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Regional Planning and the Mobilization of ‘Regional Identity’: From Bounded Spaces to Relational Complexity

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PAASI A. Regional planning and the mobilization of ‘regional identity’: from bounded spaces to relational complexity, *Regional Studies*. Regional identity refers to the uniqueness of regions and/or to the identification of people with them. Having gained currency in planning and policy circles, the concept is increasingly related to regional competitiveness. Yet, it is unclear how regional identity is understood in planning terms. This paper suggests that this discursive ambiguity derives from the fuzzy boundary between analysis and practice as well as from the context-bound character of identity discourse. A contextual geo-historical analysis is offered of the emergence of regional identity discourse in Finnish provinces. This provides a background for a study of how regional identity discourse is mobilized in strategic regional/provincial plans and how planners understand this term. These analyses show that the historical discourse on regional identity is at variance with the instrumental, visionary discourse of plans. Planners have diverging views on the roles of regional identity which also differ from the visionary views present in the plans.

Regional identity Planning Discourse Finland Competitiveness

PAASI A. 区域规划和“区域认同”的运用：从有限空间到复杂关系，区域研究。区域认同指区域的独特属性以及/或区域内居民的可辨识特征。此概念在规划和政策界得到广泛使用后，现多与区域竞争力相关。目前，如何从规划角度认识区域认同还没有明确的答案。本文认为，之所以存在这种含混不清的理解，一方面由于分析和实践之间界限模糊，另一方面是区域认同这一概念本身具有因地制宜的特征。本文首先从历史地理的视角，针对芬兰各省关于区域认同讨论的出现进行了情景分析。并以此为背景，进一步分析了与区域认同相关的讨论如何被运用到区域/省份的战略规划中，以及规划师们如何理解区域认同的概念。上分析表明，历史视角下的区域认同与现实规划的手段和愿景之间具有一定的分歧。而规划师们对于区域认同在这一分歧中所起到的作用也有不同的看法。

区域认同 规划 论述 芬兰 竞争力

PAASI A. La planification régionale et la mobilisation de ‘l’identité régionale’: de l’espace bien délimité à la complexité relationnelle, *Regional Studies*. L’identité régionale fait allusion aux caractéristiques particulières des régions et/ou de leur identification avec certaines populations. La notion s’est répandue dans les milieux de la planification et de la politique et, par la suite, se rapporte de plus en plus à la compétitivité régionale. Cependant, on peut se demander comment on comprend l’identité régionale au niveau de la planification. Cet article laisse supposer que cette ambiguïté discursive remonte à la frontière très floue entre l’analyse et la pratique aussi bien qu’au caractère relativisé du discours identitaire. On avance une analyse géographico-historique contextuelle de l’émergence du discours identitaire régionale dans les provinces en Finlande. Cela fournit un contexte qui permet d’étudier comment le discours identitaire régionale s’exprime dans les plans régionaux/provinciaux stratégiques et comment les planificateurs comprennent cette notion. Ces analyses laissent voir que le discours historique sur l’identité régionale est en désaccord avec le discours visionnaire primordial des plans. Les points de vue des planificateurs divergent quant aux rôles de l’identité régionale, qui se distinguent aussi des points de vue visionnaires exprimés dans les plans.

Identité régionale Planification Discours Finlande Compétitivité

PAASI A. Regionalplanung und die Mobilisierung der ‘regionalen Identität’: von abgegrenzten Räumen zur relationalen Komplexität, *Regional Studies*. Der Begriff der regionalen Identität bezieht sich auf die Unterscheidungsmerkmale von Regionen und/oder die Identifizierung der Bewohner mit ihnen. Dieses Konzept hat sich in Planungs- und Politikkreisen verbreitet und bezieht sich zunehmend auf die regionale Konkurrenzfähigkeit. Allerdings ist unklar, wie regionale Identität im Bereich der Planung aufzufassen ist. In diesem Beitrag wird die These aufgestellt, dass diese diskursive Mehrdeutigkeit auf die unklare Abgrenzung zwischen Analyse und Praxis sowie auf die kontextabhängige Beschaffenheit des Identitätsdiskurses zurückzuführen ist. Hinsichtlich des Entstehens eines Diskurses der regionalen Identität von finnischen Provinzen wird eine kontextuelle geohistorische Analyse vorgenommen. Diese Analyse bildet den Hintergrund zur Untersuchung der Frage, wie der Diskurs der regionalen

Identität in strategischen Regional- bzw. Provinzialplänen mobilisiert wird und was Planer unter diesem Begriff verstehen. Aus den Analysen geht hervor, dass der historische Diskurs der regionalen Identität vom instrumentellen, visionären Diskurs der Pläne abweicht. Planer haben unterschiedliche Sichtweisen von den Rollen der regionalen Identität, die sich auch von den visionären Sichtweisen der Pläne unterscheiden.

Regionale Identität Planung Diskurs Finnland Konkurrenzfähigkeit

PAASI A. Planificación regional y la movilización de la 'identidad regional': de espacios delimitados a complejidad relacional, *Regional Studies*. El término de la identidad regional remite al carácter único de cada región y/o cómo se identifican las personas con ella. Este concepto que se ha extendido en los círculos de la planificación y la política, está cada vez más relacionado con la competitividad regional. Sin embargo, no queda claro cómo se entiende la identidad regional en términos de planificación. En este artículo sugerimos que esta ambigüedad discursiva procede de la difusa frontera entre el análisis y la práctica así como del carácter del discurso identitario definido por el contexto. Ofrecemos un análisis geohistórico contextual de la aparición del discurso de identidad regional en planes estratégicos regionales/provinciales y de qué modo entienden los planificadores este término. Estos análisis demuestran que el discurso histórico sobre la identidad regional se aparta del discurso instrumental y visionario de los planes. Los planificadores tienen opiniones divergentes sobre las funciones de la identidad regional que también difieren de las opiniones visionarias presentes en los planes.

