

## EUROPEANIZING TERRITORIALITY – TOWARDS SOFT SPACES?

Keywords: soft spaces, territoriality, Europeanization, Habitats Directive, macro-regions

### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the co-existence of relational and territorial spaces – soft spaces - through the experiences of EU integration and territorialisation. First, we seek a better understanding of EU integration through an engagement with the literature and research on soft spaces. We propose that EU integration is best understood as involving an interplay between territorial and relational understandings and approaches that vary through time, a variation that can be categorized as involving pooled territoriality, supra-territoriality and non-territoriality. Second, we seek to add to the current research and literature on soft spaces by focusing upon the changing character of soft spaces and their temporalities. We approach these two dimensions through an exploration of two ex-post case studies the development of which typically shows different stages of softening, hardening and of differing degrees of Europeanization. With the focus on Europeanization, the paper concludes with three findings: the new spaces of European territoriality are characterised by, first, *temporal dynamics*, second, the *parallel existence* with ‘hard’ spaces, and, finally, they can be employed as a *political tool*.

### 1 Introduction

Recent debates on the nature of space and scale have explored their social, porous and networked nature (e.g., Thrift, 2004; Amin, 2004; Massey, 2005) and argued for a relational view, highlighting

“first, that space is constituted through an infinite set of multilayered interactions; second, that space is understood to contain the potential for multiplicity as an expression of social plurality; and third, that space is recognized as being constantly under construction” (Goodwin, 2012: 2).

Such perspectives challenge ‘territorial’ and ‘bounded’ understandings of space and scale disputing the idea that space can be understood as a ‘container’ and scales as nested hierarchies of bounded and partitioned spaces (Gualini, 2006).

This ‘relational turn’ has itself been challenged from a variety of perspectives that seek to highlight the binary and unhelpful nature in which relational and territorial spaces are portrayed. Such a reaction has sought to bring territory ‘back in’ by rejecting what Jones (2009) refers to as the ‘crude caricatures’ of relational thinkers that present non-relational thinking as ‘static’. There are also an emerging number of studies that seek to explore the nature of spatial governance empirically, drawing upon evolving new forms of spatial governance across different policy sectors.

In seeking to overcome the territory-relational dualism Allen and Cochrane (2010) have explored the nature of spatial and scalar restructuring coming to the conclusion that regional politics draw upon and employ a range of relational networks that stretch beyond regions but are also simultaneously lodged within them. As Cochrane has put it, ‘politics in practice still seems to retain a strong territorial focus, or at least territory seems still to provide a significant focus around which a range of political projects are organised’ (Cochrane, 2012: 95). It remains the case, as Goodwin argues, that a lot of practical politics continues to be conducted in, through and against a set of institutions whose jurisdiction is territorially defined (2012: 3). The upshot of such theoretical and empirical challenges to the relational

turn is a rebalancing and tempering of the view of space as a collection of networks and flows and scale as a political construction with no pre-ordained hierarchy. According to Painter (2010) territory remains the quintessential state space. More recently there have been attempts to overcome the territorial-relational standoff through the notion of assemblage that broadly concerns how spaces and places are put together whilst retaining their heterogeneity (Anderson and McFarlane, 2011). Drawing upon Latour among others assemblage thinking argues that places are complex and unique configurations of global and local factors that blur the binary nature of structure and agency, near and far, social and material. The emphasis in assemblage thinking is upon emergence, multiplicity and determinacy leading to the need for 'thick descriptions' of how places, for example, manifest, assemble and reassemble neoliberalism (though for an alternative view see Brenner, et al., 2011: 225).

Despite this revisionism and welcome engagement with the actual practices of territorial and spatial governance such territory-relational debates have largely been abstract and/or normative and have made few inroads into policy spaces and disciplines such as spatial development. Within the EU recent studies have highlighted how spatial governance has begun to address the tensions within state-bounded territorial and relational networked governance through the emergence of new spaces such as the Baltic Sea Region (Stead, 2011). These new spaces provide a 'spatial fix' that straddle the need to provide legally enabled and democratically accountable territorially linked plans and strategies in ways that also reflect the complex relational world of multiple, networked spaces. Within the EU there is also another driver of new spaces. Spatial planning across Europe is itself reflective of the tensions between nation-state territoriality and EU territorial cohesion objectives. A range of different territorial strategies of the EU have emerged each influencing the nature of

territorial/spatial governance. It is also clear that EU integration differs between sectors as well as through time leading to a complex and evolving set of tensions and new spaces (Dühr, 2009; Faludi, 2003, 2010b). Spatial planning as an activity facilitates such spatial reconfiguration simultaneously embracing relational understandings and approaches while acting within territorially defined and legally sanctioned spaces. This duality requires planning to think and act in different realms of space, engaging with the global, national, regional and bespoke, functional spaces yet working through other, often more stable and accountable spaces.

Such theoretical reflections and tensions on the changing nature of EU space and the role of spatial planning have lacked empirical analyses of how, for example, tensions are resolved in contemporary practices of spatial governance. Recent experiences of emerging or new spaces around spatial or development planning might provide a way forward. A number of studies across Europe have highlighted and explored the emergence of so called soft spaces as attempts to create hybrids of territorial and relational spaces (see, for example, Allmendinger and Haughton, 2007; 2009; 2010; Counsell, et al., 2012; Haughton, et al., 2012; Heley, 2012; Luukkonen, 2014; Metzger and Schmitt, 2012; Olesen, 2011; Stead, 2011; Waterhout, 2010). Soft spaces constitute new spaces for development planning that can be relatively enduring or ephemeral, formal or informal, centrally sanctioned or locally driven. Soft spaces, sometimes accompanied by fuzzy boundaries, provide an opportunity to address mismatches between administrative and functional areas by creating bespoke spaces for dealing with specific issues such as regeneration, integrating different sectors such as transport, infrastructure, education, etc. in such processes operating at variable scales.

