in a qualified sense: it too seeks its identity in its perspective, not in having its object of study objectively fixed. In the chorological perspective the question is: how are things, people, and processes ordered in space?

The subdiscipline that is called regional geography originally had its point of departure in postulated regions such as Africa, Norden, or Sweden, and studied what was characteristic of them, usually matters of physical geography, economy, and population. Relations between these, right up to the inter-war years, were often constructed in the form of natural determinism, or at least with a given point of departure in the perception of physical geographical conditions. An example of the way this school reasoned was the belief that the climate of Western Europe favoured hard work, enterprise, and hence the industrial breakthrough.

Although David Hannerberg still in 1971 recognized the justification of the approach because of the real need for descriptions of the situation in existing regions, its status was evidently felt to be problematic: non-systematic, ideographical, and with an a priori selection of studied phenomena. Others, such as Staffan Helmfrid, saw the perspective as a phase that had been passed, replaced in research after the 1960s by various instrumental concepts of region.26


26 Hannerberg 1971, pp. 133f.; Helmfrid 1969.
The scientific future lay in two other concepts of region: the homogeneous and above all the functional region. The point of departure was still that actual characteristics in space were the basis for regional divisions. The two concepts presuppose this. The instrumental, subject element comes in the selection of criteria, not as a property of the region in itself.\(^\text{27}\)

Homogeneous regions are often described in ahistorical, natural terms, as suiting conditions in a relatively statically perceived early agrarian society. It is no coincidence that most examples of functional regions, which are based on relations between objects, differ from the discussion of homogeneous regions in being taken from modern times: the functions that are usually studied are linked to various aspects of the modernization process: urbanization, differentiation, and the division of labour. These can also be studied for a single element, such as commuting, or many elements, such as different types of shopping regions.

A region is homogeneous to an increasing extent the more uniform it is in one or more specific object properties, the more often they occur, and the more aspects found together in the same space. Both qualitative and quantitative dimensions are thus considered. An example is the division of Sweden into regions according to farm types. A more complex regional division arises when the researcher asks whether farm types can be combined with village types or even more covarying characteristics, to arrive at different regions of settlement geography. In methodological terms this can be achieved by looking for bundles of isolines for individual features: maps are superimposed, and where several lines are seen to coincide they are taken as a regional boundary defining the features on which the lines are based. Another fundamentally more positivist approach is to try to correlate, for example, the appearance of farm settlement with explanatory factors of physical geography or climate.

A central model for the emergence of the functional view was Christaller’s central place system, in which a system of hierarchically ordered central places is distributed symmetrically in space. The biggest of these is biggest by virtue of its centrality, and the hinterland satisfies different functional needs in the interaction between periphery and centre. Tendencies to steadily increasing centrality in already large centres and an increasing number of regional centres are two features that have been observed in a long temporal perspective. These observations are relevant for the discussion that gave rise to this survey.

A variant of this centre-periphery theory which emphasizes global power relations is the development theories developed by scholars such as André Gunder Frank and the world-system approach of Immanuel Wallerstein. Relations between centre and periphery determine the development potential of any region. Peripheral regions are systematically disfavoured by the historical centre in the capitalist world system, although long-term shifts do occur, for example the rise of first a semi-periphery in the Far East, which has since developed into an independent system.\(^\text{28}\) This approach has also been tested for the analysis of the relation between “disfavoured” or exploited regions, for example, in northern Scandinavia, and their respective central governments.

---

\(^{27}\) A somewhat different description of the difference between regional geography before and after World War II is given by Anssi Paasi, who stresses how the object-defined region is connected with chorological thinking which focuses on areal differentiation, while the functional, interactive perspective focusing on distance/nearness is characterized by spatial thinking. Paasi 1986, p. 115.

The modern tendency to see the region as a result of the scientist’s more or less omnipotent choice of perspective can be seen as partly having arisen out of the internal shift in the definition of regions in early regional geography: the landscape region was perceived as a unit naturally given by topographical conditions. By the turn of the century, the natural region had already become more of a framework, for example, in the works of Vidal de la Blache, giving certain possibilities which actively deciding human beings could realize or not (so-called possibilism). In pace with the thematization of the cultivated landscape as another part of the landscape region, attention was first drawn to an organically and psychologically perceived relation between space and man. Later, in the inter-war years, it was man’s economic functions that were the focus of interest in what was called the living space region. This can be seen as a territorial and also an ideological “little brother” to the term introduced by Rudolf Kjellén, geopolitics. It sought to capture the unity and the dynamics between territory, state, and people.

The actual concepts of geopolitics and living space were discredited by their use in political thought and action in Germany. The scientific perspective was redirected towards functionalismin World War II, with the concept of the functional region. Later, with the influence of ethnology and its concept of the region as originally homogeneous, attention was also directed towards the subjective elements, the perceived region.

With this development, the next step was not hard to take. It is not just feelings and subjective identities that contain a created, subjective element. Both economic and mental processes in society are available for construction with deliberate purposes or unconscious desires as the driving forces. Today, finally, attention is increasingly focused on the constructivist elements in region-making.

While the earlier theories of the region were based on the assumption that the region actually exists in reality, the experience of arbitrariness in the definition and selection of criteria left a lasting feeling that regional division is at least as much produced by the scientist as by reality.

The definition of the concept of region has also become politically interesting – with a demand for regions that are available as objects for political measures. A concept that is too rigidly based on physical geography lacks this potential. From the 1960s, scientific expertise has been enlisted in connection with reforms of regional divisions, later for regional policy, and today in connection with European integration and economic restructuring.

What place has been given to the region in the historical process and the scientific analysis in the discipline of history? What can be learned from other disciplines? Conversely, what can the historical perspective teach them?