Identidad regional Planificación Discurso Finlandia Competitividad

JEL classifications: R58

INTRODUCTION

For decades, regional identity has been an important category in geography. For a long time it referred to natural and cultural features associated with given bounded spaces or to the identification of people with such entities (PAASI, 2003). Even today, 'regional identity' often connotes natural or cultural traits such as landscapes, dialects, local foods or the names of places and firms which are regarded as both determinants of identity and expressions of it (LAURIE and MARWIN, 1999; SLETO, 2002; SIMON *et al.*, 2009). Alternatively, regional identity can be seen to derive from narratives circulated through the broadcast media, novels and poems (TOMANEY, 2007; BROMLEY, 2010), or from performances such as plays, concerts and exhibitions (CRANG, 1999; SHIN, 2004). The concept of 'regional identity' has gained new currency with the rise of 'new regionalism' through which the region has been recognized as a key catalyst for economic development (KEATING, 1998; TOMANEY and WARD, 2000; STORPER, 1998; BRISTOW, 2010). Regional identities are now regarded as vital in planning and marketing as a means of mobilizing human resources and strengthening regional competitiveness (LE GALÉS, 1998; VAN HOUTUM and LAGENDIJK, 2001; RAAGMAA, 2002; BRISTOW, 2005; RODRIGUEZ-POSE and SANDALL, 2008; TEWDWR-JONES and ALLMENDINGER, 2006, 2007; DIMITRIOU and THOMPSON, 2007; ZIMMERBAUER, 2011).

Many researchers have now challenged the assumption that regional identities are inevitably 'bounded' and suggest that in a world characterized by diverse interactions – what HEALEY (2006) labels 'relational complexity' – regional identities should not be under-

stood as 'hermetically sealed'. Rather, they should be seen in relational terms as multiple and fluid because identities are increasingly associated with mobility, networks, and interactions occurring in 'soft spaces' and across 'fuzzy boundaries' (RACO, 2006; TEWDWR-JONES and ALLMENDINGER, 2006; HAUGHTON *et al.*, 2010). ALLEN *et al.* (1998), for example, asserted that

the identities of regions are constructed through their relationships with other regions and therefore come with a history in which they have already been 'placed' so to speak

and, further, that

identities are relational, marking out differences and contrasts between regions, and, whilst they are open to reinterpretation, they carry a legacy of meaning.

(p. 10)

These ideas echo earlier suggestions on the openness of place presented by MASSEY (1993) and on the narrative character of identities suggested by SOMERS (1994).

In spite of this new interest, 'regional identity' as a concept remains opaque to researchers, planners and policy-makers as a result of its ambiguousness. RACO (2006, p. 323), for example, claims that new regionalist writings have failed to address adequately what has been termed the relational construction of regional identities and the complex processes through which they are formed. A major issue is that 'identity' is employed as a category in both *practice* and *analysis* (BRUBAKER and COOPER, 2000, pp. 4–5). As a category of practice, it is used by 'lay' actors in some, but not all, everyday settings to make sense of themselves, their activities, what they share with other people and to make sense of how they differ from others. It is also used by 'political

entrepreneurs' to persuade people to 'understand themselves, their interests, and their predicaments in a certain way', or to persuade certain people (for some ulterior reason) that

they are 'identical' with one another and at the same time different from others, and to organize and justify collective action along certain lines.

(pp. 4–5)

A researcher, Brubaker and Cooper suggest, should thus analyse 'identity-talk' and identity politics without positing the existence of 'identities' or uncritically adopting categories of practice as categories of analysis (p. 5).

Regional identity has thus been a well-explored issue in geographical literature. However, despite its current popularity in planning and governance literature and discussions on identity by scholars interested in regional governance (for example, KEATING, 1998; VAN HOUTUM and LAGENDIJK, 2001), the meanings and uses of the term 'regional identity' in planning practice have rarely been systematically scrutinized (cf. RAAGMAA, 2002; PAASI, 2003; HAGUE, 2005; SANYAL, 2010). This paper aims to rectify this lacuna by considering how regional identity discourses emerge in a specific national context and how they are mobilized in regional planning. Rather than as an empirical entity defined in terms of its inherent qualities or as the product of the identification of its inhabitants, regional identity is understood in this paper more generally as a social construct that is produced and reproduced in discourse. The discourses of regional identity are plural and contextual. They are generated through social practices and power relations both within regions and through the relationships between regions and the wider constituencies of which they are part. The exploitation of history is often crucial in this process (cf. TOMANEY and WARD, 2000). The present article therefore proposes a geo-historical, multilayered approach. It begins with a discussion of the historical identification of regions in Finland and the perception of them as bounded spaces. This discussion considers the different actors, social institutions and practices that became crucial in the generation of this discourse, and how this emergence was related to nation-building processes. This historical overview provides the background for the analysis of how regional identity discourses are manifested in strategic plans prepared by Regional (Provincial) Councils (RCs), revealing both bounded and relational perspectives. The next section focuses on the planners themselves: on their personal understanding of regional identity and of its value as regards planning, economic development and competitiveness. Their highly contextual, or more *individual*, views are finally compared with the findings of a recent study by VAINIKKA (2012), which emphasizes the relational, networked aspects of regional identity in a globalized world.

CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH MATERIALS

TOMANEY and WARD (2000) stated that while many claims are made about the resurgence of regional identity as a general process affecting all societies in the face of globalization, as a concept it remains ill-defined for the purposes of analysis and measurement. The Introduction alluded to some of the different applications of the term as a category in research and the diversity of source materials on which a definition might be based. The same methodological complexity is evident in studies on citizen regional identification. In Eurobarometer and other macro-studies, for instance, survey techniques frequently depend on ready-made categories that fail to differentiate between 'identity' and 'identification' (EUROBAROMETER, 2010; FITJAR, 2010). Although widespread, such large-scale survey approaches have been challenged. KEATING (1998), for instance, suggested that they tend to measure different things in different contexts and that it is difficult to compare the importance of regional identities between countries at different times. Surveys are also highly sensitive to wording, which limits the reliability of findings that may arise from the analysis of the data.

BOURDIEU (1999, p. 31), in particular, has stressed the instrumental power of words to produce things, to create collective fancies, fears, phobias or simply distorted images. Writing and talking about identities, or performing historical events through which identities are understood literally, brings them into being. Representations through language and performance thus become constituents of the concept. As BENWELL and STOKOE (2007, p. 4) suggested, identity is 'actively, ongoingly, and dynamically *constituted* in discourse'. And, as MCSWEENEY (1999) put it,

Collective identity is not 'out there', waiting to be discovered. What is 'out there' is identity discourse on the part of political leaders, intellectuals and countless others, who engage in the process of constructing, negotiating, manipulating or affirming a response to the demand [...] for a collective image.