Studies of soft spaces have focused upon spatial planning where future strategies and plans for an area have been territorially sanctioned and tethered though relationally connected to issues and influences far beyond. Yet development planning is not the only field or sector where such tensions and possible hybrid solutions arise. This paper explores the co-existence of relational and territorial spaces – soft spaces – through the experiences of EU integration and territorialisation. First, we seek a better understanding of EU integration through an engagement with the literature and research on soft spaces. We propose that EU integration is best understood as involving an interplay between territorial and relational understandings and approaches that vary through time, a variation that can be categorized as involving pooled territoriality, supra-territoriality and non-territoriality. Second, we seek to add to the current research and literature on soft spaces by focusing upon the changing character of soft spaces and their *temporalities*. Some soft spaces might be very limited in time, others ‘harden’ towards strongly institutionalized forms, and others remain ‘soft’ over a long time. We approach these two objectives through an exploration of several EU policy case studies the development of which typically shows different stages of softening, ‘hardening’ and of differing degrees of Europeanization. This reflection leads, finally, to a proposed research agenda that more thoroughly links territoriality, institutional change and power plays.

## **2 Spatial planning, territory and soft spaces**

Recent debates on the nature of space and scale and the need to understand geography in relational terms have made some limited though important inroads into planning imaginations and practices (see, for example, Healey, 2006; Graham and Healey, 1999;

Davoudi and Strange, 2009). However, such interpretations and arguments for more relational forms of spatial planning<sup>i</sup> or the 'strategic turn' have tended to overlook or gloss over disjunctures between the broad-brushed and largely abstract discussions of relational thinking and the nature and practices of territorially embedded spatial planning (see as well Luukonen, 2014). Planning practice has always accepted the need to think beyond territorial units. Yet the entreaty to plan more relationally has tended to 'wish away' or overlook the enduring and significant hierarchical ontology of scalar politics and government. Financial powers, infrastructure coordination and investment, ecological and environmental concerns to name a few issues all remain situated within hierarchical structures of government and governance. Yet, we can also see that tiered, hierarchical structures of politics and power are also influenced by relational networks and are themselves porous and malleable.

Part of the solution lies, we feel, in rejecting the 'either/or' dichotomy of the relational/territorial approach. Relational and territorial perspectives are not only far less opposed than is often presented but from the standpoint of spatial planning also relate to different functions of spatial governance. Spatial planning exists at the intersection of relational understandings *and* the need for territorial governance. In other words plan and strategy making needs to think and act relationally *and* territorially. This distinction is not always a clear one from relational analyses of planning. Another way to think about this need to act and think relationally and territorially is to consider the need for planning to both 'open up' strategy and plan making to acknowledge and take account of multiple influences, networks and flows and then necessarily 'close down' such diversity in the form of a territorially based strategy or plan based upon the allocation of legal rights and responsibilities. Thinking and acting relationally comes up against the need for accountability and transparency, the political dimension, as well as a suite of legal sanctions to ensure that

decisions and strategies and implemented and enforced. Thus relational perspectives are necessarily anchored to territorial functions in spatial planning.

Recent research on the practices of spatial planning across Europe has highlighted and explored how this dual function of thinking and acting relationally and territorially has been managed through the practice of soft spaces and fuzzy boundaries particularly when the relational spaces of planning are multiple and fragmented. At one level soft spaces have emerged as attempts to represent and reflect space beyond and within territorial boundaries:

“So whilst planning still needs its clear legal ‘fix’ around set boundaries for formal plans, if it is to reflect the more complex relational world of associational relationships which stretch across a range of geographies, planning also needs to operate through other spaces, and it is these we think of as ‘soft spaces’”  
(Allmendinger & Haughton, 2009, 619).

However, it would be misleading to ascribe a single justification to the growing use of soft spaces as evidence suggests that there are a variety of uses and backgrounds (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2010). At one level soft spaces emerge to provide opportunities for functional planning to address mismatches between territorial boundaries and coherent areas such as housing markets, travel to work or river catchment areas bringing in new actors and interests from beyond existing territorial concerns, in other words drawing in relational conceptions of networked space into territorial forms of governance. At another level soft spaces can emerge to address specific and complex issues around growth management or urban regeneration within territories in relational

ways. In this form soft spaces reflect the desire to create forms of networked governance to reflect the complexity of societal issues and institutions. A third driver of soft spaces concerns the question of competences: governing in a multi-level setting always involves struggles about mandates: which actors of what level have a say in which policy fields? Here, soft spaces emerge to challenge or obscure where power actually resides. This point is of particular importance in the context of European integration, as we will detail later. Fourth, there is an important experimental and political dimension to soft spaces that allows them to be used politically, testing strategies and approaches to an issue without ceding ultimate authority. If successful then such spaces can 'harden' (Metzger and Schmitt, 2012) or disappear if their function has been achieved. If not successful then they can be disavowed and dropped (Haughton, et al, 2012). Similarly, soft spaces are often accompanied by 'fuzzy boundaries' that attempt to insert new agendas, challenge existing identities and territorial representations but with a degree of uncertainty over the issues and actions to be addressed (Haughton et al., 2009; Healey, 2012). According to Luukonen (2014, 14) European spatial planning thus "forms an informal networked space of Europeanization" and therefore "enables its articulation in terms of common 'European space' or the 'EU territory'."

What we are concerned about more in this paper is how such soft spaces can emerge and be deployed to address, challenge and 'open up' difficult and politically sensitive issues around identity and territory and spatial imaginaries, particularly with regards to European integration and how spatial planning and governance is being used as a means through which reterritorialisation at the macro-regional scale is being managed.