29 Paasi 1986, pp. 137 f.
30 Geopolitik in Svensk uppslagsbok.
31 Paasi 1986.
In French historiography, influenced by geography, the regional monograph has long had a strong position in the analysis of early modern times. In Germany, too, traditional Landesgeschichte has been developed into a broad current of methodologically aware regional history. Despite the large volume of research and the elaborate methodology, modern regional historians do not appear to find what they are looking for in the tradition, other than as overlooked, latent possibilities. The Landesgeschichte of the turn of the century could thus be developed through the idea of Geschichtslandschaft in collaboration between Karl Lamprecht’s approach from cultural history and Friedrich Ratzel’s insight that there are other regional boundaries in dynamic tension with administrative boundaries: cultural-historical regions in conflict with the deliberately controlled regionalization of the territory of the nation state by the central government.

In general, modern historians often criticize earlier traditions for showing the same lack of spatial problematization as the national tradition. This critique, or the alternative that is proposed, is actually based on the same criteria for what is historically interesting! This means that the same processes, the same events are studied and acquire their value through the place they fill in a national historiography. Alternatively, regional history (like local history) is criticized for using the region, automatically and unquestioningly identified with a political territory, as a framework in which to assemble a number of disparate studies. With the lack of a dynamic perspective, the region as a created unit is held forward.32

The great conflict in Swedish historiography came with the breakthrough of source criticism, led by the Weibull brothers in Lund. It is chiefly the dimensions of scientific theory and paradigm in the conflict that are discussed. In this context it is worth noting that, just like the Annales school which arose at the same time in France, the movement started in a major provincial university, in opposition to the establishment in the central universities. The conflict made it natural to thematize the role of the province or the regions in scholarly work too: for example the Swedish journal of Scanian history, Historisk tidskrift för Skåneland, later prefixed with the title Ale, was founded by the Association for the History and Archaeology of the Scanian Provinces in the 1920s, and Lauritz Weibull published monographs on Skåne.

Despite this, regional problems did not play any great long-term role in Swedish historiography. It was instead research in human geography and slightly later ethnology that used regional and geographical perspectives in a way more in keeping with international currents.

Much later, probably under the direct influence of the French Annales tradition, Swedish historiography acquired its first academic regional studies in the 1960s. The 1980s saw the publication of more problem-oriented literature using a rough division into East and West Sweden in a discussion of differences in courses of historical change as regards such diverse questions as the civilization process, trade union organization, democratization, and religious culture. Other regions are studied in some works as natural regions with characteristic life-modes, in some cases extending over national boundaries. The “border” itself and the border

conflict have been treated in a more thorough theoretical way than the actual region in several projects under the leadership of Sven Tägil.\textsuperscript{33}

The fact that the municipal reform of 1974 brought town and country together nearly everywhere has meant that those who commission municipal histories often demand that they cover the whole municipality. A development within various disciplines towards local studies of rural communities shows tendencies in this direction, although they have long been strongest in economic and social questions.

It is perfectly clear, however, that attention to the political life of the countryside has only come at a late stage. In its earliest and fullest form it was seen in parish histories. The local history societies sponsored these at an early stage, sometimes engaging professional historians. A number of such histories, many of them from Småland, were published in the 1980s. A few county histories also paint a picture of rural conditions.

Hans Try, who carried out an evaluation in Norway at the end of the 1980s, was struck by the lack of cohesion, the absence of a unifying theme, in most works, especially in the treatment of modern times. When the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are treated it is often on the basis of separate topics such as school, social welfare, and so on, not infrequently showing an optimistic faith in progress as the only thread running right through the history.\textsuperscript{34} The other typical feature of Swedish research in local history is how small it is, especially when seen in relation to the fairly large amount of traditionally strong urban history. This fact also applies to other countries, with certain qualifications.\textsuperscript{35}

In Norway and Finland development has been partly different, since a local historical awareness had to champion national aspirations vis-à-vis a “foreign” government which more and more people perceived as alien to a true nation state. A stronger and steadier historical interest was and still is nourished by this historical context, which is very different from Sweden. Yet even in the other Nordic countries there has been no strong movement to liberate the region as an independent level: it is the local or the national that is the focus for identities and historiography. In this respect Denmark is more similar to Sweden. Although the Danish unitary state did not take shape until after 1864, it was nevertheless taken for granted as the frame of reference for historiography, and it is only recently that it has been problematized. It turns out that the tension between the national liberals of Copenhagen and the peasants of Jutland, who for a time were also politically represented in provincial parliaments, was a necessary key to Danish national history.\textsuperscript{36}

Compared with our neighbours, Sweden shows a much weaker and less differentiated territorial identity, both in academic historical research and in official culture.

\textsuperscript{33} See e.g. *Studying Boundary Conflicts: A Theoretical Framework* (1977).

\textsuperscript{34} Try 1988.

\textsuperscript{35} A search in the international database Historical Abstracts for “rural & politics” gives 126 hits, but the majority concern the Third World, and the next largest group early modern conditions in Central Europe, France, and England. A few works thematize politics in the German countryside in the Nazi period. The rest are on diverse topics.

\textsuperscript{36} My survey is far from total, and I will gladly be contradicted on this point. A tendency towards an increasing number of commissioned works at county and district level may possibly be observed today. Perhaps it is questioned institutions which are trying in this way to obtain historical legitimacy. See the German development in *Regionalgeschichte: ein Ansatz zur Erforschung regionaler Identität* (1993).
Something more must be said about the theoretical connections behind the striking absence of theory about other spaces than the state.