(pp. 77–78; cf. BRUBAKER and COOPER, 2000)

The discursive production, reproduction and transformation of regional identities normally incorporate notions of uniqueness and difference (cf. DE CILLIA *et al.*, 1999). These notions are in perpetual conflict with each other, as they are shaped and reshaped in the process of institutionalization through which the territorial, symbolic and institutional 'shapes' of the region emerge to become an established feature of regional system and social consciousness. Such an institutionalization process is relational and typically has its constitutive powers both 'inside' and 'outside' of the emerging region (PAASI, 2009). Regional identity discourses thus arise historically. They 'accumulate' and are reproduced by institutions such as governmental and planning bodies, national and regional media, educational institutions,

and the creative industries that operate at and through various spatial scales (TOMANEY, 2007). This accumulation is not a straightforward process; there are frequently ruptures such as active forgetting, suppression and political instrumentation which incite contestation at different levels of decision-making and their manner of implementation (PAASI, 2010; CASTELLS, 2007).

Such 'layering' suggests that regional identity discourse can be conceptualized according to WILLIAMS's (1977) view of culture. Culture for Williams existed simultaneously in three forms: 'residual', 'dominant' and 'emergent'. While 'residual culture' consists of discursive elements which echo cultural tradition and heritage, 'dominant culture' is materialized through current hegemonic discourse such as the association of regional identity with tourism and regional development. 'Emergent' elements often parallel or challenge this hegemony, for example casting identity as a brand that has to be created or modified to enhance a region's future competitiveness.¹ Alongside this cultural layering, it is helpful to distinguish analytically between two intertwined conceptual dimensions in regional identity discourse: the identity of a region and the regional consciousness of its population (PAASI, 2003). The former refers to features of nature, culture and people that constitute an 'imagined community' (ANDERSON, 1991). These features are drawn on by various actors in order to present their views of what regional identity is. The latter refers to the identification of people with a region or a social collective which is defined in regional terms. This is but one element in a complex matrix of identifications comprising different social categories such as gender, generation, occupation and class. While a bounded region may be an important point of reference in processes of identification, people may equally well identify themselves with social networks and relations that transcend regional boundaries (ALLEN *et al.*, 1998).

The source material that forms the main focus of this paper consists of thirty-nine strategic regional plans prepared by nineteen Finnish RCs during the years 1999–2010. Plans are made in each RC and they are normally renewed every four years. These documents address comprehensive objectives for regional development over a twenty- to twenty-five-year period and provide perhaps the best comparative material for studying regional identity discourse in Finland. It is common to suggest that regional identity is oriented towards the perceived past (HAGUE, 2005, p. 12). However, the future orientation in these plans also makes it possible to examine how expectations shape identity discourse and how the 'emergent' elements of regional identity discourse manifest themselves (cf. WILLIAMS, 1977). The research material relating to regional consciousness comprises interviews with planning experts who are responsible for compiling, coordinating and/or formulating the plans in each RC.² The selection of the interviewees was based on their strategic institutional

position in the planning process. Since there is no given format for the plans, the planners are in a key position to shape the identity discourse of the region they represent. In defining regional identity, they draw on historical discourses and the views of the general public as well as on analytical categories developed in academic studies. In so doing, they combine 'residual', 'dominant' and 'emergent' features of identity discourse.

The aim of the interviews was to scrutinize how planners understood regional identity, how they related it to their position as expert and planner, and how they assessed its potential importance for planning. Whilst the majority of the interviewees were planning chiefs or leaders of regional development units, none was an autonomous actor in the construction of identity discourse. Inevitably, all were subject to the structural constraints within which they were called upon to operate (cf. FAIRCLOUGH, 2005a). Their personal biographies as well as their professional positions and the systemic environment which directs their actions thus come together in complex ways. The major constraint is the fact that regional plans are stipulated by national legislation. Planners follow the format of plans drawn up in other provinces. Their texts are also set within the framework of national and European development policies and draw on transnational planning rhetoric (HEALEY and UPTON, 2010). Furthermore, patterns of professional cooperation between planners and their contacts with other actors shape the contents of the plans.³ The combination of interaction and systemic constraint means that planning texts do not simply instantiate discourses but rather that they actively rework them, articulating them in potentially novel ways and transforming them through hybridization (FAIRCLOUGH, 2005a, 2005b). Thus, rather than asking questions about what regional identity *is*, it is more relevant to scrutinize carefully what it means to *claim* (in speech and in written texts) that the notion of identity applies to a given territorial space (cf. BILLIG, 1995). Initially, a discourse-historical approach, based on the works of DE CILLIA *et al.* (1999), is used to trace the 'evolution' of identity discourses as part of the institutionalization of provinces. For this purpose a careful, theoretically informed analysis of diverse documents has been made to examine what they reveal about the making of regional identity discourse. However, the main analytical approach adopted in this study follows the principles of critical discourse analysis whose prime objective is to identify power relations as part of the wider societal and historical factors which underlie surface expression (FAIRCLOUGH, 2005a, 2005b; DE CILLIA *et al.*, 1999; JACOBS, 2004; JONES, 2004). This approach is applied to both the texts of strategic plans and the language of interviews. Respectively, both materials have been analysed systematically from the perspective of the conceptual approaches presented above. Hence, the key aim has been to examine from various angles how 'regional identity' is presented and

understood in research materials, and what (planning-related) meanings are associated with this idea. A particularly important task has been to study whether the regional identity discourse in plans and interviews displays a bounded and/or a relational orientation.

THE GEO-HISTORY OF REGIONAL IDENTITY DISCOURSE IN FINNISH PROVINCES

Finnish provinces have a long history dating back to the Middle Ages. Key questions thus surround the conditions under which specific 'regional identity discourses' emerged and the reasons for their development.⁴ The answers to these questions are all the more complex given that the processes of determination, materialization and change are dynamically reciprocal. At the same time as situational, institutional, and social contexts shape and affect discourses, these discourses instrumentally modify social and political realities. BRUBAKER and COOPER (2000, pp. 15–16) argued that the modern state is one of the most important external agents of categorization and identification through its power to impose categories, classificatory schemes and modes of social counting. In Finland, the notion of provinces as social units spread gradually from administrative to scholarly elites during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The expansion of this spatial consciousness took place as a part of state and nation building. It was related to the transformation of the material and institutional bases of society which accompanied the emergence of a Finnish nationalist ideology during the nineteenth century (JUTIKKALA, 1949). Provinces gained importance in society and were increasingly represented figuratively on maps and by means of statistical information necessary for governance. The formation of provinces was thus a relational process: it was closely related to the emergence of industrial capitalism and the related spatial divisions of labour between regional centres and countryside, the increasing mobility of citizens, the gradual consolidation of regional governance, as well as the intensifying activities of regional social movements such as youth organizations and political parties (HALILA, 1958). Alongside the emergence of economic spaces and forms of governance that accompanied the rise of these new social institutions, the number of provinces gradually increased from nine *Castle Counties* (the earlier 'historical provinces') to nineteen official provinces. Already before the Second World War a Provincial Union was established in ten provinces to promote regional culture and economic growth; and between 1941 and 1967 nine other regions followed suit.