### **3 European Integration and territoriality**



Soft spaces emerged as a response to tensions around territorial and relational space in spatial planning. However, such tensions are not unique to planning contexts; they are found in other sectors and areas of governance, and are most notably a component of European integration. Questions of territorial and relational space in the context of European integration are highly complex and sensitive for two main reasons. First, the *polity* of European integration is characterised by a tension between nation state territoriality and some supranational mandates on the EU level. Second, we see a high heterogeneity on the *policy* level. In some policy fields – like the environmental policy or the European Single Market – we can identify clearly supranational features; in others – in particular in the field of spatial planning – there are no transposed mandates. In both contexts, soft spaces have emerged to handle certain complex, cross-territorial and asymmetric situations or they are used as a tool in strategic ambitions about competence ‘gaining and keeping’.

To start with the polity dimension: Despite the strength of some EU supranational competences, the EU’s territoriality cannot simply be understood as a parallel to the Westphalian State territoriality or as a superstate. Instead, we see a hybrid setting of a few hard elements (in particular with regard to external border control) and predominating soft elements. Many authors understand this as a predominating intergovernmental organisation of a ‘pooled territory’ (Mammadouh, 2001; Pullano, 2009; Bialasiewicz. et al., 2005). The European citizenship is a good example as it exclusively relies on the national affiliation of individuals: one has to belong to a nation state before they can be considered as EU citizen.

Others stress the ‘soft’ territorial character of EU integration as “aspirational in terms of a space of values and an area of solidarity” that should not be captured in a clear territorial way (Scott & van Houtum, 2009: 271, 273).

Secondly, from the policy perspective, no explicit EU mandate has been established yet with regard to spatial planning. Some see the objective of 'Territorial Cohesion' anchored as shared competence in the Lisbon treaty as a new and formal basis for the development of such a mandate (e.g. Faludi, 2010b). In the meantime, the EU commission has published a Green Book that has posed questions to stakeholders and member states on how to concretise the objective of territorial cohesion. The public consultation process has brought much inspiration, but little clarity (cp. COM, 2009). In other policy fields we see explicit European mandates that are highly relevant from a territorial perspective, but which are not coordinated in a territorial, European way – the Common Agriculture Policy or the Transeuropean Networks are just two examples in this respect (see Dammers and Evers, 2008). This setting has to be understood from a multi-level perspective, e.g., EU financial support can prioritise certain objectives whilst on the polity level, the autonomy of national, regional and local authorities can be limited by European regulation. However, initiatives of national, regional and local bodies can also draw upon European funding and regulation to help deliver the 'by-passing' domestic opponents (see Clark and Jones, 2009; Radaelli, 2003; Böhme and Waterhout, 2008).

Against this background, Deas and Lord (2006) identified a growing number of 'unusual' or non-standard regions around cooperative arrangements established by INTERREG and other programmes highlighting the tensions between national and regional territory and the European motor of spatial integration and policy (Faludi, 2009). Luukkonen sees territorialisation of the EU as an interplay of re-scaling between different levels occurring through 'everyday practices of policymaker such as European spatial planners [.....] at the 'lower levels' as well as "through 'high politics'" (2014, 15). Scrutinizing European spatial planning as a field of interaction, he further concludes that the "idea of 'Europe' as a spatial

entity [...] contributes significantly to the production of the territory of the EU” (2014, 14). Soft spaces and soft forms of territorial/spatial governance have been and continue to be one way in which this tension is managed and played out. Macro-regional strategies such as the Baltic Sea and Danube regions provide early examples of such strategic soft spaces (Schmitt and Metzger, 2012; Knieling, 2011; Stead, 2011).

One way to capture the emergence, use and fissiparous nature of soft spaces of EU integration is to propose an analytical framework against which to compare and contrast the reality of practices. In order to understand political processes and dynamics, including hidden agendas, actor coalitions etc., we have to consider a differentiated system of territorial categories. This is particularly the case given the logic of integration underpinning the European Union as a construction *'sui generis'*, without archetype and without predictable outcomes.

In the following parts of the paper we discuss the Europeanization of territoriality and what role soft spaces play in our understanding of this process. Our analytical framework is based upon three territoriality categories that provide a heuristic against which to compare the concrete case studies of the Europeanization of territory that follow.

The first category we label as *'non-territoriality'*. Non-territoriality is relevant if there is no formal mandate for a political task with regard to spatial development. In practice this means that a mandate for a certain policy field at the EU level does not exist, is not addressed or is neglected. Thus, as long as no formal EU mandate exists, EU territoriality cannot take effect. Fiscal policy is a typical example as the nation states apply their own rules within their territory. Of course, differences in fiscal regulations are highly relevant for

spatial development (e.g. commuting in border regions), but this form of spatiality does not question the political principle of national territoriality.

As soon as political mandates are transposed to the intergovernmental European level, we enter the second category of *pooled territoriality*. Sovereignty remains with the nation states as 'building blocks': this is true in the institutional as in the territorial sense. This intergovernmental logic reflects the meta-theory of intergovernmentalism based upon the notion that European integration should not or cannot overcome national sovereignty. This can be applied for spatial planning at the current state, but also for other policy fields. Good examples for this kind of policy are the Schengen regulations. These regulations are exclusively based on national competences and they are managed by nation states authorities. The role of the Commission is to focus on data management. (This is not to confuse with the supranational character of the above mentioned Frontex mandate that addresses the *external borders*).

