

## FRAMING THE GOVERNANCE OF CORE-PERIPHERY RELATIONS IN GERMANY AND ROMANIA

*Keywords: development policy, europeanisation, governance, peripheralisation*

Differentiation is an inherent quality of natural, artifactual, and human systems. Space, as a container of human activity is intrinsically uneven in quality and character, with agents constantly seeking to reinvent it in line with their abilities, affinities, but also in accordance to given constraints and opportunities. This context enables the polarisation of productive human activity in certain places, while at the same time establishing an unequal socio-economic relation with areas which are marginal to them (be them at a neighbourhood or supra-national scale). Such processes of peripheralisation are embedded in the ever-increasing complexity of the globalising world, as they are not fixed in time or space, nor are they solely driven by economic agency. Indeed, in a spontaneous interpretation, the status of peripherality may be attributed to a place which is poorly integrated within the dominant economic sectors of the economy. While that is true, peripheries are also established through processes contained in the wider social and political sphere – for instance by means of out-migration, stigmatisation, or exclusion from decision making (Kühn, 2014: 9). Emerging from this socio-economic reality are governance and policy dilemmas (Jessop, 2006: 41-2; Howlett, 2010), which are typically addressed with a limited array of instruments (Majone, 1989).

During the last decade, the governance of socio-spatial disparities within Central and Eastern Europe rested upon adjusting policy practices towards models of administrative structures and policy goals advocated by Bruxelles. However, ideals spurring from concepts championed through the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) – such as cohesion and balanced competitiveness (CEC, 1999: art. 19) – have generally been sidelined. The rationale for this is embedded in the nature of the European project itself. An overarching policy framework such as the ESDP is hard to implement in its entirety, due to its applicability in a diverse array of national policy making traditions, development paths, cultural factors, models of capitalism, and power relations (Jessop, 2006: 157; Stead, 2014: 1368). Further to this, the periphery may be perceived by private or public agency as a risk-prone environment, within which their actions often have an uncertain outcome (Barca, 2009: 24). Hence, the focus of development activity within cores becomes a safer financial venture (particularly during times of economic recovery), but also a desirable undertaking from a socio-cultural perspective.

What can be inferred from existing disparities within the European space (north-south, east-west, urban-rural) is that policy goals are more often than not set through economic arguments which rest upon the concentration of development in growth poles, with peripheral areas being expected to develop through the benefit of spillovers. This neoliberal direction signals that the idea of balanced development (with all of its economic and social sub-themes) as a driver for competitiveness in the global context is unsuited for contemporary policy mechanisms within the Union. The caveat of this message is that the excessive polarisation of development has the potential to exacerbate the marginalisation of peripheral actors and economies by rendering them as meaningless entities, unfit for participation in contexts that stretch beyond their immediate vicinity (Raco, 2003: 38). I should make it explicit that those issues have no scalar affinity – peripheralisation (as an outcome of polarisation) exists in rural hinterlands, urban spaces, and global regions alike. It is therefore a matter which ought to preoccupy policy agents at all levels.

Given this setting, my interest in studying the governance of core-periphery relations is driven by the need to provide an insight into how aforementioned ideational approaches and concepts are put to use within policy making institutions. My main research question is: *how is the core-periphery relationship framed and shaped within subnational policy making institutions?* The utility of such a study is given by the gap within the state of the art concerning the lack of empirical accounts of how such a relationship is enacted in institutional practices (Lang, 2011: 61-2; Kühn, 2014: 10). By doing this, I also seek to understand the contextualised dynamics which underpin the process of europeanisation.

### *Theoretical approach*

The key agency which shapes core-periphery relations at all scales is development, in both its applied and performative understanding. From a geographical perspective, development is a conscious intervention to improve the standards and quality of life. Theoretically, development has been traditionally explained within two schools. Conventional theories revolve around the notion of modernisation – an argument which is built upon the belief that the countries of the Global North exhibited territorial and social qualities which favoured the emergence of modernity (Peet and Hartwick, 2009: 106). Nonetheless, it is perceived that any country can progress from an undeveloped state by breaking away from their traditional norms and embracing the socio-economic and political values existing in the Western world (Larrain, 1989: 87-94). On the other hand, critical theories are rooted in the neo-Marxist school by attributing the cores an exploitative role (Higgins and Savoie, 1998: 131). Dependency theory therefore boils down to conceptualising disparities between cores and peripheries (at global and sub-national scales alike) as outcomes of the utilisation of cheap labour and production costs in peripheries.

From a spatial planning perspective, development is seen as the strategic control of investment manifested as construction activity carried out within a given territory. Development can be grasped as an illocutionary action (communication which constitutes intended action) by the state (e.g. through policy statements, adoption of strategic plans), or by the private actors (e.g. through negotiation, consultation, applying for permission). Under the neoliberal ideology, the latter are undoubtedly the key agents through which space is given shape. On the other hand, the state rarely engages in practical acts of development (i.e. construction activity); it only does so to provide infrastructures which would prove unfeasible for a private enterprise.

