Part III

Forging Human Security Networks

Regions as Security Spaces: Taking External Actors and Incomplete Region-Building into Account

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Across the southern sections of the Atlantic space, the perception of a security threat is often related to the demarcation of a region in which state control is lacking. These regional spaces enable actors other than central governments to establish competing forms of governance across national borders. This chapter explores how such regional spaces come into being and why they do not necessarily turn into autonomous territorial units. Particular attention is given to the involvement of external actors from across the Atlantic space in the creation of regional security spaces.

The question of how a regional space emerges has been vividly discussed in seminal works in both international studies[1] and geography.[2] Yet studying regionalism within international studies has predominantly meant to study formal intergovernmental regional organizations. This has led to a substantial knowledge production on these organizations and their institutions but has marginalized other forms of regionalism that do not correspond to a state-centric expectation.[3] The dominant practices and theories of International Relations (IR) have throughout the 20th century marginalized the idea of space as an analytical category and the study of regions conducted as a subfield of IR has reproduced much of this bias.[4] The applied notion of regionalism has followed the dualistic epistemology of the nation state, as it has been prevalent in IR theories. The region is not understood as a space but as yet another pre-given container, whose inside can be clearly separated from the outside.

Beyond the spatial and state-centric bias that is deeply rooted in international relations and regionalism studies, there are avenues forward to chal-

1. Hettne, B., & Söderbaum, F. "Theorizing the rise of regionness". In *New political economy*. Vol. 5, No. 3, 2000, 457-472.
2. Paasi, A. "The resurgence of the 'region' and 'regional identity': Theoretical perspectives and empirical observations on regional dynamics in Europe". In *Review of international studies*. Vol. 35, No. S1, 2009, 121-146
3. Matheis, F., Raineri, L., & Russo, A. *Fringe Regionalism*. Palgrave Pivot: Cham, 2019.
4. Matheis, F. *New regionalism in the South–Mercosur and SADC in a comparative and interregional perspective*. Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2014.

lenge such notions. Regions can be considered actors in their own right in negotiating spatial configurations and globalization processes.[5] As a consequence, regions are not understood as being in a zero-sum game vis-à-vis nation states but offer a new scale for actors to explore. These scales accumulate in a complex overlapping setting. [6] Regionalism is thus not limited to a negotiation between states or an imposition of one particular state. Territories might be shifting between different dimensions, including the regional one, but this does not undermine their relevance for the spatial configuration.[7] Under these conditions, those imagining and defining a region inevitably territorialize.[8] A regional space does not necessarily entail a delineated territory or pooling of sovereignty. The production of a region becomes tangible through cultural and social practices or can remain limited to a discursive expression. Regionalism is thus one of "different knowledge orders in the production of space."[9]

Unlike the field of international relations, political geography has focused on regionalism as a primarily sub-national phenomenon, paying less attention to the transnational dynamics at stake. This chapter acknowledges that the notion of regional space has been marginalized in the evolution of international studies as a field seeks to illustrate specific dynamics and limits of the production of regions, in particular the mutual relationship between external and internal imaginations in terms of demarcation, identity and function.[10] This is done by following MacLeod and Jones[11] and Beel et al.[12] in applying Paasi's four-stage framework[13] and broadening its

5.   Engel, U., Zinecker, H., Matheis, F., Dietze, A., & Plötze, T. (Eds.). *The New Politics of Regionalism: Perspectives from Africa, Latin America and Asia-Pacific*. London: Routledge, 2016.; MIDDELL, M. (Ed.). *The Routledge Handbook of Transregional Studies*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2019.
6.   Revel, J. *Jeux d'échelles: la micro-analyze à l'expérience*. Paris: Le Seuil, 1996.
7.   Agnew, J. "Sovereignty regimes: territoriality and state authority in contemporary world politics". In *Annals of the association of American geographers*. Vol. 95, No. 2, 2005, 437-461.
8.   Paasi, A. "Geography, space and the re-emergence of topological thinking". In *Dialogues in Human Geography*. Vol. 1, No. 3, 2011, 299-303.
9.   Engel, U., & Nugent, P. (Eds.) *Respacing Africa*. Leiden: Brill, 2010.
10. Brenner, N., Jessop, B., Jones, M., & MacLeod, G. (Eds.) *State/space: a reader*. Malden: Blackwell, 2003.
11. MacLeod, G., & Jones, M. "Renewing the geography of regions". In *Environment and planning D: society and space*. Vol. *19*, No. 6, 2001, 669-695.
12. Beel, D., Jones, M., & Jones, I.R. "City-Region Building and Geohistorical Matters". In *Reanimating Regions: Culture, Politics, and Performance*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2017. 194-2004.
13. Paasi, A. "The institutionalization of regions: a theoretical framework for understanding the emergence of regions and the constitution of regional identity". In *Fennia-International Journal of Geography*. Vol. *164*, No. 1, 1986, 105-146.

scope by exploring its relevance for international studies and vice-versa. However, rather than illustrating each stage with a different empirical case that best fit the description, one single case is analyzed through the lens of all four stages.