It is only in the last decade that we have seen efforts to problematize the question of what constitutes a local community or a region. This is partly due to the broadening of the field: new questions require new investigation areas, and new connections are discovered. The “discovery”, however, is partly due to shifts outside the discipline or on its boundaries. A more theoretical, ethical, and potentially political discussion determines the value of the spatial and formal analytical categories: the local and regional have long been viewed as peripheral in relation to a central or national level. Events on a more local level, it was long thought, must reasonably be explained with reference to processes and decisions on a higher or more aggregated level. Economic and political power in a local community cannot match their counterparts on a national level. These judgements and theoretical assumptions have been increasingly questioned. It cannot be taken for granted that changes actually happen where they become visible and easily accessible to scientists. Spatial identities can be created in local contexts and institutions but then be noticed, anticipated, and perhaps expropriated by the state in a symbolic struggle with very real and material implications. The old question with the controversial answer runs: Whose country is to be defended?

In purely epistemological terms, it is a logical fallacy to see a priori the general statement as more real or even as an explanation for the particular statement. A change of perspective would appear fruitful. The findings of the present study suggest that a focus on regional cultural struggles at the zenith of nationalism may contribute to an understanding of the integrative power. It does not flow down from above but arises in a number of overlapping networks, as the final result of both conflicts and attempts to resolve what are perceived as shared problems.

In general it can probably be said that research from a “backwards perspective” has long viewed the question of regionality as a matter of steadily declining relevance: from the provincial particularism of the Middle Ages, local self-government has gradually reduced its territorial claims, via the hundred down to parish level – although its competence many have increased. There is nevertheless always a tendency to overemphasize what is new as a qualitative change from the old in a linear or revolutionary process of change. Yet there are dissenting voices. Jan Glete, for example, thinks that the regions may have acquired increased significance in the nineteenth century through the growth of regional networks in trade and industry, as well as the establishment of the county councils. Like the experiences of our own days, this shows the danger of viewing development in too simple an evolutionist perspective. The role played by the regions must have varied through time, and will do so in the future. This fact is

---

37 For the role of the regions from the point of view of principle there is even less literature than for local history. See e.g. Leeb 1984 who speaks of reflective, additive, and dialectical interdependence perspectives. The latter concept is based on Norbert Elias’s theory of society.

once again being emphasized in the research projects of several Swedish historians, from different theoretical approaches.  

Regionalist literature of an academic kind existed, it is true, long before the twentieth century. It particularly flourished in the eighteenth century, with Linnaeus as the most famous writer. The predominant trend for local literature, however, is to deal with smaller areas, such as the parish. Belles lettres with a regional touch flourished around the turn of the century, with Selma Lagerlöf’s Värmland, Karl-Erik Forsslund’s Dalarna, Högberg’s Ångermanland, and today we have less famous writers such as Astrid Väring with her descriptions of the trials and tribulations of farmers in Västerbotten at the end of the nineteenth century. At the same time, there was a zenith for landscape painting thematizing the nature of the province as a mirror of the soul, fully in line with the programme of national romanticism. Regionally oriented literature was probably not the predominant form for historical identity creation, not even at the regionalist peak of national romanticism, when there were countless tributes to Dalarna as the archetypal Swedish province.

In the twentieth century a wide range of books dealing with nature, industry, and folklife continued to keep the province alive as a region. Perhaps it was only now that provincial regionalism with no radical connotations emerged. The local culture and history movement has no strong identity on this level during the twentieth century, although several associations at provincial level started in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Now they almost exclusively consist of local sections at parish level or even lower.

It is surely no chance that several regionalist projects in the encounter between the burgeoning folklore studies, historicism, and nation-building saw the light of day in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is well known how Dalarna was presented as a symbol of primitival Swedishness, but other attempts to build a regional identity as a stage in nation-building reached their zenith at this time in Scandinavia and Europe. Norrland at this time symbolized a large-scale industrial future which would create an America within the borders of Sweden.

It is likewise no chance that it was in the late twentieth century, when people began to question the way the nation state was centralizing competence, that a new regionalism emerged, above all with economic and technological arguments, but also with a cultural awareness expressed in regional culture production, for example, the ambition to produce an encyclopedia for Norrland. More generally, the placing of (new) universities and colleges is perceived as being among the most significant strategic decisions. Their location does not only influence the advanced production of useful things. Research in cultural science tends to thematize what

---

39 See the research presented above into East versus West Sweden, the aim of which is to test questions of social history and civilization theory; the political role of revitalized historical regions, especially in Eastern Europe, as studied by a circle of scholars in Lund; the Nordkalotten Project based in Umeå, with a far-reaching inventory of different cultural boundaries within the large area that people in the south of Sweden refer to as Norrland.

40 Such movements are not completely non-existent at regional level. There is, for example, the Hyltén-Cavallius Association founded in 1919, first as a local history society for Växjö and district, but later transformed into a county body for Kronoberg, publishing its own annual since 1920. This organization came unusually late when we remember that the foundation for the Småland Museum was laid in 1867 and the building was completed in 1885/90. It is striking, however, how rare it is for local history associations to be based on a county.

41 Burke 1994 for the more general context.
is perceived as the scholar’s own region, thus contributing to the creation of regional knowledge and identity (this is my impression which would need to be substantiated by detailed evidence).

Nation-building tried to reorganize identities and real networks, to place the emphasis on the state and the citizen, blended together in the nation. Emigration, industrialization, proletarization, railway construction – everything contributed to the questioning of old territorial identities in the village and the parish. Attempts to “find” or create new identities at a level above that of the old local communities, but below that of the nation, also drew nourishment from the need to communicate the constant dilemma of modern society: individualization and societization, vulnerability and dependence. The cold, new, contract-based Gesellschaft that grew up fed and continues to feed the image of yesterday’s Gemeinschaft: perhaps they can be combined in the identity of the historical province? What could give more legitimacy to regional identity in this century of nationalism and historicism than to evoke ties with this ancient community in the form of a kingdom, under the rule of an archaic law? The further shrinking of the realm in 1905 with the loss of Norway appears to have given a boost to the complex dynamics between national mobilization and regional identity construction.