The third category we label as '*supra-territoriality*' capturing those cases where the political mandate and power is located on the EU level, overriding (inter-)national mandates. The supra-national organisation of mandates initiates a supra-national territoriality and can limit national sovereignty. The European Single market serves as an example: thousands of technical regulations have to be considered which are linked with juridical sanctions which can be enforced by the European Court of Justice (e. g. interdiction of certain customs, mandatory public procurement procedures). This refers to the second meta-theory of European integration, (neo-) functionalism that assumes that in the long run European integration necessarily leads to evermore integration and in the end to the supranational state.

This threefold classification provides a framework for the different territorial dimensions of EU integration though there is a further dimension that needs to be included. Analyses within spatial development highlight the dynamic nature of soft spaces as they evolve to take on new dimensions and characteristics (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2009; Haughton and Allmendinger, 2010). Such evolution reflects the flexible and ephemeral nature of such hybrid spaces as a result of changes in their policy scope (e.g., the inclusion or exclusion of transport and environmental issues) or territorial domain. In other words there is a temporal dimension over which territoriality evolves including future trajectories and possibilities. A policy's reorganization can mean the shift from one kind of territoriality to another. The 'upward' dynamic is fuelled by the transposition of political mandates. The downwards dynamic can be triggered by the retrieval of political mandates. This latter development must be regarded as exceptional but discussions around the future of the Euro illustrate this: the Euro states could agree to withdraw from the common currency – either to non-territoriality with the renationalisation of the currencies or to a pooled territoriality based on currency peg. Both directions, either upwards or downwards, are forms of reterritorialisation.

#### **4 From the analytical to the empirical**

The following two case studies are explorative empirical arguments that aim to illustrate and test the framework developed above. The engagement between the analytical and experiences are based on the involvement of the authors in a series of research projects related more or less directly to the questions addressed here. We draw upon two experiences of the Europeanization of territory – the Habitats Directive (HD) and Macro

Regional Strategies (MRS). We have chosen these case studies in order to cover the wide range of current constellations in Europeanised territoriality: They involve territorial questions of formally institutionalised policies (HD) and more informal ones (MRS); they cover political processes of quite a long period (HD since the 1980s) and very recent ones (MRS for less than a decade); they involve the EU/EC without originally having explicit mandates (HD) and the EU as coordinator explicitly invited by national authorities (MRS). The two case studies at hand enable us to explore the temporalities of territoriality in two very different cases. Both cases are examples of new, provocative soft spaces that challenge and reterritorialise areas and perimeters.

#### **4. 1 Habitats' Directive**

The Habitats Directive is the main basis of EU nature conservation policy and is the legal basis for the protection of fauna, flora, and habitats in all EU member states. The Habitats Directive was enacted in 1992, after considerable political bargaining. Today, more than 10 % of the European territory is protected by the Directive's regime that unfolds relatively strong consequences in spatial planning and territorial development (Alphandéry and Fortier, 2001; Chilla, 2005; Gibbs, et al., 2007).

The starting point of this policy tool lies in the late 1980s when dissatisfaction with political power constellations was felt in two groups – within the European Commission and from protagonists of environmental policy. Firstly, within the European Commission there was a strong ambition for more supranational competences in the field of nature conservation, where EU competence was absent with the exception of the Birds Directive from 1979 that had shown hardly any effect until the 1990s. Environmental, policy specific motivations

certainly played their role, but given the rotation logic of the personnel within the Commission, the policy specific ambitions were completed by general political power questions and polity concerns.

Secondly, on the national and regional level throughout Europe many policy experts on the fields of the environment felt a certain frustration about environmental policy in general. Despite a considerable degree of institutionalization of environmental and nature conservation policy, the effectiveness in concrete planning conflicts was seen to be rather weak. In the course of the political bargaining on the Habitats' Directive, these both groups got together within a structural coalition, by-passing the resisting powers mainly on the national level.

This coalition turned out to be effective. The first phase of policy formulation was characterized by a deterritorialisation strategy. Within the official discourse, spatial differentiation was largely absent. Discursive references to the pan-European heritage remained diffuse from a territorial point of view. In background negotiations, it was not easy to convince sceptical member states to adapt the competence transfer – and here 'territorial othering' came into play: For example, Germany was persuaded to support the directive with the argument that there would be few consequences for the country well known for its high environmental ambitions. It was argued that the intention was to upgrade nature conservation policies of the – at that time – new southern European member states (the so called 'club med' considered to have limited ambitions in environmental policy; see Chilla, 2005). From a juridical point of view, this argument was meaningless, but it was politically effective.

In parallel, the institutional setting was institutionalised through the directive, in parts somehow hidden in its annexes that comprise long lists of species to be protected throughout Europe, regardless the territorial belonging (HD Annex I – V). Moreover, biogeographical regions were installed (HD Art. 1 c iii). However, the procedural regulations remained unclear at that time and member states were unaware of the juridical meaning of the long appendices of the directive. In this sense, the policy formulation can be seen as a discursive deterritorialisation. This phase can be interpreted as ‘deterritorialised biology’: biological arguments of nature conservation were put forward, detached from their (bio-) geographical meaning.

After the adoption of the Directive in 1992, the implementation process only started slowly, as the national adaptation came along with delays in most countries. In the years after, more and more conflicts came up, in particular between environmental/biological arguments on the Commission side, supported by ENGOs from all levels, and the non-environmental arguments from sub-national levels like regional planning authorities or national economic lobbying. This is where the second phase started that we consider as reterritorialisation phase. The prescriptions of the Habitats Directive were taken very seriously, and the hitherto soft elements unfold surprisingly efficient consequences: this is particularly true for site selection processes where the protection of the annexes’ species turned out to be juridically coercive: the Commission and the European Court of Justice took this issue surprisingly seriously, considering the hitherto ‘relaxed’ monitoring of environmental implementation processes. Figure 1 illustrates this hardening process. (Fig. 1: The Habitat’s Directive formulation and implementation – and the relevance of soft spaces.)