In Finland the state-centric model of 'spatial socialization' (PAASI, 1996, pp. 7–8) harks back to the mid-nineteenth century and the cultural and political work of national activists. BRUBAKER and COOPER (2000, p. 33) suggested that activists of identity politics often deploy the language of 'bounded groupness'. Such

rhetoric 'has a performative, constitutive dimension, contributing, when it is successful, to the making of the groups it invokes' (p. 33). In Finland such activists were often university professors such as Zacharias Topelius, who suggested in his patriotic *The Book of Our Land* (originally published in 1875) that

the people in one province differ from those in another province as regards their appearance, clothing, character, habits and standard of living.

(TOPELIUS, 1981, p. 124)

Topelius put forward a persuasive narrative that brought together spatial scales, regional distinctions, religious rhetoric and various features of the 'national character'. Student Unions at the University of Helsinki also became important advocates in creating a consciousness of provinces, their culture, nature/landscapes and citizens, producing the first map of Finnish provinces accompanied by Finnish texts 1846 (PAASI, 1996, p. 86).

Since the late nineteenth century, the human body has become the object of socio-spatial categorization: the body became regionalized. Descriptions of Finnish 'tribes' related to historical provinces figured in national literature and stereotypical depictions of their character and physiognomy were embodied in identity narratives. This was part of the search for the 'original Finnish race' (KEMILÄINEN, 1985) which found expression also in the atlases prepared by the Finnish Geographical Society, which until 1960 included several maps of the body features of people living in various areas. JOTUNI (1923, p. 17) described in his geography textbook how people from Häme 'have a robust body' and 'round-shaped face and blond hair' and those from Karelia, 'a slim body, oval face and dark hair'. Textbooks also drew on 'Topelianic' stereotypes of tribal characteristics, together with features of landscape and dialect in order to distinguish provinces and their peoples from one another:

People from Häme are persistent workers, calm and taciturn. [...] People from Savo are known for their playfulness. [...] A Karelian is lively and energetic. [...] Bothnians] are vigorous and fiery folk.

(AUER and MERIKOSKI, 1938, p. 52)⁵

Together with the maps, atlases and regional governance, these features served to define the character of Finnish territory and its subdivision into discrete units. The exploitation and 'mapping' of body features in spatial classification are fitting examples of the use of what FOUCAULT (1998) calls 'biopower', that is, a way of managing people as groups.

In addition to the influence of educational textbooks and literature, the regional press became a powerful promoter of regional identity. Leading newspapers declared themselves to be the 'voice' of their province (HUJANEN, 2000). Even today, Finnish regional newspapers not only provide information relevant to the region, but also, through personification and

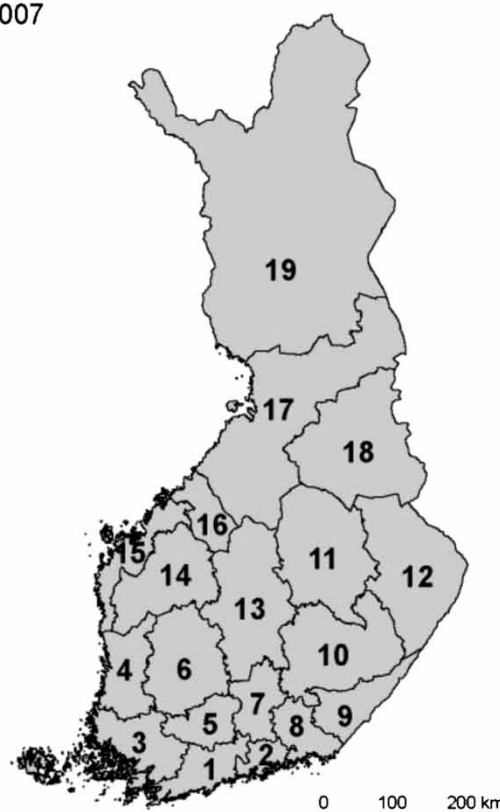
fetishization, propagate regional stereotypes. They maintain identity discourses that draw on elements from a region's past in order to define its present and anticipate its future (PAASI, 1986; HUJANEN, 2000). The Finnish case thus confirms observations made with respect to other European states, namely that regional identity discourse emerges as an element of nation-state building, reflecting romantic ideologies linked to economic change (BRACE, 1999; CRANG, 1999). This discourse becomes embedded in spatial socialization to the extent that regional stereotypes persisted in national education curricula and textbooks until the 1960s and remain present in regional newspapers (cf. HUJANEN, 2000), becoming part of what FOUCAULT (1980, p. 133) referred to as a 'regime of truth'. Until the 1950s, in Finland a 'tribal' discourse, based on relatively fixed characterizations of regional cultures and provincial populations, permeated many official governmental committee reports (PAASI, 1986; HÄKLI, 1994). These reports sought to justify the setting of new boundaries in regional governance. Their intention was to identify 'naturally bounded regions' which reflected distinct categories of citizenship so as to lay the foundation for self-governance. Nevertheless, the interplay of power and knowledge relations has meant that the moves to establish regional self-governance in Finland have not been conclusive despite efforts going

back more than one hundred years and the work of innumerable state committees (HÄKLI, 1994).

