



Belgeo

Revue belge de géographie

4 | 2020

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/belgeo/43431>

DOI: 10.4000/belgeo.43431

ISSN: 2294-9135

Publisher:

National Committee of Geography of Belgium, Société Royale Belge de Géographie

Electronic reference

Nora Mareï and Yann Richard, « Editorial: Regional integration in the world », *Belgeo* [Online], 4 | 2020, Online since 09 November 2020, connection on 11 November 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/belgeo/43431> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/belgeo.43431>

This text was automatically generated on 11 November 2020.



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Editorial: Regional integration in the world

Nora Mareï and Yann Richard

- 1 Research on the organization of global space and globalization is largely structured by studies on networks, long-distance trading, transnational practices and global cities. But academic approaches to globalized space pay relatively little attention to large global regions, understood as aggregates of neighboring countries linked by strong interactions. Politicists study regional agreements; economists discuss the commercial limitations and benefits of such agreements – in terms of creation, destruction or avoidance; and some geographers and sociologists specialize in the study of a particular region or regional area. In these studies, the macro-region is rarely regarded as a key pattern for the organization of space at an international level. Many authors consider the hypothesis of a generalized return to localism within large regional groupings as unlikely. However, a number of global disturbances have led some observers to predict a return to more local social practices and the revival of the intermediate scale in the governance of territorial issues. In this context, can the regionalization of the world be regarded, today as tomorrow, as a key model for the governance and organization of the world space? This topic can be analyzed starting from two main hypotheses. First of all, the contemporary world space could be better understood through the dialectic between globalization and macro-regionalization. Secondly, the tensions and crises affecting a number of macro-regions should not be interpreted as proof of their failure in the short term, but on the contrary as evidence of a slow and difficult move towards a wider and more appropriate territorial form than the nation-state to tackle today's major challenges.
- 2 The wealth of recent news stories regarding macro-regional integration – or disintegration – around the world makes this theme an undeniable scientific and societal issue. In this particular context, a conference organized in Paris in 2019 confirmed the keen interest of geographers in this subject, in the context of a dialogue, or even a confrontation, with other disciplines (economics, political science, law, history and sociology). This conversation highlighted the need for geographers to

further explore and clarify their concepts as well as their theoretical and methodological approaches to macro-regional integration. This work could indeed enable geographers to gain visibility in this field of research, which has been largely dominated since the 1950s by economists and politicians who delivered a very advanced theory of the macro-regional phenomenon. In contrast, geographers often approach macro-regional integration according to the principles of traditional regional geography, through case studies that are difficult to generalize. Their hesitations are partly due to the multiple forms and spatial scales of integration: cross-border or transnational regions, multi-state macro-regions, duplicate cities and cross-border metropolises, regional seas, large marine ecosystems, marine ecoregions, common development areas or growth triangles, transnational corridors, etc. Despite the plethora of definitions and approaches addressing the words and facts of regionalization, the conference showed that geographers' expertise on the notion of region – traditionally circumscribed to the sub-state level – can in fact be transposed to larger ensembles. This special issue is a follow-up to this conference and to the publication of the *Dictionnaire de la régionalisation du monde* ("Dictionary of Global Regionalization", 2019). It features mostly contributions by geographers, highlighting this field's contribution to the regional question. But it also includes two articles written by an economist and a politician, thus continuing the interdisciplinary dialogue initiated during the conference "A World of regions?"