A similar but in a sense reversed dynamic can be discerned behind today’s interest in the region.

**Theoretical Choices in the 1990s**

In the transition from homogeneous, essentialist views to functional and constructivist approaches, with their emphasis on social interaction and vague spatial boundaries, there is a tendency towards more interactive perspectives.

Sverker Sörlin says that the essentialist and constructivist definitions should be seen as extremes on a continuum. A region is presumably a combination of these aspects: there must be something historical to build on, but it is not self-evident what will be successful. It was not least the historians and the growth of history as a university discipline in the nineteenth century that played a decisive role in the legitimacy of the nation state.42

The interest in culture shown in local and regional studies by historians has found a rival in the last decade in the new interest in how nations are created as communities; a constructivist definition has gained increasing ground. This interest is now beginning to have repercussions in that the same perspective is being applied to regions. The fact that people have not thought of the region in these terms is probably because the regions were already there when the nation state project was being established, and because the region was associated with the province and a conservative folk culture. Perspectives could now be borrowed from the study of the nation state, such as Benedict Anderson’s *imagined communities* and Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm’s emphasis on *the invention of tradition*, where the nation state is seen as a project in which symbols and cultural forms play a decisive role for the self-understanding of the modern nation state.43

---

42 Sörlin 1993a, p. 40.

43 *The Invention of Tradition* (1992), Anderson 1991, Gellner 1993. Cf. Ousager 1994, who is more critical of the constructivist approach which has otherwise been so triumphant in the academic world, and more favourably disposed to a substanti-
A useful theory for the discussion of the relation of the nation state and regions to territory has been suggested by Lipset and Rokkan: one axis describes territoriality and the other functionality in terms of social and economic networks. The nation state project is described by them as the aspiration to assemble and organize as many networks as possible at state level, and to reinforce these with a national identity. Identity should really be drawn in as a third dimension. Sörlin and Gidlund build on this model, discussing it in terms of sovereignty, network, and identity.  

I myself would add that the territoriality axis is less interesting in that roughly the same processes that create state sovereignty are found in the creation of local autonomy, although the proportions are shifted from monopoly of violence to cultural and economic processes.  

People’s subjective experiences of spatial affiliation, subjective regionality, have also been studied on a greater scale. In France, for example, it has been found that a deeper degree of local affiliation can be found in the traditional bourgeoisie than in modern white-collar workers and technicians, for whom urban culture provides identity more than local affiliation. The same stratum can constitute the core of the green movement which, with its revaluation of belonging to a place, can sometimes be a seed-bed for a neo-regional tendency. In the study the same phenomenon has been observed in the regional cultural struggle at the turn of the century and in today’s partly political “production of regions” within scientific disciplines. It was not just the nationally oriented nineteenth-century establishment, geography teaching in schools, the regional coverage and target groups of the mass media, the division of organizations, and historiography that actively but perhaps unconsciously contributed to the creation of regions. The growth of a regional policy in the post-war era is in itself a source of regionality which should not be underestimated.

al perspective. See also Lunden 1991. The traditional discussion is based mainly on western developments and the nationalism of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. Studies of the “new” nationalism, colonial liberation, and stateless nations may add fresh perspectives, particularly to the situation of the “stateless” regions in the west. These thoughts are based on Charlotte Skoglund’s ongoing research into Tibetan nationalism at Växjö University College.

44 Sovereignty is not such a good concept for my purposes, since its so clearly connotes national, state activities, institutional unity, and power, and can be used on several different levels. Sörlin and Gidlund focus more on the relation to other states and on European integration. It is interesting to note that the study of such different territorial units can benefit from very similar analytical concepts; this says quite a lot about the general nature of the problem. Gidlund & Sörlin 1993, pp. 101–02.
The concept of region came into use in Swedish in the nineteenth century. For a long time the biological and physical geographical connotations predominated. The conceptual ground for modern regional policy was prepared in the inter-war years. The concept of region became common in compounds associated with public planning in the 1920s: *regionalplan* (1926), *regionalarbete* (“regional work”, 1928), *regionalchef* (“regional manager”, 1930). In the 1940s the instrumental aspect became explicit in compounds concerning legislation, committees, and planning. As a designation for state localization measures, the term “regional policy” did not catch on until 1970.45

Although the direction of modern regional policy may change radically, there is always a functional, state-dependent, perception of regionality. The meaning, however, has been shifted from the first decades, when policy was dominated by Keynesian social engineering with the functional regions of industrial society at the centre, taking on an increasingly bottom-up perspective in recent years.

The instrumentalization of the concept of region has led to two paths for theory formation: one which virtually gives up any attempt to find a spatial demarcation and instead speaks of “networks” with individual or local nodes held together by functional bonds, which differ according to the functional context(s) studied. This perspective developed above all in the more instrumental, future-oriented regional interests, regional policy institutions, and enterprises with strong regional interests.46

In geography, too, one can also see a renaissance for the concept of region pointing in the same direction as the interest shown by historians and sociologists: the interest in space as socially created in the tension between the perspective of everyday practice and the structuring theories of Allan Pred, Anthony Giddens, and others. Interest is shifted from material space to the space that is constructed of experience and charged with meaning; research is more influenced by the perspectives of cultural analysis and history, with a leaning towards the kind of knowledge in which the humanities are interested.47

The Finnish geographer Anssi Paasi presents this movement and a development model for the dynamic study of the historical growth of regions, regarded as a social process. The concept of “community” once again becomes central for the study of regions: “a region is lived through, not in”.48 Within the framework of a focus on regional identity, he distinguishes carefully between “regional consciousness” which refers directly to people’s experiences, and “the identity of the region”, which finds expression in the institutions (in a broad sense) that

---

45 *Ordbok över Svenska språket* (SAOB), s.v. *region*.