The negotiations of the site selection processes were not directly negotiated between member states and the Commission. Instead, following the perimeters of the respective biogeographical regions, representatives of the concerned states and the Commission negotiated in different parallel committees. This spatial and institutional reorganisation gives the Commission a powerful role in coordinating and directing the policy development. For the Commission this procedure is efficient as there are less biogeographic regions than Member States. The states face a considerable complexity: France, for example, is part of four of these regions (the Atlantic, Continental, Mediterranean and Alpine biogeographic regions). Despite the legislative anchorage of the biogeographic regions they are soft spaces as they constitute technically-driven, functional planning spaces that cross territorial boundaries. Latterly, the political importance of these regions has diminished. They remain the technical reference, but political negotiations ended with the end of the site selection process.

As a result, the key actors' aims of the early phase were achieved: Both the supranational institutions and the environmental policy concerns saw an important shift in competences and power. Reterritorialisation processes, based on temporarily soft spaces, were a key concept of this strategy.

(Figure 1. Territorialities and Temporalities of the Habitats Directive)

#### **4.2 The case of the Macro-regions**

Macro-regions have emerged as a new form of European territorial cooperation within the budget period 2006-2013 in regions with so called 'common geographical characteristics' (Dubois, et. al, 2009, Samecki, 2009). Macro-regional strategies were developed as

intergovernmental initiatives aimed at reinforcing international cooperation. Within the Baltic Sea Region the idea for the development of a joint macro-regional strategy arose in 2005. In the course of a changing geopolitical configuration after the EU Eastern enlargement and an increasing eutrophication of the Baltic Sea an interregional working group of the European Parliament took up the idea for a strategic cooperation (Schymik, 2011, Antola, 2009). In 2007, an 'experimental' phase of macro-regions started, when the European Commission was mandated to develop the first macro-regional strategy in order to set new impulses to the already existing institutional setting (see Fig. 2).

The institutionalisation process in the Baltic Area was surprisingly quick: due to the priorities of several EU presidencies the European Parliament adopted the strategy in 2009. Several stakeholder groups strongly supported the development of macro-regions for different reasons. Two inducements played an important role for the stakeholders: Many stakeholders were not satisfied with the setting of cross-border and transnational cooperation (e.g. water purification control). There was a search "for a spatial or territorial framework for these policies to fit into" (Faludi, 2010c, 6). Policy makers on the national and EU levels expressed their dissatisfaction with the existing instruments and complained about missing instruments for joint actions within their geographical focus. The European Commission, more explicitly the Directorate General for Regional Policy, had shown signs of frustration considering the output of regional policies and had difficulties to successfully compete for competences in internal power plays. National representatives were unsatisfied with the international cooperation perimeters available and at the subnational level particularly private stakeholders and project partners missed recognition and political support for long-term actions (Sielker, 2012).

At this stage, the pooled territoriality principle is applied as national and regional representatives developed the strategies within their respective mandates. Supranational elements can be seen in the Commission's role preparing the consultation process and the Parliamentary adoption. Summarizing the first phase macro-regions can be termed as "soft spaces" that were developed between different layers of decision-making. The official literature stresses the bottom-up element in the establishment process (CEC, 2010). It is true that the initiative started at the member state level, but the strong role in coordinating the establishment process must not be underestimated. During the phase of implementation the national representatives, however, gained importance.

Following the idea of the first macro-regional strategy tremendous political interest in this new tool arose on the national level - in most cases for the reason of policy influence (e. g. shipping, harbour infrastructure) and on the EU level in particular for the reason of integration challenges with regard to new member states. The Baltic Sea Region Strategy triggered a macro-regional 'hype' as many regions debate their own potential in this respect (Dühr, 2011, Bialiasewicz, 2013). In the early phase the so called three 'nos' – postulating the absence of (1) financial, (2) institutional and (3) legislative changes – underline the political sensitivity of macro-regions (Schneidewind, 2011).

Macro-regions are implemented through multilateral committees that sit alongside formal institutions and operate within existing frameworks (Sielker, 2012). The key governance elements are so called Priority Areas addressing different policy fields. Voting members are national representatives that give an observing status to the Commission, private and semi-public stakeholders. The implementation mode, thus, builds on an intergovernmental model and does not lead to supraterritoriality. The priority areas are soft in the sense that they are constantly open to diverse stakeholders and operate in flexible and sometimes overlapping

spatial foci (Sielker 2012). Within the different actions in each priority area, a multitude of actor constellations and different geographical boundaries can be relevant (Stead, 2011, 165). The macro-regions also include 'hard' elements, as the goals agreed upon in Steering Groups have to be decided and implemented by e. g. national ministries or other committees of funding schemes. During the preparation and implementation process a "growing readiness for 'soft' reforms is evident" (Schymik, 2011: 6). The macro-regional concept has shown first signs of 'hardening'" (Metzger and Schmitt, 2012) as e.g. the newly developed committees developed different steps of institutionalization depending on working modes and engagement of nation state representatives in the Steering Groups. One reaction towards the macro-regional development is the development of a Danube Region INTERREG programme area. However, the principle of pooling domestic territory is not put into question by a new INTERREG programme organisation.

The dissatisfaction discussed above has led to the different stakeholder groups being in a constant search for arenas to enforce their objectives. Both in the Baltic Sea Region and the Danube Region we see a 'success' of certain policy priorities on the general political agenda through the changing interplay of stakeholders at the macro-regional level. In the case of the Danube Region the focus on the river, for example, led to an increased agreement and prominence of objectives to increase the shipping on the Danube. In the case of the Baltic Sea Region the macro-regional development provoked an increasing attention of the wider public towards the problems of eutrophication leading to an increasing popularity of existing and initiation of new policy actions, making the missing instruments and perimeters more visible.