Given the complex context in which core-periphery relations are embedded at all scales, I feel that understanding how this spatial relation is governed can best undertaken within the constructivist school of thought. Doing this enables the conceptual understanding of socio-spatial inequality as a decentered, context-dependent processes that is socially constructed through the ability of individuals to create meaning (cf. Bevir and Rhodes, 2006: 98). Through this position, inequality in the social sphere is explained as an outcome of human agency, rather than a natural occurrence (Hacking, 1999: 6). For a study concerned with the governance of socio-spatial relations, I find this boundary pivotal, as oftentimes analyses blur the lines between agencies operating independently within those distinct systems (see Cook, 2008: 265). I find the constructivist approach to be adequate for a number of reasons.

First, in the domain of cohesion policy, the European Union relies on an open method of coordination consisting both of soft laws (e.g. declarations, recommendations) and benchmarking (best practices, encouragement of reform – often through financial incentives), in its aim to change norms in national and sub-national policy making institutions (Thatcher, 2006: 302). While in the domain of formal institutions, this method of policy transfer is evident (e.g. formation of mechanisms of transparency, establishment of democratic processes, changes in legislation underpinned by ideological shift – Suci, 2014: 106), the establishment of informal institutions is less clear, as it relies on policy makers themselves to make meaning of Bruxelles's goals by

interpreting and choosing the best set of practices applicable to their context; agency therefore becomes a central issue to be understood.

The second point is given by variations in how European goals are expressed in practice. The implementation of cohesion strategy is not a linear process (neither within or between countries), but rather one which is determined by current contexts and patterns of inequality. That said, spatial planning systems are underpinned by different normative values, are faced with different socio-political pressures, and are used to solve the salient issues encountered by member states at any given time (for instance, in Romania, economic growth has been the prime concern of post-socialist governments, while issues relating to sustainability had taken a secondary stance).

Third, the shift in policy practices from government to governance is unevenly understood or implemented, and relies by enlarge on policy actors unlearning old ways of policy making (cf. Lightfoot, 2010: 332). I must point out that in the field of territorial governance, the state holds a hegemonic role in policy making. Its centrality is determined by the necessity to forward-plan development in a setting where the fixity and finitude of space is mediated. In providing a space for legitimisation of action, the state also serves, in theory, to safeguard the public good – namely, to represent citizens' views about rules and moral beliefs (Gilley, 2006: 502-3). In a market economy, however, the state cannot successfully do this on its own. Rather, its role is framed as a provider of a stable context for the agency of development by legitimising a series of formal and informal institutions.

Within this setting, the governance of the never-ending agency of development can be viewed as a performative act, constructed as “a field of powers, capacities and performances” (Wagenaar, 2012: 91). My thesis therefore rests on the belief that agents play a key role in interpreting the constraints and opportunities given by institutional contexts (Hayward and Lukes, 2008: 8). The central theoretical concept which underpins my understanding of policy action that of frames. Frames provide a guiding metaphor of how the world works, and imply a general direction for intervention (Rein, 1976: 103). The role of such constructs is to give sense to complex events by establishing an a-priori insight that enables knowledge in the first place. Causal relationships are therefore not objectively deduced from data about reality, but are pre-imposed through the guiding force of a paradigm. As Schön and Rein (1987) show, the practice of policy making is contained within a wide array of frames. *Rhetorical* frames consist of the persuasive use of story and argument in policy discourse, *action* frames underlie policy practice and implementation (p. 32), *policy* frames are formed of actions that institutional actor use to construct the problem of a specific policy situation, and *metacultural* frames are broad systems of beliefs which underpin institutions and discourses (p. 33-4). However, the interpretation of the world is not only subject to filtering through a set of beliefs (e.g. application of knowledge deduced from a particular theoretical model), but is also exposed to processes of valuation, action, and moral imperative. Meaning is not the sole driver of interpretation, but rather shares a role alongside the immediate agency of backtalk. Given this, I will seek to focus my inquiry on the means through which goals are articulated and given effect (cf. Howlett, 2010: 66).

### *Methodology*

An interpretive methodology typically employs qualitative research methods with the aim of situating meaning at the centre of the analysed social constructions (Furlong and Marsh, 2010: 200). It is important to note that interpretive researchers and subject alike actively participate in interpreting the real world through their own set of beliefs, social position, or experiences (Chamraz, 2006: 15).

