

abstract Region is a polysemous concept, partially defined by several disciplines: sociology, international relations, geography, economy, law or politics. Even within the realm of an own discipline, the concept can be analysed in different ways: at supra- or sub-state level, but also from bottom-up (regionalism) or top-down (regionalization) perspectives.

keywords European integration ♦ new regionalism ♦ regionalization ♦ regions ♦ sub-state level

Overview of theoretical approaches

This article examines an elusive concept with a multiplicity of meanings; one that has been thoroughly analysed within different contexts and a range of social science disciplines (Beaufays, 1985; Domínguez, 2005; Keating, 1998a).

The etymological origin of 'region' stems from the Latin term *regio*, which in turn comes from the term *rex* and the verb *regere*, which originally meant 'line, a direction in a straight line' (Domínguez, 2005: 25). The term evolved to mean territorial space associated with some kind of power, or larger entity (Bolgherini, 2003: 25). However, it soon came to be influenced by different factors: ethnicity, linguistics, history, culture, economy and politics (Castro Ruano, 1994; Petschen, 2003), to name but a few. Indeed, the concept of region is semantically polysemous and has multiple significations, from the anatomical to the geographical (Tuñón, 2009: 4).

Although a multiplicity of meanings has been attached to the concept, it denotes a spatial dimension, which might also be territorial, political, of social interaction, economic, or even functional. As Keating (1998b: 11) states, 'a region is the result of the meeting of various concepts of space. It is also an institutional system, either in the form of a regional government or as a group of institutions operating on a territory.' Indeed, while undoubtedly a territorial

demarcation, 'within, there is scope for a variety of functional processes' (Keating, 1997: 383).

As already stated, 'region' can take on different meanings, but can also be approached from many different perspectives. Indeed, it is (currently) a well-known and documented phenomenon within a wide variety of dimensions. Sociopolitically, region is understood as an administrative unit within a nation-state,¹ or even as an area composed of several nation-states which share common characteristics. According to the economic dimension, region is demarcated by common characteristics and development possibilities (Tuñón, 2009: 4). The cultural dimension refers to a community that shares uses and traditions, but also enjoys its own language and literature (Bolgherini, 2003: 24–5). While region from a geographic perspective would refer to a demarcation limited by natural, climatic or ecological borders (Anderson, 1994).

Caciagli (2006: 17–18) avoids categories, dimensions or disciplines, but deals instead with denotations. On the one hand, there is the institutional, which attaches the term to the major political-administrative units within a state. On the other hand, there is the historical-cultural for those regions not recognized within the current political-administrative delimitations (referring to those territories that contain communities with their own distinctive identities

– vis-a-vis the state – for cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious or political reasons).

It has been shown above that the regional phenomenon can be defined according to many different criteria. Moreover, within these different benchmarks, several different approaches can also be distinguished. For example, geographic criteria could be defined as physical space, but also according to climatic, topographic, ecological or other fixed characteristics. Moreover, an economic definition of a region might focus on the labour market differences, but also on common production patterns, interdependencies and market linkages, for instance. Furthermore, regions can be also defined by cultural criteria: according to language, traditions or even the sense of identification exhibited by citizens and political actors, to name but a few. But, regions can be also defined as institutional divisions, historically constituted or recently created for the convenience of state administrators or even built by political action on the ground (Keating, 1998a: 9–10).

The problem arises that all these varying categories, denotations, approaches and/or definitions of the concept of region do not always coincide; they may, in fact, also conflict with one another. Moreover, they do not evoke completely different meanings or significations, but they, continuously and in different ways, overlap with one another. Taking into account that each and every perspective (from the urban landscape, to the style of cuisine) could establish its own specific categories or classifications, in this article I methodologically bring together the main social scientific contributions (to date) from four different but obviously overlapping social disciplines (approaches, dimensions or perspectives). Thus, I distinguish the main theoretical research on the regional phenomenon according to: (1) international relations theories; (2) geography and urban sociology studies; (3) the fields of economics and economic sociology; and (4) the disciplines of politics and political sociology. Only by appreciating the conjunction of these different logics within a selected territory, will it be possible to understand the regional phenomenon, and indeed its importance.²