In parallel, the Directorate General obtained the possibility to take credit for new cooperation initiatives in which they appear in a new managing role without tying up

substantially more resources. At the same time, the responsibility for the success and the implementation lies in the hands of the nation states. Interestingly, the diversity of objectives pursued by different stakeholder groups is not fully obvious. The European Commission aim at more European competences, the national representatives pursue intergovernmental cooperation agendas and the stakeholders of certain sectors (e.g. International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River within the Danube Region) aim at an increasing policy influence in informal networks. All three stakeholder groups, however, seem to be able to address their needs through a gradual reterritorialisation process.

We expect the 'macro-regional era' to continue, though the development paths of macro-regions in Europe are not exactly foreseeable – and might vary between the regions (e. g. speed of development, degree of institutionalisation, topics addressed, etc.). One development path could be a 'supranationalisation' where macro-regional strategies are first steps of a rescaling process towards a supranational level where competences will be allocated to (Stead, 2011, Faludi, 2010, Metzger and Schmitt, 2012, Welz and Engel, 1993). A second, very likely, scenario is the continuation of macro-regions to 'intergovernmental super-regions' coming along with a further allocation of resources. In the coming years, the scope for assigning further competences to the macro-regional framework would not imply leaving the intergovernmental logic. A third development path would imply the continuation of the 'status quo' where macro-regions are established as a permanent cooperation and constitute an umbrella for other EU initiatives with the soft characteristics as the dominant ones.

(Figure 2. Territorialities and Temporalities of the Macro-regional Strategies)

## 5 Conclusions

If we compare both cases presented (Habitats Directive and Macro-regional Strategies), we see parallels and differences. The starting point in both cases was political dissatisfaction and different actors' ambitions to increase the political influence on a certain level and for certain policy priorities. In both cases soft spaces played an important strategic role. In the case of the Habitats directive, the phase of de-territorialisation, of spatial 'tabooing' was of key importance particularly in the first phase. Biogeographical regions were very soft in the beginning and are only detailed in the implementation phase after the formal competences shifted. This can be contrasted with the development of macro-regional processes where territorial arguments played a prominent role throughout the process that institutionally establishes regions with so called common geographical challenges. The soft character was of importance when building a governance structure and deciding upon the priority areas and goals. In both cases, though having a different emphasis on territorialisation processes, reterritorialisation turns out to be very efficient throughout the policy process, based on 'soft spaces'. The biogeographical regions and in particular the 'functionally coercive' annexes of the Habitats directive turn out to influence spatial development in Europe in a very efficient way. The macro-regional development within in Europe already has changed the perception of some regions and influences e.g. the allocation of the INTERREG budgets' organisation post 2013.

As soon as the strategy is efficient, new perimeters, new agendas and new actor constellations occur. In parallel, soft spaces can 'harden' (MRS as Interreg perimeter) and/or they lose their political relevance (biogeographical spaces today as only technical reference).

In the case of nature conservation policy, the strategy has turned out to be efficient; in the case of the macroregional strategy, the 'success' is not yet finally to be seen, but there are clear signs that macroregional strategies are unlikely to vanish from the political agenda again.

The two explorative case studies here indicate that soft spaces can be very efficient instruments with regard to power plays and ambitions for competence transfer in the context of European integration. In that sense, our examples highlight the complex, evolving and contested nature of reterritorialisation of European space and how such new spaces can unsettle, challenge and disrupt existing, national territorial spaces.

Summarizing the two presented case studies we can identify three perspectives that are crucial for the understanding of soft spaces in the context of European integration: the new spaces of European territoriality are characterised by, first, *temporal dynamics*, second, the *parallel existence* with 'hard' spaces, and, finally, they can be employed as a *political tool*: Firstly, soft spaces are very much characterized by *temporalities* due to the dynamic political development. As we saw at the example of the Macro regions, at a certain point of the political process the softness of the early years can harden, but this hardening can turn into softening again. It is important to note that there is no automatic logic of hardening and no one way dynamic: soft spaces are object to political negotiations with an open end – they are part of contemporary reterritorialisation processes.

Secondly, we see a persisting *parallelism* of 'hard' and 'soft' spaces also in the context of European integration. The example of the macro-regions demonstrates that an intense debate on soft spaces does not necessarily modify or weaken the hard spaces of domestic planning. The territorial and relational features of such new spaces can coexist and develop

dynamically. This is particularly true for phases of 'opening up' when the relational features get more prominent. As we see it in the case of the biogeographical regions – there is a process of 'closing down' when soft spaces undergo a process of hardening.

Finally, soft spaces are not only an outcome of political processes but they can also be employed as a political *tool*, be it intentionally or not. They can be an efficient element in political bargaining of political competences and power.

This paper has presented a heuristic on the basis of ex-post case study analyses. Obviously, further empirical testing has to be the next step, taking an in-vivo-perspective in contemporary processes of reterritorialisation. We feel that a focus upon the significance and import of existing and emerging new spaces of planning would be fruitful, highlighting how European reterritorialisation is impacting upon the outcomes, or not, of national and sub-national competences and spatial planning. Such processes may help explain some of the role of new spaces in national political displacement and disruption.