My comparison of Germany and Romania will be at a sub-national level (NUTS-2), with a focus on the institutional context – meaning that the analysis will expand vertically and

horizontally where observations mandate it. The choice of comparing the two countries is underpinned by two aspects. First, when East Germany is considered, the former state shares a very similar ideological past with Romania, yet has evolved in a different context during its post-socialist years. The key difference is the power regimes within which subnational entities are embedded, and identities ascribed to regional institutions within the two contexts. While the former East Germany has been quick to internalise a well established federal structure, Romania still relies on a lasting centralised decision making mechanism, and ongoing polemics regarding the devolution of power to local and regional authorities. The second factor is given by spatial relations manifested within both countries. On one hand, the two countries have experienced opposite trends with regard to peripheralisation, with Germany reducing the development gap between its best and worst performing regions, while Romania has experienced a widening of such disparities. However, within both countries there is an emerging trends towards implementing metropolitan areas, with a goal to consolidate national poles of growth. I therefore hold that the dynamics between cores and peripheries can be explained in a meaningful sense by understanding how this relationship is practiced within the two contexts.

The methodology I plan to follow in this study is grounded theory – a set of principles developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) which leads to the generation of theory by systematically analysing conceptual categories emerging from social data research. The substantive theory emerging from such a study does not mandate generalisation, but is rather used to understand the manifestation of a particular social phenomenon. The principal method used in this study will be qualitative interviewing, as a means of entering participants' worlds to gain an understanding of my researched domain, and to challenge my initial beliefs. In addition, I will also seek to engage in participant observation.

## References

- BARCA, F. (2009): *An Agenda for a reformed Cohesion Policy, Independent Report prepared at the request of Danuta Hübner, Commissioner for Regional Policy*. Available online: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/regi/dv/barca\\_report\\_/barca\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/regi/dv/barca_report_/barca_report_en.pdf) [Accessed 7<sup>th</sup> of May 2012].
- BEVIR, M., RHODES, R. A. W. (2006). Interpretive approaches to British government and politics. *British Politics*, 1(1), 84-112.
- COOK, S.D.N. (2008). Design and Responsibility. The Interdependence of Natural, Artifactual, and Human Systems. In: VERMAAS, P. E., KROES, P., LIGHT, A., MOORE, S. A. (Eds.). *Philosophy and design. From Engineering to Architecture*. Berlin: Springer.
- CHARMAZ, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory*. London: Sage.
- COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (CEC). (1999). *European Spatial Development Perspective: Towards Balanced and Sustainable Development of the Territory of the EU*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- FURLONG, P., MARSH, D. (2010). A Skin not a Sweater: Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science. In: MARSH, D., STOKER, G. (Eds.). *Theories and Methods in Political Science*. New York: Macmillan Publishers Limited.
- GILLEY, B. (2006). The meaning and measure of state legitimacy: Results for 72 countries. *European Journal of Political Research*, 45(3), 499-525.
- GLASER, B., STRAUSS, A. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- HACKING, I. (1999). *The social construction of what?*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard university press.
- HAYWARD, C., LUKES, S. (2008). Nobody to shoot? Power, structure, and agency: A dialogue. *Journal of Power*, 1(1), 5-20.
- JESSOP, B. (1998). The rise of governance and the risks of failure: the case of economic development. *International Social Science Journal*, 50(155), 29-45.
- KÜHN, M. (2014). Peripheralization: Theoretical Concepts Explaining Socio-Spatial Inequalities. *European Planning Studies*, (ahead-of-print), 1-12.
- LARRAIN, J. (1989). *Theories of development: Capitalism, colonialism and dependency*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- LANG, T. (2011). Regional development issues in Central and Eastern Europe: shifting research agendas from a focus on peripheries to peripheralisation? In: ERÖSS, A., KARACSONYI, D. (Eds.). *Geography in Visegrad and Neighbour Countries*. Budapest.
- LIGHTFOOT, S. (2010). The Europeanisation of international development policies: The case of Central and Eastern European States. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 62(2), 329-350.
- MAJONE, G. (1989). *Evidence, argument, and persuasion in the policy process*. Yale University Press.
- PEET, R., HARTWICK, E. (2009). *Theories of development: contentions, arguments, alternatives*. London: Guilford Press.
- RACO, M. (2003). Assessing the discourses and practices of urban regeneration in a growing region. *Geoforum*, 34(1), 37-55.
- REIN, M. (1976). *Social science and public policy*. New York: Penguin Books.
- THATCHER, M. (2006). European Regulation. In: RICHARDSON, J. (Ed.). *European Union: power and policy-making*. London: Routledge.

- SCHON, D. A., REIN, M. (1995). *Frame reflection: Toward the resolution of intractable policy controversies*. Basic Books.
- STEAD, D. (2013). The rise of territorial governance in European policy. *European Planning Studies*, (ahead-of-print), 1-16.
- SUCIU, M. (2014). Decentralization and Regional Development in Romania. An Unfinished Reform in Search of a “European” Model. In: PALERMO, F., PAROLARI, S. (Eds.). *Regional Dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe: New Approaches to Decentralization*. Lieden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.
- WAGENAAR, H. (2012). Dwellers on the threshold of practice: the interpretivism of Bevir and Rhodes. *Critical policy studies*, 6(1), 85-99.