46 Törnqvist 1993, p. 13: “A network can naturally be surrounded by boundaries. But the concept is used henceforth mainly to emphasize phenomena which are boundary-transgressing and which cannot be captured in regions without considerable generalizations”. A theoretical objection to the distinctions is that the studied boundary-transgressing networks can be said to constitute functional regions but on a level above the nation state. In this case the concepts become neither dichotomous nor wholly interchangeable: a network can be a way to form a region; regionality can be an expression of an institutionalized network.

47 The state of research in the latter, presented from a more humanistic perspective in an emancipatory tradition, is described in Paasi 1986.

48 Quoted from Nigel Thrift, in Paasi 1986, p. 108.
are formed by a historical process. It is the latter process that leads to regionality, while the former connotes ties to a place.\textsuperscript{49}

The following elements, or “interacting stages”, are included in the creation of regions, the transformation of social spaces into “real”, objectively perceived entities, regions, although not necessarily in chronological order:

- the conception of the existence of a territorially distinguishable space;
- the territory is given a conscious conceptual form, with symbols being associated with the space;
- institutions are formed: laws, organizations, language systems, etc.;
- finally, the region occupies a place in a system of regions, externally recognized and legitimate.

This process is enacted in real societies, which means that power relations also become central to the study of regions:

- the emergence of a region can be looked on as a consequence of the goals established and the decisions reached by local or non-local power-holding individuals and/or coalitions of individuals operating in the context of the ongoing structuration process.\textsuperscript{50} The institutions of a society (economic, political, legal, educational, cultural, etc.) will eventually be the most important factors as regards the reproduction of the regional consciousness.

The structure of expectation plays a crucial role in the analysis, since it presents the region first as something factually existing and then given its normative content. Both objective and goal-directed regionality are thus established on a legitimate foundation.\textsuperscript{51}

Paasi makes a fruitful suggestion for both a definition and a dynamic perspective on the creation of regions. Although he notes that regions are created through institutional practice and the aims of different power-holding groups, this aspect is not as well developed and ground-breaking as the former. Robert David Sack suggests the concept of “territoriality” to link place and power:

- the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area. This area will be called territory.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{49} Paasi 1986, pp. 131 ff.
\textsuperscript{50} Paasi 1986, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{51} Paasi is inspired here by Allan Pred, Berger & Luckman, Raymond Williams, and Pierre Bourdieu; Paasi 1986, p. 123. For the historical perspective connected with this concept see also Koselleck 1985 and 1988.
\textsuperscript{52} Sack 1986, p. 19. It should be stressed that the definition is not uncontroversial. Territory is an everyday word, often used in a more neutral way in geographical literature, e.g. “Territory is perceived as a continuous part of the earth’s surface. It is characterized by internal similarity and unity.” Törmäväst 1993, p. 13.
For historians, political scientists, and others it has long been self-evident that the state/nation is this unit. It is important to point out that territory in this sense operates on many levels, from private ownership to the Catholic church, to achieve influence over others via influence over territories.

It is obvious that the spatial demarcation can be done at several levels in a society with any degree of complexity. Depending on the features that are emphasized as creating community, units on the level of the town quarter, the neighbourhood, the village, the parish, the hundred, the county, or the historical province can be distinguished. This should not perhaps be seen as vagueness in the concepts of region or local community but as a research task: what are the elements that give a village or a parish, a hundred or a landscape a sense of “community”? It is thus only by concretizing and historicizing that the distinction between the local place and the region can be given a more precise meaning. One suggestion is to reserve place for a dimension that is perceived more strongly and subjectively, associated with the individual’s everyday life, practice, and affinities, allowing the region to be free of this subjective, existential dimension. Or better, following Anssi Paasi: when individual practice is assembled in collective, routinized, institutional form, it is the region as a concept that best captures the organization of space. This does not rule out perception and the identity dimension, but the institutional and collective dimension serve to distinguish the region from the concept of the place.53

With this definition, the place is not necessarily less extensive in territory or more local than the region: a county, a hundred, or a municipality can, by virtue of its institutional arrangements, be more of a region than the provinces, which are more dependent on individually charged meanings. The more everyday, intimate feeling of belonging appears to be this kind of place identity, which is difficult to formulate in territorial terms except on ceremonious occasions or as a response to external provocation.

Here, however, a theoretical problem becomes clear. Individual opinions are always more or less congenially linked to culturally shared symbolic codes: “Smålander” derives its meaning from narratives about Nils Dacke or by Astrid Lindgren and Vilhelm Moberg, from tourist brochures, scientific ideas about the Gnosjö spirit and the history of Småland, and from personal memories of childhood. All this is mixed and takes shape with the aid of pastoral commercials for Timotej shampoo and the red cottage that has become a national symbol.