## References

- Allmendinger P, Haughton G, 2007, "The fluid scales and scope of UK spatial planning" *Environment and Planning A* **39**(6) 1478-1496
- Allmendinger P, Haughton G, 2009, "Soft spaces, fuzzy boundaries and metagovernance: The new spatial planning in the Thames Gateway" *Environment and Planning A* **41** (3) 617-633
- Allmendinger P, Haughton G, 2010, "Spatial planning, devolution, and new planning spaces" *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* **28** 803-818
- Alphandéry P, Fortier A, 2001, "Can a territorial policy be based on science alone? The system for creating the natura 2000 network in France" *Sociologia Ruralis* **41**(3) 311–328
- Amin A, 2004, "Regions unbound. Towards a new politics of place" *Geografiska Annaler B* **86** (1) 33-44
- Anderson B, McFarlane C, 2011, "Assemblage and geography" *Area* **43**(2) 124-127



Antola E, 2009, "EU Baltic Sea Strategy. Report for the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation London Office", London

Bialasiewicz L, Elden S, Painter J, 2005, "The constitution of EU Territory" *Comparative European Politics* **3** 333-363

Bialasiewicz L, Giaccaria P, Jones A, Minca C, 2013, "Re-scaling `EU`rope: EU macro-regional fantasies in the Mediterranean" *European Urban and Regional Studies* **20**(1) 59-76

Böhme K, Waterhout B, 2008, "The Europeanisation of Planning", in *European Spatial Research and Planning* Ed A Faludi (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Cambridge, MA) pp 225-248

Brenner N, Madden D, Wachsmuth D, 2011, "Assemblage urbanism and the challenges of critical urban theory," *CITY* **15** (2) 225-240

Chilla T, 2005, "The Implementation of the EU Habitats Directive in the German Laender - The challenge to enforce ecological aims and the risk of top-down-procedures", in *Sustainable Regions: Making Regions Work. Conference Proceedings of the Regional Studies Association Annual Conference*. Eds S. Hardy, L. B. Larsen F. Freeland, pp 104-105

Chilla T, 2012, "Germany in the European Union: The Perspectives for Territorial Cohesion" *Geographische Rundschau* **64** / IGC Edition 54-59

Chilla T, Evrard E, Schulz C, 2012, "On the Territoriality of Cross-Border Cooperation: 'Institutional Mapping' in a Multi-Level Context" *European Planning Studies* **20**(6) 961-980

Clark J R A, Jones A R, 2009, "Europeanisation and its discontents" *Space and Polity* **13**(3) 193-212

Cochrane A, 2012, "Making up a region: the rise and fall of the 'South East of England' as a political territory" *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* **30** 95-108

COM, 2009, "Sixth progress report on economic and social cohesion", Commission of the European Communities, Brussels  
[http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/interim6/com\\_2009\\_295\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/interim6/com_2009_295_en.pdf)

Counsell D, Haughton G, Allmendinger P, 2012, "Growth Management in Cork through Boom, Bubble and Bust" *European Planning Studies* DOI: 10.1080/09654313.2012.722975 1-18

Dammers E, Evers D, 2008, "Beyond heuristics: applying scenarios to European territorial development" *TESG* **99**(5) 629-635

Davoudi S, Strange I, 2009, "Space and Place in Twentieth Century Planning: an Analytical Framework and Historical Review", in *Conceptions of Space and Place in Strategic Spatial Planning* Eds S Davoudi, I Strange (Routledge, London) pp 7-42

Deas, I, Lord A, 2006, "From a new regionalism to an unusual regionalism? The emergence of non-standard regional spaces and lessons for the territorial reorganisation of the state" *Urban Studies* **43**(10) 1847–1877

Dubois A, Hedin S, Schmitt S, Sterlin J, 2009, "EU macro-regions and macro-regional strategies – A scoping study", Nordregio Electronic Working Paper 4, Nordregio Stockholm

Dühr S, 2011, "Baltic Sea, Danube and macro-regional strategies: a model for transnational cooperation in the EU?" *Notre Europe Studies & Research* **86**

Dühr S, Colomb C, Nadin V, 2010, *European Spatial Planning and Territorial Cooperation* (Routledge, London/New York)

Dühr S, 2009, "Visualising spatial policy in Europe" in *Planning Cultures in Europe. Decoding Cultural Phenomena in Urban and Regional Planning*. Eds Knieling J, Othengrafen F, (Aldershot: Ashgate) p. 113-136

EEA, 2013 Website: last accessed 5 June, 2013  
[http://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/figures/biogeographical-regions-europe-2001/biogeo\\_graphic.eps/image\\_original](http://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/figures/biogeographical-regions-europe-2001/biogeo_graphic.eps/image_original)

Eser T, Schmeitz P, 2008 "The making of the territorial agenda of the European Union: policy, polity, and politics", in *European Spatial Research and Planning* Ed A Faludi (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Cambridge, MA) pp 249 - 270

Faludi A, 2003, "Intersectoral relations and European spatial planning: The case of the European Spatial Development Perspective", in *European Regional Planning: Sustainable Spatial Development: Strengthening Intersectoral Relations*, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg **69** pp 53-57.

Faludi A, 2009, "A turning point in the development of European spatial planning? The 'Territorial Agenda of the European Union' and the 'First Action Programme'" *Progress in Planning* **71** 1-42

Faludi A, 2010a, *Cohesion, Coherence, Cooperation: European Spatial Planning Coming of Age?* (Routledge, London)

Faludi A, 2010b, "Beyond Lisbon: Soft European Spatial Planning" *DISP* **182**(3) 14-24

Faludi A, 2010c, "Territorial Cohesion Post-2013: To whomsoever it may concern." Paper presented at the 24<sup>th</sup> AESOP Annual Conference, Finland

Feindt P, 2003, „Metropolregion Hamburg – Anmerkungen zu einer politischen Konstruktion von Raum“, in *Stadt – Raum – Natur. Die Metropole als politisch konstruierter Raum* Eds M Döring, G Engelhard, P H Feindt, J Oßenbrügge (Hamburg University Press, Hamburg) pp 38-50