While symbols related to the nature/landscape and culture of provinces (songs, coats of arms, birds, lakes, stones, flowers, etc.) have been invented and repeatedly used since the nineteenth century to typify regions, and while some prominent regional activists have never ceased to emphasize the importance of separate provinces and their identities (KIRKINEN, 1991), these regions remained politically marginal until Finland joined the European Union in 1995. RCs were established in 1994 by combining pre-existing *Provincial Unions* and *Regional Planning Associations* (Table 1). They became major regional planning bodies whose mission was to give a substance to the idea of a 'Europe of the regions', where regional identity was an important category. *Regional identity and sustainable development* was one of the three innovative actions and strategies for regional competitiveness proposed by Romano Prodi's Commission (2002–2006).⁶ More recently, the TERRITORIAL AGENDA OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (2007) also accentuated the need to strengthen regional identities and foster territorial cohesion. In Finland the Ministry of Employment and the Economy (TEM) has promoted provinces as major units for regional development and has enhanced their legal status in strategic regional planning. However, at the same time it

Table 1. Population in 2009 and gross domestic product (GDP) for 2007 in the areas (provinces) of Finnish Regional Councils

Number	Province/region	Population	GDP per capita in 2007 (Finland = 100)
1	Uusimaa	1 408 020	135.8
2	Itä-Uusimaa	93 491	106.0
3	Southwest Finland	461 177	96.6
4	Satakunta	227 652	84.4
5	Häme	173 041	80.3
6	Tampere Region	480 705	95.5
7	Päijät-Häme	200 847	77.7
8	Kymenlaakso	182 754	90.4
9	South Karelia	134 448	91.6
10	Etelä-Savo	156 632	76.9
11	Pohjois-Savo	248 423	79.6
12	North Karelia	166 129	74.1
13	Central Finland	271 747	82.7
14	South Ostrobothnia	193 511	77.3
15	Ostrobothnia	175 985	94.3
16	Central Ostrobothnia	71 029	91.3
17	Oulu Region	386 144	88.6
18	Kainuu	83 160	72.3
19	Lapland	183 963	81.7



Source: Statistics Finland.

has emphasized competitiveness, innovations, networks and the 'openness' of provinces that implies their relational rather than their bounded character (TEM, 2009, p. 14). Finland's entry into the European Union also promoted forms of spatial socialization in which the provinces have a high profile. The Finnish National Board of Education, for example, regarded regional identity as crucial for active citizenship and sustainable ways of life. Some new geography textbooks assert that provinces are the basis for regional identity (CANTELL, 2002). These developments have brought provinces, regional planning and identities together, thereby giving regional identity discourse a new lease of life.

REGIONAL IDENTITY IN PLANS

HEALEY (2006) suggested that strategic spatial planning endeavours are

complex governance processes through which concepts of spatial organization are mobilized with the ambition of accumulating sufficient allocative, authoritative and imaginative force to shape both the materialities and identities of particular places.

(p. 527)

Healey proposes that relational complexity approach demands the recognition of the complex interrelation between place qualities and multiple space-time dynamics instead of relapsing into analyses that take the territorial contexts as given. This suggests that in order to scrutinize how notions of regional identity are mobilized in regional plans, it is pertinent firstly to position the use of this term in a wider discursive context.

Regional identity as well as other contemporary key terms such as 'competition', 'innovation', 'cluster', 'social capital' and 'learning region' are widely used in regional plans, bearing witness to the adoption of international planning concepts. This is an example of the relativization and transnationalization of contemporary planning spaces (HEALEY and UPTON, 2010). A frequency analysis of regional plans shows that keywords related to the materiality of regional development are much more important than 'soft' concepts related to mental prerequisites of such development. Thus, 'competition' is cited almost 1400 times in thirty-nine plans, 'innovation' 1150 times and 'cluster' 650 times, whereas 'regional identity' is noted 202 times and 'image/brand' 174 times. 'Social capital' (fifty-one times) and 'learning region' (thirty times) occur even less frequently. While thirty-three of the thirty-nine plans use the concept 'regional identity', and while it is mentioned in at least one plan in all nineteen provinces, what this means is rarely specified and, indeed, no definition for this idea is offered. Regional identity refers more often to the identity of the region (fifteen plans) than to regional consciousness (six plans) but it is often difficult to

discern what this category means. Regional identity seems to be simply something that is good for regional development, a term which conjures up visions of the future offering of unspecified benefits to regional populations. As such, it is embedded in the discourse of the text in which it is used and derives its meaning from its verbal context rather than corresponding to a stable pre-existing form of understanding. 'Regional identity' is thus a context-bound expression.

As far as the currently significant theoretical emphasis on non-bounded, relational identities is concerned, the key question for empirical analysis is then: what is the relationship between provincial, inwards-oriented historical regional identity discourses and those presented in current planning documentation? As has been suggested above, reference to the past is normally a key feature in regionalist discourse (TOMANEY and WARD, 2000, p. 474). Nevertheless, the connection between historical identity ('tribal' stereotypes, cultural heritage, and so on) that emerged as a corollary of the institutionalization of the provinces and regional identity is today accentuated only in few plans. These state, for instance, that traditional elements of the 'mentality' of citizens can prevent regional cooperation (HÄMEEN LIITTO, 2001), that the past and the present together give rise to regional identity or that regional identity is firmly rooted in local culture (KESKI-POHJANMAAN LIITTO, 2005). One plan draws on historical stereotypes and asserts that 'the will to win', 'jealousy', 'honesty' and 'sincerity' characterizes the people of Southern Ostrobothnia (ETELÄ-POHJANMAAN LIITTO, 2006, p. 24); another declares in more relational terms that 'in a healthy community, old national and regional identities are prerequisites for genuine internationalization' (PIRKANMAAN LIITTO, 2000, p. 40). Interestingly, these plans rarely refer to specific features of nature or landscapes, which were key elements in traditional identity narratives. This is in stark contrast to the provincial narratives promoted by tourism agencies, which in most regions highlight exactly these elements (ENJOY SUOMI, 2011). Narratives developed to promote tourism put much more often emphasis on marketing regional images rather than identities. This promotion also brings in a relational element in the sense that marketing is largely directed to audiences outside of the regions.

More often, regional identity discourse in planning documents refers ahistorically to its potential role for social solidarity, regional development and promotion, and to regional competitiveness. It is thus related to future-oriented thinking and seen as an important medium for competitiveness, which opens a relational perspective on the inwards-looking identity discourse:

[The province of] Kainuu has the need and capacity – based on its identity, distinctiveness of nature and culture – to develop its competitiveness by investing in the

development of the resources of the local people, that is, in human, educational and social capital.

(KAINUUN LIITTO, 2003, p. 40)

The background for accentuating identity is often the need to raise the competitiveness of the region.