- 3 This issue opens with a programmatic article. Nora Mareï and Yann Richard clarify fundamental notions such as regional integration, regionalization and regionalism, opening up a methodological perspective to better measure integration at this scale. The next two articles stress that globalization and macro-regional integration are not mutually exclusive, on the contrary. According to Natalia Zdanowska, the restructuring of urban networks and the rearrangement of transnational firm networks in Central and Eastern Europe are excellent indicators of the spatial dynamics created by European integration in the post-Cold War period, in the context of globalization and EU enlargement. Nora Mareï and Steffen Wippel study the city of Tangier, which the Moroccan government wants to establish as an international metropolis. They show that this secondary city is being transformed by three concomitant processes: metropolization, globalization and regionalization. The latter process has the effect of inserting Tangier into economic networks reaching out across West Africa.
- 4 The following three articles examine macro-regional integration by focusing on three themes. Antoine Beyer presents the implications of the construction of a European airspace. He shows how European integration is changing the institutional system in charge of managing airspace, and how the EU's growing power is shaking up certain legacies, with the objective of building a common space of shared sovereignty. Emmanuel Chauvin and Géraud Magrin study the role of political violence in spatial dynamics through the regionalization but also the de-regionalization of Central Africa. The authors examine the regional conflict complex formed, among others, by the jihadist insurrection of Boko Haram and the civil war in the Central African Republic. Lucile Medina and Mohamadou Mountaga Diallo follow a comparative approach in their study of the place and function of cross-border cooperation in macro-regional integration in Central America and West Africa.
- 5 Audrey Sérandour, Camille Escudé-Joffres and Jacques Guillaume study ongoing experiments in regional construction from the perspective of political geography.

Audrey Sérandour describes the possible emergence of an integrated system in a vast cross-border space that stretches across the territories of Argentina, Bolivia and Chile: the lithium triangle. Rather than integration, she prefers to use the terms “unfinished regionalism” and “bottom-up regionalization”. Camille Escudé-Joffres examines “top down” political cooperation established by institutional bodies in the Arctic since the end of the Cold War. Her central hypothesis is the following: the actors’ strategies form an “interwoven multi-level governance”, creating what the author calls a “region by intersection” with blurred and contested boundaries. As for Jacques Guillaume, he looks at the foundations of Scandinavian unity. Partly challenging the idea that Scandinavian (or Baltic) Europe is a highly integrated region in the process of being reconstructed since the end of the Cold War, he highlights the limits of this unity. Guillaume shows that the so-called “Scandinavian world” is perhaps not a region because it is torn by resistances against its own integration, and by centrifugal dynamics caused by the strong external polarizations that stem from European integration.

- 6 Finally, several authors propose to study macro-regional realities from resolutely critical or even deconstructive perspectives, tackling concepts, methods and discourses. Assen Slim and Mark Bailoni look at the theme of regional disintegration. The former investigates how Catalonia’s desire for independence, the fragility of the euro zone, and the lack of solidarity among EU members in the migration crisis point to a possible “disintegration” of the European Union. He presents an economic theory of “regional disintegration” based on the “exact inversion” method, which poses significant theoretical, methodological and practical problems. Adopting a critical geopolitical approach, the latter presents the hypothesis that Brexit inaugurates a new stage in the regionalization of Europe and even that of the world. According to Mark Bailoni, the scale of reference for the British integration strategy is changing: the scale of the European Community is being replaced by the Commonwealth, whose relationship to the notion of regionalization is studied. Conversely, through the example of Turkey, Etienne Toureille explores the idea that nothing in official texts objectively and indisputably defines what a European state is. He suggests a reversal of perspectives: rather than looking for a definition of the European macro-region through *ad hoc* analyses, he proposes a critical study of the discourses produced by EU bodies to propose possible regionalizations. Finally, Florence Mury is interested in the viewpoint and discourse of Westerners on the Oceanian world as a cultural macro-regional reality. Is Oceania a space whose form has been imposed and whose cultural unity has been conceptualized from the outside, in the West? Is it, on the contrary, an indigenous and autonomous geographical object?
- 7 This special issue ends with a political science contribution in which Mario Telo presents the theme of regionalism. The author starts by noting that regionalism (in this case, the construction of regional organizations) has been a structural feature of global governance for many decades. However, Telo questions how multilateral regional cooperation can be sustained in today’s multipolar world, which is increasingly fragmented and agitated by power politics. This article paves the way for a dialogue with geography and other disciplines to study the dynamics of international relations.

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