- Gibbs D, While A, Jonas A E G, 2007, "Governing nature conservation: the European Union Habitats Directive and conflict around estuary management" *Environment and Planning A* **39**(2) 339-358
- Goodwin M A, 2012, "Regions, Territories and Relationality: Exploring the Regional Dimensions of Political Practice" *Regional Studies* DOI: 10.1080/00343404.2012.697138
- Graham S, Healey P, 1999, "Relational concepts of space and place: Issues for planning theory and practice" *European Planning Studies* **7**(5) 623-646
- Gualini E, 2006, "The rescaling of governance in Europe: New spatial and institutional rationales" *European Planning Studies* **14**(7) 881-904
- Haughton G, Allmendinger P, 2010, "Spatial Planning, Devolution and New Planning Spaces" *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* **28**(5) 803-818
- Haughton G, Allmendinger P, Oosterlynck S, 2012, "Spaces of neoliberal experimentation: soft spaces, post-politics and neoliberal governmentality" *Environment and Planning A* (forthcoming)
- Healey P, 2006, *Urban Complexity and Spatial Strategies: Towards a Relational Planning for Our Times* (Routledge, London)
- Heley J, 2012, "Soft Spaces, Fuzzy Boundaries and Spatial Governance in Post-devolution Wales" *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* DOI:10.1111/j.1468-2427.2012.01149.x
- Jerneck M, 2000, "Europeanization, Territoriality and Political Time" *Yearbook of European Studies* **14** 27-49
- Knieling J, 2011, "Metropolitan Networking in the Western Baltic Sea Region: Metropolitan Region Hamburg between Multilevel Governance and Soft Spatial Development", in *The Role of Regions? Networks, Scale, Territory*. Eds T Herrschel, P Tallberg (Kristianstads Boktryckeri, Stockholm) pp 195-214
- Luukkonen, J, 2014, "Planning in Europe for 'EU' rope: Spatial planning as a political technology of territory", *Planning Theory* doi 10.1177/1473095213519355
- Mammadouh V, 2001, "The territoriality of European integration and the territorial features of the European Union: the first fifty years", *TESG* **92**(4) 420-436
- Massey D, 2005, *For space* (SAGE, London)
- Metzger J, Schmitt P, 2012, "When soft spaces harden: the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region" *Environment and Planning A* **44** 263-280
- Moisio S, 2011, "Geographies of Europeanization: The EU's spatial planning as a politics of scale", in *Europe in the World: EU geopolitics and the transformation of European space* Ed L Bialasiewicz (Asghate, Farnham)

Olesen K, 2011, *Strategic Spatial Planning in Transition - A Case Study of Denmark* unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Development and Planning, Aalborg University, pp. 145-162

Olesen K, 2012, "Soft spaces as vehicles for neoliberal transformations of strategic spatial planning?" *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* **30**(5) 910 – 923

Olesen K, Richardson T, 2011, "The Spatial Politics of Spatial Representation: Relationality as a Medium for Depoliticization?" *International Planning Studies* **16**(4) 355-375

Pallagst K, 2010, "The Emergence of New 'Epistemic Communities' in the New European Landscape: Some Theoretical Implications for the Spatial Agenda of the EU", in *Territorial Development, Cohesion and Spatial Planning* Eds N Adams, G Cotella, R Nunes (Routledge Publishers, Oxon) pp 123-142

Pullano T, 2009, "The Evolving Category of Territory: From the Modern state to the European Union", GARNET Working Paper No: 63/09, Economic and Social Research Council, Swindon

Radaelli C, 2003, "The Europeanization of public policy", in *The politics of Europeanization* Eds K Featherstone, C Radaeli (Oxford) pp 27-56

Samecki P, 2009, "Macro-regional strategies in the European Union. A Discussion Paper" Conference, Stockholm, 18 September

Schneidewind P, 2011, „Makroregionale Strategien: EU Kraftakt mit Phantasie“ *RAUM-Österreichische Zeitschrift für Raumplanung und Regionalpolitik* **82** 46-49

Schymik C, 2011, "Blueprint for a macro region. EU strategies for the Baltic sea and Danube regions", *SWP research paper* [www.swp-berlin.org/](http://www.swp-berlin.org/)

Scott J W, van Houtum H, 2009: Reflections on EU territoriality and the ‚bordering‘ of Europe. *Political Geography* **28** (5) 271-273

Sielker F, 2012, *Makroregionale Strategien der EU und Soft Spaces – Perspektiven an der Donau*, Fakultät Raumplanung, TU Dortmund  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2003/29755>

Stead D, 2011, "European Macro-Regional Strategies: Indications of Spatial Rescaling?" *Planning Theory & Practice* **12**(1) 163–167

Thierstein A, Egger U K, 1995, „Regionale Entwicklung und Innovationsfähigkeit. Neue Rollen für öffentliche und private Akteure“ *Aussenwirtschaft* **50**(2) 371-389

Thrift N, 2004, "Transurbanism" *Urban Geography* **25**(8) 724-734

Waterhout B, 2010, "Soft Spaces and Governance: The Transformation of Planning" *24th AESOP Annual Conference*, Helsinki, 7-10 July

Welz C, Engel C, 1993, "Traditionsbestände politikwissenschaftlicher Integrationstheorien: Die Europäische Gemeinschaft im Spannungsfeld von Integration und Kooperation", In: Bogdandy A v, (Ed.), „Die Europäische Option. Eine Interdisziplinäre Analyse über Herkunft, Stand und Perspektiven der europäischen Integration“ Baden-Baden, pp. 129-169.

Zonneveld W, 2012, "The long and winding road to EU territorial governance", in *European territorial governance* Eds W Zonneveld, J De Vries, L Janssen-Jansen (Delft University Press, Delft) pp 57-83

---

<sup>i</sup> We use the term spatial planning in a general sense to capture the variously labelled systems and practices of land use or development planning across Europe.