International relations theories

Although this discipline also deals with regions, it is further extended by the term ‘regionalism’, which is one of the main dimensions of the concept of region. Within international relations theory, the latter part of the last century saw a resurgence of regional dynamics. The end of the Cold War created an environment conducive to an increase in regional patterns of interaction. Thus, regionalism, currently revisited as ‘New Regionalism’, has again become a

major characteristic of the international system (Calleya, 2000). Within the current (scientific) context, although globalization has been highlighted as an obvious alternative, the reality of the contemporary world seems to be better expressed in terms of regionalism. Since the end of the Second World War, there has been a proliferation of supra-state organizations entrusted with normative roles. Thus, during the last four decades, new paradigms have emerged to account for the increasing restraints on the freedom of action of states (Joffé, 2007).

From an integrative and cooperative perspective, the regional ‘alternative model of development implies regional restructuring based in symmetrical and solidarity-oriented patterns of development which could consist of both intergovernmental and transnational patterns of relations’ (Calleya, 2000: 234). Currently, the major and most developed example of this model would be the European Union model. However, this integrative experience has also been, at least partially, reproduced all over the world: Mercosul-Mercosur, the North America Free Trade Area (NAFTA), the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), for example; even in Africa there has been some sort of experience of regionalism (Eliassen and Arnessen, 2007; Farah et al., 2010; Sbragia, 2007; Söderbaum, 2007; Vasconcelos, 2007).

The regional issue involves explaining the flourishing of regional organizations through endogenous and exogenous factors, and studying their current and potential impact upon global governance (Telo, 2007: 1). Thus, its novelty resides in its potential to act as an alternative to hegemonic stability, within a globalized context, in which the region becomes the nexus of activity, both at state and supra-state level. Therefore, providing a degree of theoretical order to the current international society, regionalism ‘may become the preferred response in a post-modern world through which the threats and benefits of globalization are mediated’ (Joffé, 2007: xiv).

Moreover, other approaches deal with regional macro-aggregates or regional integration in the globalized world. Through the world-systems theory, Wallerstein (1974, 2000) attempts to explain why modernization had such wide-ranging and different effects on the world. To do so, he divides the world into different macro-regions: the core, the semi-periphery, the periphery and the external areas. Linking international relations and global economy, Ohmae (1995, 2005) points out that the ongoing integration of the global economy will lead to an inevitable undermining of the nation-state in favour of the region. He argues that regions are more in line with today’s transnational world because they are already economically sizeable players, but also

because they are less fixated than nation-states on borders and population. Within the so-called global neoliberal amphitheatre, Dicken (1994) also states that cities and regions are increasingly becoming part of the manoeuvres of the globally mobile transnational corporation.

Indeed, according to Paasi (2009), a number of scholars argue today that a rescaling of the spatialities of state is taking place; these include both international markets and regional political responses to global capitalism which generate regionalism and accentuate the significance of regions, even if their institutional arrangements (EU, NAFTA or APEC, among others) vary. Therefore, regions constitute the political results of globalizing economic competition, while regionalism, might be (in this context) a mirror image of globalization.

Geography and urban sociology studies

Urban sociologists and geographers have also taken a new interest in regions. 'Whereas in the past, these [regions] tended to be seen as given or stable entities, bounded by natural features, conditioned by patterns of economic production, or home to perennial cultural or identity groups, nowadays they are seen as essentially constructed and open to challenge' (Keating, 2004a: xii). Although many geographers have been tempted by overlapping economic approaches, Paasi (1996, 2002) analyses the main typologies of the regional concept from a genuinely geographic perspective. He argues that regions are open spaces, linked to other social systems and constantly subject to change and adaptation (Paasi, 2002). Furthermore, Paasi (1996) points to those critical approaches where the region is variously understood as: (1) an integral feature of capital accumulation; (2) collective interpretations in identity formation; or (3) a setting for social interaction and practice. Therefore, Paasi (1991, 2009, 2013) argues that regions are social processes whose inherent motives and power relations might be based on economy, politics, culture or administration.