The intention of this chapter is thus to provide a bridge between the two disciplines. In geographical thought in general and regarding the declination of the four-stage model in particular, regions have usually been associated with sub-national entities, be they provinces [14], regions [15] or city-regions.[16] By contrast, the case analyzed through the four-stage framework in this chapter is a transnational regionalism, albeit one that is not led by formal regional organizations: the Triple Border region around the Iguazu river at the intersection of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. This regionalism emerges at a crossroads between deliberate practices of cross-border actors, overarching intergovernmental structures, external perceptions and representations as well as counter-imaginations against imposed conceived spaces.

The four-stage model has been used to analyze the entangled and complementary processes that enable a region to emerge and institutionalize into an established part of a spatial structure. The stages build on each other but they are not entirely sequential. Rather, they are staggered in a partly overlap manner, both interlacing and reinforcing each other at points of juncture. Regionalization is a complex process and to trace its emergence and evolution Paasi[17] proposes four analytical stages to grasp a process that spans over a long duration with overlapping features. Regions reflect a spatial structure that primarily manifests itself in institutions that create a collective that socializes its inhabitants and exercises control.

In the remainder of this chapter, the four-stage model outlined in Paasi[18] will be discussed from a regionalism point of view and applied to the Triple Border (*triple frontera* in Spanish or *triplice fronteira* in Portuguese), also called the Iguazu region, which refers to a transnational space that is

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14. Ibid.
15. MacLeod, G., & Jones, M. "Renewing the geography of regions". In *Environment and planning D: society and space*. Vol. *19*, No. 6, 2001, 669-695.
16. Beel, D., Jones, M., & Jones, I.R. "City-Region Building and Geohistorical Matters". In *Reanimating Regions: Culture, Politics, and Performance*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2017. 194-2004.
17. Paasi, A. "The institutionalization of regions: a theoretical framework for understanding the emergence of regions and the constitution of regional identity". In *Fennia-International Journal of Geography*. Vol. *164*, No. 1, 1986, 105-146.
18. Ibid.

located around the border of the three South American countries Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, but has strong ties across the entire Atlantic Basin.

First stage: consciousness the region as an idea

The first stage deals with the foundation of a region-building process: regional consciousness. This process is primarily understood as the emergence of the awareness among a collective to inhabit a region. A crucial element for the consciousness of a region is a prevalent idea of the shape of a region and common expectations concerning its defining characteristics. The shape of a region can already be territorial but vague and less exclusive connotations are likely to be prevailing. Regions are considered through a certain historical narrative, a landscape or cultural traits. Though theses defining characteristics suggest where a region begins or ends but its boundaries are usually not statically defined but are rather porous and shifting. The processes of cognitive mapping thus primarily entail an imagined region that established itself by increasing its relevance as a space and identity reference point for its inhabitants.

The lens of the first stage can be meaningfully applied to the Iguazu case. First, the Iguazu region surrounds the border between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. The idea of the region is thus connected to the status of a borderland in a remote situation vis-à-vis the national capitals.

Second, the Iguazu region is topographically characterized by the Parana and Iguazu rivers that also constitute the national boundaries. The rivers lead to the world's largest waterfalls, the Iguazu waterfalls, which are located at the heart of the region and constitute the main landmark. The idea of the region is thus also structured around elements of nature and landscape.

Third, the Iguazu region as an economic space is primarily characterized by activities of transnational nature, chiefly energy production and commerce. The Iguazu waterfalls fuel massive hydropower plants that constitute a major source of electricity for all three countries. In terms of commerce, Ciudad del Este not only is the main urban center of the region but also an important market where large amounts of illicit and licit goods attract traders from beyond the region. To that end, the idea of the region is

characterized by the permeability of borders, which underpins the economic practice and the social fabric.[19]

Fourth, the Iguazu region as an infrastructure is forms a triangle between three cities connected by the transnational bridges that span the two rivers. In decreasing order of size, the cities are Ciudad del Este in Paraguay, Foz do Iguazu in Brazil and Puerto Iguazu in Argentina. The idea of the region is thus a transnational and transurban one.

Fifth, the Iguazu region as a socio-cultural space is characterized by a multitude of migrations throughout the 20th century leading to cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. The idea of the region is thus not defined by a homogenous society, although certain patterns, such as the dominance of Portuguese and Spanish, embody the region as a whole.