In our own times attention has been drawn to trends towards an increased significance for regions combined with a reduced role for the nation state, and also a reduced role for ties to

---

53 Paasi 1986, pp. 111 f. Paasi is not very precise about which cultural constructions should be reckoned as institutions. It is clear that they include legal and political organization, but newspapers and other producers of culture also appear to be viewed as institutions which sustain and change regional identity. Isn’t all “meaning” cultural in a certain dimension? The difference between the individual place and the institutional and collective region is far from razor-sharp. A more psychologizing approach can be found, for example, in Burgess 1978, who also presents the state of research as it was some years ago, together with methodological considerations about British urban geography. See also Gould 1975 for slant towards more regional information horizons.
place with the establishment of global networks of communication and production: the global village is transforming the world into one place. In this tension, the conscious production of the region as space, defined in ethnic, cultural, or even religious terms, appears to take on a new meaning which we cannot properly grasp yet. To the extent that it coincides with the modernization of communications, urbanization, and industrialization, there is a switch from regions based on community to more loosely defined regions based on communication.

The question of the present situation is completely new and is of course wholly crucial for whether the historical perspective will have any value over and above the purely contrastive perspective. Henri Lefebvre argues that a qualitatively new phase begins in modern society when the earlier “production of space” arising from people’s social life and work was replaced by an opposite relation: in the global society the production of space is superior to other production! Perhaps the discussion of new regional and supranational divisions, heavy investments in communicative infrastructures, as well as this and other inquiries into the meaning of space, should be seen as a confirmation and a part of this transformation?

A completely different answer to the question is given both by the Swedish research findings which suggest a Swedish political culture antedating “the Swedish model” by several centuries, and by the findings published by Robert Putnam concerning democracy and regional political culture in Italy. Putnam’s thesis is that the variation in communitarian or civil culture, the degree of confidence in institutions and in relations between people plays a crucial role in the efficiency of modern society in both economic and political terms. This in turn means that local identification with a place, where the roots of confidence must grow, must be brought into harmony with the regional institutionalization of bodies for cooperation and resolving conflicts. These cultures do not arise and do not change at the drop of a hat. This is a substantive contribution which also entails a theoretical challenge to continue Paasi’s approach: the networks of place identification are the basis for and cannot be severed from the institutional patterns of regionality.

The question here has been to what extent the regions have played and may in future play a more prominent role than we thought possible just a decade ago. Perhaps it is precisely in this discussion of the relation between power and territory that historians can make an important contribution. The long continuity of several of the patterns described above suggests that the aspect of power is important. At the same time, the region concept is further delimited, distancing it from the still common practice of demarcating virtually any phenomenon in space and calling it a “region”. Territory or regionalization are one aspect of what a region can be. Could it be more than this? This of course depends on how broadly the concept of power is

---

54 Cf. Paasi 1986, p. 124, who cites Pred’s argument that human ties to place are an existential feature which cannot be eliminated by development, but can only change expression. See also Lefebvre 1991 for the view that the conscious production of space and distance culminates in the modern production system.

55 Paasi 1986, p. 128.

56 Lefebvre 1991.

57 Putnam 1993.
defined. Is it allowed to mean any attempt to gain influence over others, even if this is done through consensus, organized, for example, in a communalist spirit? Or does it just mean special attempts to govern based on inequality, the unequal distribution of values, and hierarchy?

From both an ethical and an analytical point of view, there is reason to distinguish between territoriality based on topophilia or communalist, egalitarian aspirations, and an exercise of power based on hierarchy. This does not make it self-evident that a lower regional level is more egalitarian than a higher one. The state as a democratic territory can very well be a better expression of a communalist regionalism than a local region based on the influence of an estate owner or an industrial magnate.

In terms of methodology, two extremes can be discerned in all the perspectives adopted for regional studies (if we disregard for the moment the epistemological question whether they exist in our heads or “out there”). One method is to distinguish a decisive criterion as region-forming, such as administrative division or the occurrence of small-scale industry. The other use of the region concept emphasizes its inclusive capacity. Regions are then seen as cultural units in which a number of features are shared, whether this is due to ecological factors or patterns of diffusion. For both these types one can then focus on their character as systems or the way they change through time. From a dynamic point of view, one can thus distinguish between ideographical, functional, and processual definitions of region depending on whether they emphasize individual, statically unifying characteristics, functional connections within the region, or processes of spatial change.

The emphasis in this study has been on the more complex concepts of region, since they are most relevant for the purpose of the project. In particular, the role of knowledge production in the creation of regions has been stressed. Any phenomenon could otherwise be studied from a regional angle, as a purely methodological and spatial limitation. In actual fact, it is precisely the degree and nature of the overlapping patterns of interaction that have been in focus, and this can be described in terms of greater or lesser regionality.

Two opposing tendencies can be conceived as prevailing in the creation of regions of different intensity with differing territorial extent: the territorial size of regions and the intensity and complexity of social interaction. In a society where much of the societal dynamic is enacted within a surveyable region, there should be plenty of scope for development into a homogeneous region, in a different sense from that used previously: high density and several coinciding patterns of various kinds. The character of this probably depends on the size and nature of interaction within the region, what we could call its intra-action.

The self-sufficiency of the local community and its inner, overlapping complexity, its character of a homogeneous region in which many functions and networks coincide or overlap in space, reinforces the regionality. Johan Asplund seizes on the way this fact must have influenced people’s perception of place, making it full of collective meaning, a topophilic place, to a much greater extent than what is later possible in more sparsely interlinked, heterogeneous regions. Power relations, interaction, and institutional expressions necessarily become more complex when larger regional units take shape.59

58 Asplund 1983, ch. 10 on topophilia.
59 Paasi 1986, pp. 121 f.
One may also conceive, however, that regionality is built up around a smaller number of “real” contact networks and a greater degree of symbolic community. This has been maintained as being constitutive for nineteenth-century nationalism, and it has been stressed that there is much to suggest that a regional identity based on an imagined community of shared history and character also takes shape on other levels. The latter mechanism is probably an increasingly important factor the larger the regions that are distinguished. With increased territory, the overlapping and intensity should decline at a given point in time. The potential of the new communication technology to build networks independent of place will be left open for the sake of caution. The long cultural regional symbol production (dialects, customs, costume, local history) can replace this to some extent, perhaps with greater integrative force than material exchange. Often, of course, it is impossible to distinguish these. For example, the judicial tradition and the law can be seen as a symbolic production of a cultural community which takes institutional shape in a country, a judicial district, or a hundred. This has very real practical consequences, but the point is that their effect on the development of regionality can be discussed and evaluated partly independent of these. The common law creates a regionality which is not immediately dependent on the intensity with which it is administered, crime is prosecuted, purchases are ratified, and so on.