At a general level, regional geographers' work (see, inter alia, Allen et al., 1998; Paasi, 1996, 2002) also highlights the political and cultural construction of region-specific interdependencies, the spatialization of justice or even institutional thicknesses (MacLeod and Jones, 2001). As MacLeod (2001) states, most of the New Regionalists 'offer little sense of the interpretative structures of feeling and envisioning practices that endow particular industrial spaces or learning regional economies with a geographical imaginary or a community of political-cultural interests'. Therefore, the constructivist geographical perspective might highlight a wider framework of cultural, economic and political

processes out of which local and regional entities are constituted and governed (Brenner, 2001). As pointed out above, geographers' temptation to pursue overlapping (with other disciplines) approaches has been very important.

With regard to urban sociology (which nevertheless cannot be treated in isolation from the economic approach), we can bring two different groups of scholars into the discussion: first, those pointing to the productive models in specific areas or regions; and second, those highlighting the development of postmodern, postindustrial global cities or metropolitan regions and macro-urban agglomeration in the globalization era. Among the first group should be mentioned those contributions (Bagnasco and Triglia, 1993; Crouch et al., 2001; Storper, 1997; Triglia, 1991) which show how local societies provide the conditions for successful development. Focusing on the local layer, Le Galès (2002) also argues that cities in Europe notably dominate the small and medium urban settlements, often with deep historical roots, in contrast to their inevitable rise and fall in America. Among the second group, Castells (1989, 1996) argues that regional economies and urban metropolises have surged forward to lead in the wealth creation; Harvey (1989) mentions an entrepreneurial mode of governance whose interventions are largely at the expense of local collective consumption; while Sassen (2000a, 2000b, 2001) analyses the impact of globalization and European integration in the concept of the global city.

Economics and economic sociology

As Keating (maybe the most prolific author on the regional issue) stated in 2004, some of the most challenging work on regionalism comes from the discipline of economics, at times overlapping with the urban sociology and geographic approaches (Keating, 2004a). Although inspired by economic sociology, the latest contributions to the field place more emphasis on the social conditions which enable regions to provide collective public goods, allowing small firms to gain the economies of scale traditionally only associated with large companies. Thus, 'this is a strong challenge to the modernist notion that territory will give way to function, since it portrays functional systems as territorially embedded and inseparable from their context' (Keating, 2004a: xiii). Some examples of this kind of economic approach are in order: Ohmae (1993), from a neoliberal but also regional mercantilism analytical stance, shows regions in competition to gain advantages within a declining nation-states world; Scott (1996) points out the links between globalization and the emergence of regional economies; while Storper (1995, 1997) focuses upon

the rise of regional production systems, without getting rid of the state altogether.

However, other economic approaches to regions in general and the regionalism issue in particular are not that enthralled by the aforementioned neoliberalist approaches. Hudson (1999) or Gertler (1997) noted the limitations of regionalism, while Amin (1999) further develops the argument about how the neoliberalist approaches left no room for social and welfare issues at the regional level, and also focuses on the importance of national states as a framework for the New Regionalism. However, it was Lovering (1999) who gave the 'deepest' (MacLeod, 2001: 813) critique, or 'blistering attack' (Keating, 2004a: xiii), of those neoliberal economic approaches to the regional issue. He argues that they offer a lack of any real analysis, are mere propaganda, but also an excuse for governments to renege on their responsibilities. Indeed, he accuses the New Regionalism of being 'a poor framework through which to grasp the real connections between the regionalisation of business and governance and the changing role of the state' (Lovering, 1999: 391).

Politics and political sociology

The disciplines of politics and political sociology have contributed the greatest breadth of research so far to the regional issue, approaching it from an inclusive perspective. Thus, they have, at some point or other, overlapped with some of the other disciplines' attempts to analyse the regional issue. These perspectives have been widespread in Europe among the theorists of the rise of the nation-state, the so-called diffusionists, but also in the early accounts of European integration researchers, during the last decades of the 20th century. In this context, reference should be made to Stein Rokkan (1980), who (since the 1960s, and among others) has explored the way in which European states were built and the persistence of earlier, territorial cleavages into modern times (Keating, 2004a: xii). The Rokkanian school made a huge advance in plotting territorial lines in European states to generate a conceptual map of the continent as a whole. Moreover, Rokkan and Urwin (1983) also produced a typology of territorial state forms to replace the conventional unitary-federal dichotomy (Keating, 2008: 65).