(VARSINAIS-SUOMEN LIITTO, 2005, p. 35)

The aim is that Eastern Uusimaa becomes a well-known and attractive culture- and tourism province with a distinct identity ... strong regional identity provides a creative environment that increases interest to settle down in the region.

(ITÄ-UUDENMAAN LIITTO 2005, pp. 42, 45)

The cultural identity of Tampere region, its strong attractiveness and international visibility give the province a positive image that has been forcefully employed in development activities, for instance, in tourism.

(PIRKANMAAN LIITTO, 2009, p. 13)

The fact that the plans present visions of ideal, harmonious communities, often in highly normative terms, doubtless reflects the process of coalition-based, consensus-seeking, political decision-making.⁷ Such normative visions stress the importance of popular consciousness for regional development rather than the identity of the region in itself:

Citizens who have adopted a strong Southern Karelian identity will co-operate to work on behalf of the whole province.

(ETELÄ-KARJALAN LIITTO, 2003, p. 24)

The importance of regional identity is strengthening as a counterweight to globalization, which also increases social capital. ... A strong provincial identity creates a lively and distinctive solidarity among the people in the region. It strengthens their community spirit and co-operation.

(POHJOIS-POHJANMAAN LIITTO, 2003, pp. 13, 54)

Regional identity means the inhabitants' strong commitment to their home region. It is the image that people have of their home area. This image has to be taken into consideration in development activities and in order to encourage people's creativity and entrepreneurship. People's identity is greatly modified by how they feel they are esteemed. A strong identity and a positive image are remarkable resources in regional development, and both can be influenced by positive communication.

(LAPIN LIITTO, 2002, p. 43)

One common feature in all plans is that regional identity is not related to gender, class, occupation, political affiliation or other socio-cultural categories. In ten of the thirty-nine plans, the region itself is 'personified' as an actor. Regions are represented as units with internally homogeneous populations, fitting examples of what BRUBAKER and COOPER (2000) called a 'strong understanding' of identity. This implies that identity is something that all people already have, should have, are

searching for or may possess 'without even being aware of it' (p. 10). If the plans thus represent the 'will of the region', this will largely operate at a level above that of the ordinary citizen.⁸ Even the fact that populations frequently cross regional borders and become mixed as a consequence of migration has not destabilized an identity discourse that implies the existence of a coherent imagined community. Yet, on average only 60–70% of Finns live in the province of their birth (PAASI, 2002). Further, as HEALEY (2006) suggested, those who are legally citizens of a particular territory may have diverging notions about what citizenship means to them and diverse territories with which they associate and, in relational terms, many others who live outside the territory concerned may have a stake in it.

The presence of regional identity discourse in the plans is not dependent on the level of regional development since, to varying degrees, it features in at least one plan for all regions (Table 1). In about half the plans analysed regional identity is regarded as important for visions of development and 'regional values'. In some plans, for example Central Ostro-Bothnia, Itä-Uusimaa or Oulu, identity is discussed more extensively than in others. Central Ostro-Bothnia and Itä-Uusimaa are small provinces with a strong cultural heritage.⁹ Furthermore, it appears that identity discourse is historically contingent: if the notion was present in an earlier plan of a RC, it may be removed from the next (Etelä-Savo), and vice versa (Päijät-Häme).

From the perspective of spatial orientation – what HEALEY (2006) referred to as 'scalar consciousness' – regional identity is typically related to an 'inward' orientation that aims to distinguish the region as an entity apart from other spaces. By contrast, a relational 'outward' orientation relies on 'images' through which the region is represented as an object of external attraction. While the region is thus presented as a bounded planning unit, the emphasis on competition and marketing thus positions it as a part of the wider relational space (FRISVOLL and RYE, 2009; WALLIN and ROININEN, 2005). Identity discourse is also located in broader spatial networks when identity is interpreted as a counterforce to globalization (cf. MEYER and GESCHIERE, 1999). Identity is then related to an 'inwards-looking' orientation in plans so that globalization can 'destroy regional cultures' and 'values that still exist' (HÄMEEN LIITTO, 2001, p. 17). In some cases internationality is seen as a crucial, relational component of regional identity in a world dominated by competitiveness and cooperation:

Regions compete increasingly in co-operation in global markets rather than separately: Pirkanmaa's (= Tampere region's) own regional development work is based on the province's own points of departure, its material and mental resources and regional identity.

(PIRKANMAAN LIITTO, 2000, p. 81)

PLANNERS' PERSPECTIVES

For HAGUE (2005, p. 10) the construction of identity through planning is a process of developing a discourse or even writing a narrative:

We see planning as being about place-making; that is to say that a key purpose of planning is to create, reproduce or mould identities of places through manipulation of activities, feelings, meanings and fabric that combine into place identity.

(p. 8)

This proactive view of the planning process emphasizes the manipulative nature of identity-building and accentuates the capacity of planners to mobilize identity discourse. None of the planners interviewed suggested that they purposefully invented or moulded identities in their plans, but an element of manipulation is of course present in current efforts towards regional branding and image building that aim at locating regions as part of wider relational spaces.

The interviews display three divergent attitudes towards regional identity. The first regards regional identities as important. This applies in some peripheral provinces such as Northern Karelia and Central Ostro-Bothnia which have a strong sense of cultural history and a strong regional media. However, even in prosperous central regions such as Tampere (Pirkanmaa), Oulu (Northern Ostro-Bothnia)¹⁰ and Itä-Uusimaa (Eastern Uusimaa) whose status as provincial units is less clearly defined, planners accentuated the identity of their provinces, at times passionately, and, at the same time, its importance for regional development, communal solidarity and even resistance (cf. CASTELLS, 2007). It is thus no accident that in the plans made in these regions regional identity has such a visible role. Having generally been trained in geography or regional science, these planners regarded regional identities as important assets for regional development:

In our province (the emphasis on identity) does not come from the outside, but from inside. We see as a major task to maintain and strengthen regional identity.

(Male planner, born in the region)

Yes, we too have a strategic emphasis in our Regional Plan to strengthen regional identity and internal cohesion ... in order to be strong towards the outside, the province must also be strong internally and this requires a certain sense of community that starts from identity.

(Male planner, born in the region)

Regions must have an identity in the sense that they cannot be like the British colonies in Africa, whose borders were drawn with a ruler without thinking at all where certain tribes were living. ... Regional identity starts from people and their cultures, as these delimit the natural borders of the region and identity serves as an important cohesive force ... identity is something that does not come from administrative authoritative orders

or statutes ... it results from long cultural processes and a co-operative culture.