With this emphasis on social and cultural interaction, it is not self-evident that one and the same region is relevant for all the people working within a territory. The high nobility of the Middle Ages were inter-Nordic, large merchants in Kalmar had an intensive network crossing the Baltic Sea, while the old provinces retained for a long time (and perhaps still do) their relevance for a large share of the permanent population. The a-national republic of the learned was in dialectic interplay with the traditional provincialism of the university towns.

To sum up, there has been a noticeable shift in perspective on regions, from natural to created units. It can be shown how this goes hand in hand with the development of society itself, which allows more and more processes to be consciously steered and created, and with an internal logic in the development of the sciences.

There is reason to use several different dimensions in thinking about regions, not least in human geography with its many ideas. What the dimensions have in common is the focus on subjective elements, experience, and symbol production as essential aspects of the creation of regions. The historical perspective helps to keep the creative spirit in place: the continuity in regional affiliation and in the distribution of power is in many ways remarkable.

**A Warning against Modern and Postmodern Short-sightedness**

In a long temporal perspective it is impossible to avoid the theme of the position of regions and their development in relation to the rise and sometimes the fall of the nation state. A characteristic of the territorial state is that the exercise of power is administratively coordinated with the territory. The normal form for this is the administrative, political, and judicial techniques developed from the start of the modern era (1500–).
Several theorists have viewed the state, or state interventionism, as a substitutive technique for a modernization of society. For recently arrived, less economically developed pretenders to a place in the industrial community, national economic policy is a practicable technique. The question of nation and region formation is then linked to the form of economic development and its pace in different countries within the framework of global historical development.\(^{61}\)

With new technology in which information flows play a more prominent role, the need for territoriality becomes different, but how different? Judgements differ. Some people clearly emphasize globalization, the de-territorialization of production and capital. Others point to a new regionalism: the state as a hothouse for the economy has to some extent finished its role; it is instead in regional economic and cultural contexts that the new growth enterprises derive their strength and can then go on to compete on the world market.

Population changes in the last hundred years and the transformation of business and industry have been charted in order to show the dynamic or regressive capacity of different regions. The point of departure is not infrequently in “logistic revolutions”, radical changes in communication systems. We are familiar with the discussion of the role of railways for the restructuring of the place system in the second half of the nineteenth century, even though its ability to reshape the regional system as a whole may not have been as revolutionary as it was for individual industrial communities which were founded and grew, via the status of market town and borough, as a result of the railways. Population and real capital, after all, move much more slowly than innovations and finance capital.

This reasoning can be linked to special studies of how industrial activity has varied from region to region in Sweden. The most striking thing in the long term is perhaps how small the changes are.

It is justified in the light of this to underline the strength of the historically achieved power positions as a highly structuring force for new communication technologies as well – at least up to now. Technical innovations are not socially neutral, they do not lead to a general widening of the market. The creation of the railways, for example, can be seen as the establishment of a “spatial transport monopoly”. There is therefore no reason to be surprised by a certain stability in the regional pattern for growth and investments. This is a “power interpretation” of stability in the spatial distribution of population and incomes. A “liberal” interpretation would instead describe the course in terms of the tendency of the communication system and the market to level out all regional differences through time. Perhaps the two can be combined if one puts a restriction on the latter interpretation which means that “main nodes”, regional centres, can retain their position when new communication networks are established.

Today there is a discussion of whether a transition to a new information and knowledge society via changed nodes in the regional networks will restructure space, or if leading regions and places by virtue of their power will retain their relative superiority. “The republic of the

\(^{61}\) Gerschenkron; Barrington Moore and Stein Rokkan, to name just some international names. There are representatives in Sweden, too, such as Göran Rystad and Per Nyström, regarding the modernizing efforts of the Swedish state in both the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. See e.g. *Europe and Scandinavia* (1983)
learned” has been highlighted in a new study as a network of complicated relations to the nation state, with roots going back hundreds of years. There are several different ways of theoretically motivating a new significance for regions in the sense used here (below the national level). Jane Jacobs has refined the theory of “successful” growth-generating regions (of the kind that interest public planners!) and has seen the level as necessary for fruitful combinations of diversity and density which innovative product development requires. In this perspective, nations will not only become obsolete but also dysfunctional when they strive to restore the homogeneity of a region which no longer generates economic growth.

What does the new pattern mean for the old political units? Will the EU revitalize the nation state project at a higher territorial level, perhaps in interaction with new regions which will become new political actors on an economically functional level below the nation state? Even more important than the territorial question is the question of how political power in general will be affected. Democratic culture is not just a matter of ideas and convictions. It has to do with the way in which economic and cultural experiences are interpreted and translated into action. The revival of small production regions, “crafts communities”, now called “flexible specialization”, has been linked with a corresponding political culture which differs from the classic liberal culture, “yeoman democracy”, but carries on the American tradition of individualism, and perhaps even the Swedish local, communitarian political culture. New regions, both under national level and at international level, can be seen as ways to try to handle the new production networks and to integrate them in territorial forms of power.