In the 1990s the revival of regional studies was seen among a wide range of disciplines promoting the New Regionalism (Keating, 1998a; see also, inter alia, Caciagli, 2006). As Keating (2008: 69) states, the broad context of New Regionalism was 'the transformation of the state and government, the loss of some capacities and the search for others, and the demystification of the state with the end of the Cold War and the more sophisticated understanding of its

historical contingency'. A large literature grew up around New Regionalism: on the end of the territory (Badie, 1995); the borderless world and the network society (Castells, 1997); stateless nations and national minorities using the New Regionalism themes to claim functional autonomy without necessarily demanding independence (Keating, 2004b); or comparative works about regionalism and political parties emphasizing territorial representation, decentralization and party competition (inter alia, De Winter, 1994; De Winter and Tursan, 1998; De Winter et al., 2006; Hough and Jeffery, 2006).

However, the most prolific research on New Regionalism deals with the external context, both globalization and European integration. Most of the studies go in depth into the paradigm of the competitive region, an idea which risks reifying the territory unless a systematic analysis of its social and political composition can be engaged. As in the context of international relations, several studies (inter alia, Keating, 1998a; Keating and Jones, 1985; Petschen, 1993, 2003) argue 'whether European integration represents an accentuation of globalisation; whether it serves to modify its impact; or indeed whether it is a bit of both' (Keating, 2008: 71). Indeed, European integration has brought about profound changes to the regional issue, because it so often questions the monopoly of the nation-state as the main actor within economic, political and social processes, but also offers new forms of autonomy. Particularly, one might highlight those studies on national devolution processes and the disparities and consequences due to their interaction with European regional policies (Hooghe, 1996); or those on regional mobilization vis-a-vis the EU institutions to become part of the European decision-making process, and the relative success of some of them in doing so (inter alia, Bolgherini, 2003; Börzel, 2002; Dandoy and Massart-Piérard, 2005; Hooghe, 1995; Hooghe and Marks, 1996; Jeffery, 2000; Swenden, 2006; Scully and Wyn Jones, 2010; Tuñón, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011b).

In spite of the many other commendable studies on the regional issue that have been conducted (dealing with the structural funds and regional issue interaction; cross-border cooperation [Rhi Sausi and Conato, 2008; Rhi Sausi and Oddone, 2010; Tuñón 2011a]; and even on the regionalist-nationalist linkages), we might finally highlight those that have stressed the importance of the regional government level, the meso-level or meso-government (inter alia, Keating, 1998b; Le Galès, 1998a, 1998b; Le Galès and Lequesne, 1998; Moreno, 1997, 2001, 2002, 2003; Sharpe, 1993). They explain the reasons for the emergence of this new level in its various forms, but also the specific and internal factors that

characterize it within the different nation-states.

Review of the empirical evidence

As stated earlier, the different approaches to the regional issue are merely different interpretations/perspectives about an empirical phenomenon. Even Paasi (2009) argues that regions on any scale, from local to continental, are today understood as social constructs that constitute simultaneously both products and constituents of social action and always reflect asymmetrical power relations. Indeed, the regional issue historically constitutes evidence of a decline, to an extent, in the influence of the Westphalian nation-state theories. However, it can also be pointed out that the roots of the regional issue are mainly European.³ Indeed, they take us back to the end of the 18th century. In fact, 'the history of regionalism in Europe begins with the French revolution' (Hueglin, 1986). Since then, the old ideas (that acknowledged the state as sole bearer of national interests and the distributor of public goods, whereas regions, with their specific interests, identities and needs, were disregarded as actors), have no longer been entirely appropriate.

Without delving into the different, multilayered approaches, more than two centuries of empirical evidence have enabled us to distinguish the two main, different sides of the regional issue. Indeed, it is through the combination of these two different, but complementary logics that the regional issue can be understood. In order to deal with the problem, we need to recall the historical development of the regional issue ideas, linked to the process of nation-state. Thus, we may distinguish the bottom-up logic, on the one hand, and the top-down logic, on the other hand. The first logic goes in the direction of the regional or sub-state level towards the state; while the second logic goes, on the contrary, from the state towards the regional level. While the regionalization or top-down logic has frequently been the subject of scholarly analysis since the 1970s; the other, that of regionalism, has only been studied in any depth since the advent of its recent revival in the form of New Regionalism.