(Male planner, born in the region)

The second group of planners, normally with a background in engineering or regional science, had a more instrumental attitude. In peripheral Kainuu, but also in Häme, Päijät-Häme and Uusimaa, that is, provinces that are currently struggling to be identified as part of the national image-building project,¹¹ Metropolitan Finland, the planners increasingly replaced the term 'regional identity' with that of 'image' and emphasized in more relational terms *marketing* of the region as their main focus:

Our region is a brand. It is a promise of something. It is a promise of high quality which is grounded in reality, a promise that we will keep ... if I have understood this correctly, many provinces have begun to market themselves.

(Male planner, born in the region)

perhaps the focus is now moving onto consider how outsiders see us, to the marketing and to the visibility of the province.

(Male planner, born in the region)

Nevertheless, despite the importance that previous planners attach to competitiveness and 'hard values', an emphasis on identity is still present, although increasingly cultural heterogeneity is seen as weakening regional identity. Also in historically strong provinces such as Central Finland, Kymenlaakso or Lapland planners noted the importance of identities, but suggested that it is not the province but the *locality* that is the most important reference point for identity.¹²

The third group was sceptical, even critical towards regional identities, and it accentuated the relational openness rather than the boundedness of regions. This was obvious in Pohjois-Savo (Northern Savo), Southern Karelia, Kymenlaakso and Southern Ostro-Bothnia, where three planners had a background in business studies/economics or social policy. The first three of these regions have a long industrial history, which the planners emphasized as an example of early globalization that has 'opened' and 'networked' these units decades ago. For one planner the whole idea of regional identity was strange; it was just an example of ideas that 'new forms of governance have put on the agenda' (female planner, born in the region) or a topic that was gradually disappearing from regional debates, 'which is a good thing for many' (male planner, born in the region). One interviewee even questioned in very relational terms whether 'in this borderless world, regional cultural environments exist any more' (male planner, born in the region). Alternatively, provinces were seen as units that were 'too small' for an identity discourse to be applied to them or the discourse itself was seen as obscure:

On the whole, Finland is terribly homogeneous. There are no major differences between the different regions of this country, so perhaps we should speak about identity in a wider European perspective.

(Female planner, born in the region)

Well, we are a small country where culture and ways of doing things are similar and uniform. ... When you asked me what the identity of this region was, I started mumbling that we had written about 'neo-tribes' and things like that. What does this really mean ...? Perhaps that identity does not exist in ways that can be directly transferred into planning documents.

(Male planner, born in the region)

At times this scepticism reflected the experience of heterogeneity in a globalizing world. Planners also suggested relationally that people are living in a complex, multi-cultural environment and wondered whether 'regional identity' could still be meaningful, especially as regional development is related to wider, often international agencies such as the European Union. For these persons the international regional identity discourse was itself a reaction to globalization and the demand for greater competitiveness whilst at the same time being an expression of the same (cf. BRISTOW, 2005). Alternatively scepticism reflected the difficulty of translating regional identity into practice: regional identity is not a concrete thing such as 'highway number 5' (male planner, born in the region) or 'it is somewhat difficult to measure history and identity and draw the border on the map' (male, born outside the region).

this is a difficult question. So if I say that there is a sort of provincial identity. ... How does your identity differ from that of the neighbouring province. ... This is a mind-bender. Either I cannot understand it, or I simply don't see it. Or at least I can't describe it in writing. ... I do not personally believe in provincial advertising.

(Male planner, born outside the region)

Regional identity itself is a feeling or sort of soft factor, difficult to measure in other ways than by asking you to define the place you identify with.

(Male planner, born outside the region)

Not surprisingly, planners' views were strongly affected by their personal backgrounds. Most interviewees had a close relation with the province they represented. Eight of them had been born in the region under consideration; four in the neighbouring one. Most had a long work history in the region. Only one of the seven planners originating from a more distant region had been working fewer than twenty-five years in the province. Personal biography seemed to reinforce their views. Those who had moved to the region from the outside had usually more relational views. Ten planners suggested that their province has a 'strong identity' and only two regarded its identity as weak. Their age seemed not to be a significant factor in their opinions. Instead several interviewees related their views on

regional identity to their *professional identity*: as planners and advocates they had a 'special perspective' and felt a 'responsibility for the region'. As JENKINS (2004, p. 23) suggested, the fact of occupying a certain institutional position ascribes particular identities to individuals that use them as resources in their professional activities:

I have been working and living here so long that it is pleasant and easy to speak on behalf of this province.

(Female planner, born outside the region)

Human beings can be anywhere, but a person's heart is in one place. ... I work in a dream profession ... whatever you do you must have your heart involved ... in this job I can work on behalf of the region that is close to my heart.

(Male planner, born in the region)

The above observations, drawn from both regional plans and interviews, show that both research materials display a mix of relational and bounded ideas of regions and their identities. These observations can be compared with the results of a recent study that scrutinized the meanings of Finnish provinces and their regional identities in the everyday lives of ordinary people. Instead of leaning on random samples and surveys normally used in the analysis of identification, the study consisted of fifteen focus groups representing different organizations (Amnesty International, Friends of the Earth, youth societies and heritage associations) based in cities and rural areas of four Finnish provinces (VAINIKKA, 2012). The study shows that, for citizens in general, regions are less stable reference points in the formation of identity than is implied by regional plans and interviews with professional planners. Certainly, the focus groups reveal the importance for identities of personal histories and phases of life which are expressed in relation to specific spaces and localities. However, in an era of greater mobility, regional spaces are not actively 'thought through' and 'practised', but rather 'experienced' (VAINIKKA, 2012). The members of Amnesty International and Friends of the Earth were often critical towards bounded provinces and accentuated wider horizons. These results suggest that for 'mobile' citizens spatial identities are relational, and that this is a growing trend.

DISCUSSION

Regional identity has become significant around the world in planning circles. This formerly inwards-looking idea has been challenged by relational thinking. HEALEY (2006) suggested that a 'relational complexity' approach means eschewing notions of inherent territorial coherence or integration, as well as unidimensional concepts of territorial identity. Researchers increasingly accentuate the relational character of identities rather

than relying on ideas of fixed, bounded identities (ALLEN *et al.*, 1998; RACO, 2006; HEALEY, 2006; cf. SOMERS, 1994).