Perhaps we should not exaggerate the new principles in development, although the changes in economic structure are an important mechanism behind the discussion of regionality and territoriality: an important perspective on the nation state was precisely its function of encouraging and protecting, and excluding actors who transgressed the traditional territorial boundaries, whether by trade or by violence. The variation in state-building has sometimes been explained by means of the relative position in this process. There is nothing to suggest that the fundamental tasks or demands for order have changed. A redistribution of these to partly new or revived institutions nevertheless appears to be on the cards.

Perhaps the central place theory continues to give a good picture of the functional regions as regards housing and the need for socializing and service in the everyday environment. On the other hand, it appears as if parts of the late-modern production apparatus, above all those parts which produce services of a more abstract kind – information and knowledge – are increasingly freeing themselves from a limited regional context and creating a new sense of connection in space, with the network metaphor having a more prominent place than the concept of region.

There are, however, several arguments against an exaggerated belief that spatial relations will no longer play a decisive role:

---


1. I have pointed out one everyday existential argument: the body, with its biological, cultural, and social needs and desires, has a physicality which makes it likely that an existential “being in the world” actually has a spatial factuality which cannot be quickly transformed.

2. We have also seen that power has hitherto tried to the last to adapt new technology to earlier spatial distribution. There is therefore a limit to the theoretical power for change of new technology.

3. A societal argument is that job-sharing, insecurity of information, and transaction costs favour close personal relations which cannot survive solely through telecommunications or e-mail.

4. The role of protecting society which has been played by the state will still need to be discharged if internal and external peace, however fragile, is to be maintained. For these reasons, a strong territorial dimension will persist, even when more and more networks are acting in the same questions.
Bibliography

Aronsson, Peter, *Regionernas roll i Sveriges historia*, under tryckning (Fritzes, 1995)
Asplund, Johan, Tid, rum, individ och kollektiv (Stockholm, 1983)
Bandyopadhyaya, Jayantanuja, *North over South. A non-Western Perspective of International Relations* (Brighton, 1982)
Braudel, Fernand, *The Identity of France. People and Production*, vol II (Fontana Press, 1991)
Burgess, Jacquelin A, *Image and Identity. A study of urban and regional perception with particular reference to Kingston upon Hull*, University of Hull, Occasional Papers in Geography No. 23 (1978)
Burke, Peter, *Annales-skolan. En introduktion* (Daidalos, 1992)
Burke, Peter, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, revised reprint (Scolar Press, 1994)
Dann, Otto, "Die Region als Gegenstand der Geschichtswissenschaft", *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, vol 23 1983, s 652-661
Eriksen, Sidsel, ”Vækkelse og afholdsbevægelse. Et bidrag til studiet aaf den svenske og danske folkekultur”, *Scandia* 1989:2
*Europa - historiens återkomst*, red Sven Tägil (Gidlunds, 1992)
Frank, André Gunder,*On capitalist underdevelopment* (Oxford U.P. 1975)
Gidlund, Janerik & Sörlin, Sverker, *Det europeiska kalejdoskopet* (SNS, 1993)
Glete, Jan, ”Delen och helheten. Något om möjligheterna att förena historiens makro- och mikroperspektiv”, *Lokalt, Regionalt, Centralt - analysnivåer i historisk forskning*, red Ingrid Hammarström, Stadshistoriska Institutet, Studier i stads- och kommunhistoria 3 (Stockholm, 1988)
Hannerberg, Svenskt agrarsamhälle under 1200 år. Gård och åker. Skörd och boskap (Stockholm, 1971)
Hellquist, Elom, Svensk etymologisk ordbok (LiberLäromedel, 1980)
Koselleck, Reinhardt, Futures past. On the semantics of historical time (Camebridge, Mass, 1985)
Leeb, Thomas, "Region als Figuration - Bemerkungen zu einer Didaktik der Regionalität des Menschen", Geschichtsdidaktik 1984:2, s 121-130
Lefebvre, Henri, The Production of Space (Blackwell, 1991)
Lunden, Käre, "Historisk syntese, särleg funksjon i forhold til offentlighetha - ukollegiale refleksjonar", Historien og historikerne i Norden efter 1965, Studier i historisk metode XXI (Aarhus universitsforslag, 1991)
Ordbok över svenska språket, utg. av Svenska akademien (1893-)
Ousager, Asger, "Nationernes denationalisering", Scandia 1994:1
Putnam, Robert D, Making Democracy work. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy (Princeton University Press, 1993)
Regionalgeschichte: ein Ansatz zur Erforschung regionaler Identität, Informationen zur Raum­entwicklung, Heft 11, (Bundesforschungsanstalt für Landeskunde und Raumordnung, Bonn, 1993)
Strömbom, Stig, "Hugg odjuret Staten i stycken...", SvD 94 05 03
Studying Boundary Conflicts. A Theoretical Framework, Lund studies in international history nr 9 (Lund, 1977)
Sörlin, Sverker, "Idéer om regionen", Folkets historia 1993:3
Sörlin, Sverker, De lärdas republik. Om vetenskapens internationella tendenser (Liber­Hermods, 1994)
Sörlin, Sverker, Framtidslandet. Debatten om Norrland och naturresurserna under det industruella genombrottet (diss Umeå, Carlssons, 1988)
The Invention of Tradition, ed E Hobsbawm and T Ranger (CUP Canto, 1992)
Toler, John, Per Jönson Rösiö "the agrarian Prophet". A Charismatic leader’s attempt to rejuvenate small agriculture and create a commitment to a cultural revolt against industrialism in Sweden, 1888 - 1928, Stockholm Studies in History (diss Stockholm, 1993)
Wehner, Burkhard, *Nationalstaat, Solidarstaat, Effizienzstaat* (Darmstadt, 1992)