Indeed, just like the primary concept (region), regionalism implies a complex variety of phenomena (Keating, 1998a). As Caciagli (2006: 12) broadly defines it: 'regionalism is the process, first cultural and after, but not always, political, produced by a community endowed with a strong feeling of territorial membership'. This definition highlights too some of the dimensions of the primary concept, such as common territory, language, ethnic group, history or ideology, which also build a common identity.

As Keating (1998b: 573) states, New Regionalism is a reconstructed phenomenon born during the late 1960s and the early 1970s. However, this 'new' term implies a revival of old and known phenomena. Indeed, it is common for the contemporary European regionalisms to defend, with or without historical justification, the ancient roots (Tuñón, 2009: 8–9). However, some forms of regionalism truly bring us back to the Ancien Régime, when the defence of language and minority ethnic groups was even understood as a sign of weakness. More recently (after the First World War, but before fascism's arrival in Europe), many regional demands emerged, in Ireland, Wales, Scotland, Brittany, Corsica, Roussillon, Flanders, Catalonia and the Basque Country, among others (Caciagli, 2006: 159–62 Scully and Wyn Jones, 2010).

However, regionalism was thrown into crisis after the Second World War, and the aforementioned New Regionalism revival has only emerged since the 1960s/1970s. Although, this new phase was vigorously political (even to the point of violence in some cases, such as in the South Tyrol, Corsica or the Basque Country), its main motivating factor was economic. Indeed, at the very beginning, the New Regionalism claims came from the peripheral regions, which felt marginalized and exploited by their political centres. In spite of the large number of different regional demands since New Regionalism's revival (mainly in Central and Western Europe), the methodological typologies are not very precise. Without taking into account those general classifications that distinguish economic, ethno-linguistic or just linguistic based regionalisms, the most in-depth classification has been presented by Keating (1998b), who distinguishes up to six different regionalisms.⁴

Following the work of Charles Ricq (1986: 41), the region's key elements are the territorial space and the inhabitant group. Thus, while regionalism refers to the community organization, regionalization focuses on the spatial organization. Indeed, both of them constitute the two sides of the root or original concept: the region. Thus, while regionalism is ascending (bottom-up), regionalization is descending (top-down). Regionalism implies a mobilization from the region and towards the state, whereas, within regionalization, the state initiates a devolution process mobilizing the region to bring government closer to the citizenship. Therefore, I also follow here the distinction made by Petschen (1993). On the one hand, he states that regionalism refers to the group dynamics of the citizens within a territory, to gain greater competencies because of anthropological, historical, cultural or social factors. Thus, regionalism demands the political decision-making power to satisfy the territories' management of home

affairs, and their desires in terms of their identity also. On the other hand, he also points out that regionalization implies a territorial planning based on already existing state powers. Thus, its main characteristics are economic and administrative, and it comes from the central power base that devolves power quotas for a more efficient and re-distributive management.

Although both regionalism and regionalization have been complementary, within the European framework the driving force has been regionalism (Scully and Wyn Jones, 2010: 5–6). In fact, regionalism has promoted a progressive regionalization, settling territorial divisions with the regional political institutions and competencies according to the will of the citizenship. However, the regionalization side of the coin is no less important. Indeed, within the regionalization context, many factors have made the regional level more suitable than the state or the supra-national organizational level, due to its proximity to the citizenship.⁵ The advantages at the regional level include factors such as size, the kind of services offered and representation of the population. Moreover, there is a wide range of specific advantages that favour regionalization processes: the accessibility of the regional and local governments to the citizenship and its needs; a more efficient use of public resources; and a greater respect for and identification with groups and cultures (Farah et al., 2010; Moreno, 2012; Petschen and Tuñón, 2009; Tuñón, 2009: 10).

In fact, even confining ourselves exclusively to the sub-state level, there are (at least) three different levels of 'regions' identifiable at European level: statistical, administrative and affective (Scully and Wyn Jones, 2010: 6–7). Indeed, there are three different layers of regions (NUTS) as the basis for the presentation of the European statistical data and decisive (NUTS 2) in the framework of the Cohesion Policy. However, there are many cases (mainly within larger states) in which the boundaries of NUTS regions do not match with the boundaries of any existing unit of administrative authority. Moreover, the relationship between statistical regions and administrative regions is therefore a weak one. Neither is there any simple or straightforward relationship between the borders of statistical and administrative regions, on the one hand, and 'regional consciousness and identity on the other' (Scully and Wyn Jones, 2010: 7).