This study has analysed how bounded spaces and relational complexity manifest themselves in regional identity discourses developed in planning practice. It shows that the meanings of regional identity in plans, and for planners themselves, vary considerably. While notions of territorial coherence and solidarity persist in plans, the evidence of both plans and interviews is that regions are not represented and understood merely as self-contained entities: their relational position as nodes in wider economic and cultural environment and processes are equally stressed. Such relational emphasis harks back to the fact that the work of planners is increasingly related to complex networks at regional, national and European levels. The European Union itself, for example, has promoted regional identity as an important category!

Why are regions then perceived simultaneously as bounded spaces within such relational settings? Firstly, the region as a given administrative context and an object of strategic planning process is simply spatially bounded in the current work of RCs. As planners suggested:

Borders exist only because they show the power. Power exists of course in the act of making the plan inside the border.

(Male planner, born outside the region)

Well, we are of course still in a situation, that we make, you know, the plan for our own province with those borders that we have.

(Male planner, born in the region)

Secondly, while a number of actors participate in a coalition-based planning process in each region, they all come from this 'bounded' region. Thirdly, the region is often understood 'historically' so that the elements that are associated with regional identity rely on certain understandings of the 'boundedness' of regions.

These observations support HEALEY's (2006) comments on the emerging forms of strategic planning in Europe: certain signs of a recognition of the 'relational complexity' exist, but relational understanding is weakly developed and often displaced by more conventional and traditional ways of seeing place/space in governance processes. This implies that there is not inevitably a gap between 'bounded' planning practice and more 'open' academic theorizations, but rather that an understanding of the openness and boundedness of regions characterize concomitantly planning practice. While regional planning occurs today in the relational context of 'soft spaces' and 'fuzzy boundaries' (HAUGHTON *et al.*, 2010), borders may still effectively disturb and limit both visionary thinking and planning practice.

The plans studied linked the notion of regional identity to divergent aspects of cultural heritage, to an assumed solidarity between citizens and to a resource in promoting regional competitiveness. Planners rarely defined analytically what regional identity was and how it could best be exploited in regional development. This diversity of definition suggests that rather than using the idea of regional identity as a category of analysis, planners were drawing on it as a category of practice (cf. BRUBAKER and COOPER, 2000). As such, their discourse constituted an agenda orientated primarily towards economic development and grounded in a political rhetoric which was both national and international in origin. At the same time, while all the regional plans and interviews display a certain relational outlook, it is important to note that identities have different meanings in different regions. As KEATING (1998) has suggested,

regional identity is highly contextual, is moulded by events and political strategies, and can be mobilized for different purposes.

(p. 92)

While this study has focused solely on Finland, it is clear that national differences in (regional) political cultures and the assumptions that underpin them mean that 'identity' and 'region' have different connotations in different states (KEATING, 1998; LE GALÉS, 1998; HEALEY, 2006). The challenge for research into regional identity is therefore to extend its comparative focus. Yet, this is only the first step. While regional identities may provide motivation for both political struggles and community-based activities in regional development, an important challenge for a relational planning strategy is to avoid discourses about singular spatial identities (HEALEY, 2006). In a world characterized by all kind of flows and interactions, immigrants and refugees, it is crucial to 'open' univocal inwards-oriented concepts of regional identity. It is important to note that a possible 'regional identity' represents only one of the many identities that people have today, that many of those not living in a region may have a stake in it, and that an identity attached to a region by the media or planning bodies is a contested discourse rather than a permanent truth of this region. A major challenge for planning is therefore to reflect on the pros and cons of 'regional identities', and to collect information on what 'identities' actually mean for various actors. Regional identity should not be understood as automatically positive nor taken for granted because other authorities such as the European Union privilege it.

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NOTES

1. TERLOUW's (2009) idea on thick and thin regional identities is also related to the time dimension. The former denotes traditional identities focusing on shared past and specific cultural characteristics. The latter points to (images of) future-oriented regions that face the challenges of global competition and which, for example, regional administrations try to communicate.
2. The semi-structured interviews of planners (six women and thirteen men) were carried out by the author in August–September 2009. They were tape-recorded and transcribed. When excerpts from the interviews are used, the names of respective RCs are omitted in order to maintain the anonymity of the interviewees.
3. Plans are prepared by the RCs in cooperation with regional actors operating in politics, in public, in private and in the Third Sector. Plans are thus results of coalition building used to accumulate competence and legitimacy, a feature that is typical in strategic planning (HEALEY, 2006). The plans are accepted by the delegates of the decision-making bodies of the RCs, who are political appointees of the member municipalities representing the results of *municipal* elections. The delegates have *not* been elected by voters as their *regional* representatives. Therefore, while in the rhetoric of the RCs the plans are frequently said to reflect the 'will of the region', this refers above all to the will of political, administrative and economic elites.
4. It is important to note that the phrase 'regional identity' (*alueellinen identiteetti*) has been absorbed into the Finnish language as a borrowing only in the 1970s. Before this period, identity discourse manifested itself in such phrases as 'regionalism' (*maakuntahenki*) or 'individuality' (*omaleimaisuus*) that denoted divergent ideas of nature, culture, 'us', the Other and human relations/social community that have been associated with regions.
5. For a detailed analysis of the emergence of regional stereotypes, their continuity and ruptures in spatial socialization in Finland, see PAASI (1984).
6. See http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docger/informat/innovat_en.pdf/.
7. See note 3.
8. See note 3.
9. Itä-Uusimaa RC was merged with Uusimaa RC at the beginning of 2011, which reduced the number of RCs from nineteen to eighteen.
10. The English names of Pirkanmaa and Northern Ostro-Bothnia used in the names of RCs are now *Tampere* Region and *Oulu* Region, that is, they have been renamed after the capital (high-technology) cities of these provinces. This choice implies that in the international context the decision-makers increasingly think of the region as a brand rather than a mere provincial unit.
11. During the first decade of the new millennium, competition, city-regions and metropolitan thinking became global keywords (SCOTT and STORPER, 2003; BRENNER, 2004) and they soon spread into European regional policy. In the Finnish context this has led to neo-liberal models in regional development and increasing concentration on metropolitan thinking (MOISIO and VASANEN, 2008).
12. The importance of the local scale for the identification of citizens has been noted in several empirical studies in Finland (ZIMMERBAUER, 2002).

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