Assessment of research to date

To date, the research on the regional issue has often doubted the necessity or even the possibility of deter-

mining with any precision a single, universal concept of region – whether 'region' might constitute a general concept valid for every situation and approach, or whether it is only a specific concept, useful only according to the defining parameters. To date, the majority of approaches, within the different social disciplines, have formulated casuistic and partial definitions.⁶ As soon as it was verified that a universal (region) concept was no longer possible, the different social disciplines began to theorize on the academic utility of different specific and partial concept definitions. Indeed, the concept has been categorized but not generalized.

There are four main challenges to the formulation of a universal concept: (1) the existence of other terms in different social disciplines and in different languages to define a similar idea; (2) the plurality of criteria to delimit the content of the concept even within the same social discipline, due to the different sub-disciplinary definitions; (3) the analysis of the term at different levels, sub-state (the approaches of urban studies and politics, among others) but also supra-state (as in international relations or economic approaches); (4) the multiplicity of sub-levels even within the one given concept level (even at sub-state level there are many different categories of regions) (Domínguez, 2005).

This plurality of hypothetical criteria and approaches to defining it has made the term region ambiguous, and difficult to pin down. Thus, we might certainly criticize those (many) studies lacking an explicit and logical regional theoretical framework (even those that pretend to consider restrictively just their own approach), or that are constructed from an undefined concept. It is also possible to find analysis that has avoided the concept of region altogether, substituting it for a new term, but without clarifying that new term either. There have also been some interdisciplinary studies that have analysed the regional issue from different disciplines. However, it has not been possible to build a concept of region that is valid for all social disciplines. Thus, it being impossible to delineate a universal approach, and it being the case that many of the different disciplines overlap, we might ask for clearly defined, but partially built approaches. So, it might be possible to construct homogeneous models and research, based on partial, yet common and clearly defined conceptual approaches.

Moreover, it should be reiterated that Europe has been at the core of the research on regions. First of all, it has been the main arena for studies on the regional issue. Europeanization, EU policies, but also the centuries-old political-administrative predominance of its small territories, have promoted the emphasis on the European context. Second, a

majority of the academics and researchers interested in the topic are themselves of European origin. Although there has been an increase in the study of the regional issue in recent years, this analytical framework remains underdeveloped in the discipline of international relations (Calleya, 2000), and it is not the main topic within economic studies either. Both disciplines have powerful traditions in North America, and its only partial interest (currently) in the issue, constitutes an important lack.

Discussion of future directions

Since the 1970s, academics have distinguished between the 'Old Regionalism', characterized by conservatism, resistance to change and dominated by politics of identity but also by separatist sentiments, and the 'New Regionalism', considered modern and pursuing the autonomy of the region through federalization, decentralization or regionalization, but without destabilizing the state (Albina and Khasson, 2008). However, recently, the New Regionalism approach has been revisited and many authors have theorized that it is no longer useful to debate on the old and new regionalism issue. On the contrary, future theorizing and research might take into account the diverse forms of regions and regionalism, existing not only in Europe but on a global scale, where, *inter alia*, sociological, political, economic, geographic, historical or juridical logics would be rationally and conceptually intertwined.

As highlighted earlier, future theorizing and research on the regional issue might be proportionally and democratically expanded on a world scale. An equilibrium might be looked for at the level of both actors (researchers) and arenas (research topics). Thus, we will gain a balanced research field with different origins and new approaches, but also with less of an emphasis on Europe as the main object of study.

Moreover, at the European level the so-called 'other Europe' (Keating, 2008: 74) might also be further analysed. Indeed, studies on the regional issue have been traditionally dominated by the Western Europe example. Although, since the fall of Communism, regionalism and regionalization in Eastern Europe have attracted some attention. Within the European integration context, some sort of regionalization has been developed in some Eastern European countries. However, it might be further analysed and theorized to what extent those processes have been merely administrative to fall in line with European regional policies, or whether they have also been promoted by social, political, cultural or historical common regional factors. Indeed, the

structures of regional government across Europe differ along several dimensions, among the most remarkable ones are: their constitutions' status; their powers, autonomy and governing/administrative capability; or to what extent their structures attract the diffuse institutional support of their citizenries (Scully and Wyn Jones, 2010: 243). Moreover, dealing with the regionalizing dynamics, there might also be distinguished three different processes: (a) Euro-regionalism, which refers to the perceived pressure on member states to regionalize their governmental structures as part of a broader integration process; (b) state-regionalism, which deals with the regionalizing pressures emanating from the state level itself; and (c) regional-regionalism, which refers (by contrast) to the bottom-up regionalizing pressure from the region itself, very often as a manifestation of its regional 'identity' (Paasi, 1991, 2009, 2013).⁷ As Scully and Wyn Jones (2010: 8) point out, while these three dynamics are distinct, it might be remembered that all three can and do interact with each other in practice.

To sum up, 'regions', 'regionalism' and 'regionalization' on whatever spatial scale are not the result of straightforward processes. Regions, their boundaries and their attached meanings are social constructs. Indeed, they are 'expressions of perpetual struggle over the meaning associated with space, democracy, representation and welfare' (Paasi, 2009: 478).

The disciplines of sociology, politics, economics, geography, international relations mainly, but also history and law, among others, have developed concepts that travel across time and space, enabling us to grasp the elusive notion of territory and its changing manifestations. As Keating (2008: 76) states, a lot of progress has been made, but 'we are not there yet'. This attempt to provide a 'state of art' on the regional issue at the beginning of the 21st century goes, to some extent, towards raising the profile of regional theories and their empirical analysis. It is modestly hoped that the framework introduced here, but also the criticism and assessment provided, might encourage regionalist researchers (from many different disciplines, coming from different 'regional' areas) to focus more comprehensively on the conceptualization of 'region' within their analyses.

Further research and theorizing, at both sub- and supra-state levels, are necessary for a better understanding of the relation between regions at different levels (sub-state, state or macro-continental, among others) and the world order, but also between the whole range of regional mechanisms and layers. It is also hoped that the further reading section below will attract a wider and greater amount of reflection on the theoretical and operative frameworks for analysing the regional concept.

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Notes

1. Keating (1998a: 9) argues that this is a minimal definition, that places the region between the state and the locality. However, it is broad enough and gives little idea of its territorial scope since some regions are larger than some states.
2. This grouping together of the main disciplines does not imply an absence of occasional contributions from other (traditionally less interested in the regional issue) theoretical fields. Indeed, the value of contributions taking a juridical (Domínguez, 2005) or historical (Applegate, 1999) approach, for instance, should also be pointed out.
3. These ancient European origins explain why the largest proportion of contributions to the regional issue has emanated from Europe and has mainly focused on the European scale. This is not only because of the dominant position all over the world that Europe enjoyed until the last century, but also because small territories were the dominant political-administrative units on the continent for centuries.
4. (1) The conservative regionalism rooted in the idea of affective community which resists the modernization embodied in the homogenizing and secular state – 19th-century France or 20th-century Italy. (2) The bourgeois regionalism attached to the industrial and economically advanced regions – currently represented by some *Länder* in Germany, the Lega Nord in Italy or Catalonia in Spain. (3) The modernizing regionalism, which is technocratic and depoliticized but also less linked to class interests. (4) The progressive regionalism, which supports democracy, reforms of the state, equality or even ecology, among others. (5) The populist and right-wing regionalism, confronting a centralizing state, fiscal redistribution or immigrants, to name a few – currently, politically represented by the Lega Nord in Italy or the Vlaams Blok in Belgium. (6) The separatist regionalism, currently exemplified within the nation-conscious Western European regions such as Northern Ireland, Scotland or the Basque Country (Keating, 1998b: 570–3).
5. Although sometimes the local or municipal level could be even closer to the citizenship.
6. However, in the very beginning disciplines like economics or geography made some efforts to articulate a general term or definition of the issue. Nowadays, those efforts constitute only a small minority.
7. At present, this is happening in the cases of Scotland and Catalonia, where two different processes to gain the rights to auto-determination or even their independence have been launched during 2013. See Keating, 2009, 2013; Scully and Wyn Jones, 2010.

Annotated further reading

- Caciagli M (2006) *Regioni d'Europa: Devoluzione, regionalismi, integrazione europea*, 2nd edn. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- During the last decades, many European states' institutional architecture has changed. This evolution has been because of the different processes of power devolution, from the political centres towards the peripheries. Indeed, regions became relevant actors within the European arena, where they vindicate an increasingly important role. Therefore, Italian political analyst Mario Caciagli points out the complex relationship between devolution, regionalism and European integration.
- Domínguez García F (2005) *Las regiones con competencias legislativas*. Valencia: Tirant lo Blanch, Colección Estudios Autonómicos y Federales.
- This book analyses (from a political and constitutional law angle) the presence of sub-state entities within many of the current members of the EU. Fernando Domínguez categorizes the territorial entities with political autonomy and legislative powers as 'legislative capacities regions' (also well known as *partner-regions* or *legislative regions*). The author compares their internal constitutional position, but also their participation channels in European affairs, as agreed by their states.
- Keating M (ed.) (2004) *Regions and Regionalism in Europe*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- The last half century has seen the rise across Europe of a new intermediate (regional) level of government. However the term 'region' means many different things and can be approached from many different angles – geographical, historical, cultural, social, economic and political. Although it is in Europe that regionalism as a multiform phenomenon has developed the furthest, the European experience resonates in other parts of the world, where some of these elements also exist. Michael Keating selects some of the most significant previously published articles. Therefore, this compendium provides a comprehensive overview of past and current thinking on this topic.
- Macleod G (2001) New Regionalism reconsidered: Globalization and the remaking of political economic space. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35(4).
- Amid economic globalization and the decline of the nation-state, a range of subnational regional economies and urban metropolises are increasingly being canonized as the paradigmatic exemplars of wealth. Gordon Macleod offers a rejoinder on what might be recovered from the range of New Regionalist perspectives currently vying for attention within critical studies of regional development. However, he also highlights a series of future theoretical directions for a geopolitically sensitive regional research agenda, drawing on recent thinking from the new regional geography, globalization and the politics of scale, institutional-relational state theory and the regulation approach.

Scully R, Wyn Jones R (eds) (2010) *Europe, Regions and European Regionalism. Palgrave Studies in European Union Politics*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

This book addresses the paradox of whether Europe's regions and European regionalism are of little but also diminishing consequence. Therefore, it examines the experiences of regions and regionalism across Western, Central and Eastern Europe. A group of country experts introduce analyses of both the larger states of Europe and their smaller counterparts (Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Poland, but also Ireland, Sweden, Hungary, Estonia, Bulgaria or even Scotland within the United Kingdom). The volume concludes that 'there is a growing diversity of European Regions, and a wide variety of regionalizing imperatives. Regionalism may not have overthrown the nation state, but Europe's regions and European regionalism, have a persisting importance to the politics of the continent.'

Telo M (ed.) (2007) *European Union and New Regionalism: Regional Actors and Global Governance in a Post-Hegemonic Era*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

This volume highlights external relations within the framework of the development of different forms of regional arrangements, within the globalized world of the 21st century. The book, edited by Mario Telo, offers: (1) a response to conventional wisdom on EU international identity; (2) an exploration of key issues of regionalism vs globalization and the potential for world economic and political governance through regionalism; and (3) a key resource for study and research of international relations, European studies, comparative politics and international political economy.

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résumé Le concept de région est un terme polysémique partiellement défini par plusieurs disciplines: la sociologie, les relations internationales, la géographie, l'économie, le droit ou les sciences politiques. Au sein d'une même discipline, le concept peut être analysé de plusieurs points de vue au niveau supra ou sous-étatique, mais également en fonction des perspectives ascendante 'bottom-up' (régionalisme) ou descendant 'top-down' (régionalisation).

mots-clés intégration européenne ♦ niveau sous-état ♦ régionalisation ♦ régionalisme nouveau ♦ régions

resumen El concepto de región es un término polisémico parcialmente definido por diferentes disciplinas: la sociología, las relaciones internacionales, la geografía, la economía, el derecho o la ciencia política. Incluso en el marco de una misma disciplina, el concepto puede ser analizado desde diversas perspectivas: a nivel supra o sub-estatal, pero también en función de las dimensiones ascendente 'bottom-up' (regionalismo) o descendente 'top-down' (regionalización).

palabras clave integración europea ♦ nivel sub-estatal ♦ nuevo regionalismo ♦ regionalización ♦ regiones