Second stage: objectification the region as a shape

The second stage refers to a process of objectification or fetishization of the region. The core mechanisms are conceptualization and symbolism. The second stage builds on the first stage, as it tries to embody the elements on which regional consciousness relies on creating names and labels that embody the idea of the region. At the same time, the second stage also curbs the first stage. Providing a symbolic shape to the region entails putting on hold the dynamic and porous processes, as the conceptualization of the region proposes to freeze the region in its current shape. Symbols aim to reproduce and legitimize the practices of the region-building process. The conceptualization of the inhabitants of the region as a social group guides political and economic action. Through symbolism such as flags or maps the inside of the region becomes more tangible and thus also more distinguishable from the non-region. Social and physical demarcations delimiting the region become more visible. At the same time, the label of a region is applied retroactively to forge the concept of a common history, even if the region might not have been a relevant entity in the past.

The second stage thus requires considerably more deliberativeness than the first stage. In addition, it entails a formalization of the regional space both in terms of cartography and social structure. Out of the many available characteristics of regional consciousness existing in the first stage, only a selection is carried over. Power relations become visible as the selection

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19. Ribereio Nogueira, B.F., & Clemente, C. C. "Etnografia da Tríplice Fronteira: Primeiras aproximações". In *Horizonte Científico*. Vol. 5, No. 2, 2011.

is negotiated between an existing elite that includes elements that confirm and expand their control in the current spatial format and an aspiring elite that seeks to disrupt existing administrative delineations.

Applying the second stage to the Triple Border yields a number of insights.

First, the Iguazu region surrounds the border between Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. The idea of the region is thus connected to the status and self-identification of a borderland in a remote situation vis-à-vis the national capitals. The shape of the region is thus defined by its transnational and distant position. The national borders are not considered dividing and sealed demarcations. Rather, it is their porosity that underpin the socioeconomic shape of the region.

Second, the region did not have a strong label until demand for a term to refer to this space emerged in the mid-1990s when the region was designated as the Triple Border. A term was required not so much to give shape to a regional consciousness but to delineate a problem to be solved: the external perception of a transnational lawless territory outside the control of national capitals. The primary purpose of creating the term Triple Border was thus not for purposes of internally driven region-building or cohesion but to be able to grasp a space that could be set apart from surrounding areas by the flourishing of specific illicit activities.[20] As such, the name Triple Border did not emerge as an aspiration towards regional identity but rather as an external denomination used to delineate a negative space.[21]

Third, the spatial narrative of the Triple Border was autonomously promoted by actors - primarily national governments and foreign powers - that had become aware of their limited influence in the area and aimed to pave the way to re-establish territorial control. The bias in framing a region around the illicit character of economic practices entailed that other region-building aspects, including crucial existing cross-border activities such as tourism and energy, were largely negated. Furthermore, the definition about what qualifies as illicit was driven externally [22]. This all corresponds to the selective process in stage 2, albeit driven by actors outside

20. Rabossi, F. "En las calles de Ciudad del Este: una etnografía del comercio en la frontera". In *Suplemento antropológico*. No. 43, 2008, 1-282.
21. Montenegro, S., & Béliveau, V. G. La Triple Frontera: *Globalización y construcción social del espacio*. Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila editors, 2006.
22. Jusionyte, I. "On and off the record: The production of legitimacy in an Argentine border town". In *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*. Vol. 36, No. 2, 2013, 231-248.

the region. Equalizing the region from the outside with a perceived lack of control led to policy solutions being brought from outside.

Fourth, the region was not designed as a long-lasting political, social or cultural space. Instead, it was conceived as an ephemeral entity and the main purpose of this framing was to address illicit activities. Once the illicit aspects were solved and external control was reinstated, the need for referring to the Triple Border as a region would vanish. By consequence the region itself would disappear, as soon it did not represent a problem anymore. This observation adds to Paasi's model, as not all region-building is designed to advance through all stages.

Fifth, this external and state-led narrative of the Triple Border had the unintended consequence of creating a backlash of region-building, thus leading to the negotiation process highlighted in stage 2. The denomination of the Triple Border as a lawless heartland of underground activities also generated a somewhat romantic imaginary of a space in which the otherwise prohibited is conceivable, enabling inhabitants and transients to change their identity in other words a "South American version of Casablanca in the 1940s".[23] However, this romanticized reinterpretation only had a limited impact on the external perception and did not lead to notably increase the attraction of the region.

Sixth, instead of establishing a monopoly on defining the region from the outside as a problem, the external frame gave rise to a local counter-narrative as an exercise of regional appropriation. Being externally perceived as a problem triggered two intertwined reactions. The first one was to reject the reductionist vision and the second one was to tap into existing cross-border dynamics in order to create an alternative regional frame. This frame would be congruent with the scope of the Triple Border and based on the same categories yet coined in positive terms as commonalities. The idea of a regional consciousness and a regional economy were an attempt to directly speak to the external perception of ethnic links to terrorism and illicit trade and turn them around. Rather than defending that the idea of the Triple Border was only an external frame, the existence of the region was accepted but filled with a different meaning. This appropriation would thus challenge the external definition and produce its own from the inside. Rather than giving in to be a playing field for external actors, the region tried to promote its own agency and coherence. The negotiation does thus not only happen among internal actors, as stage 2 formulates, but also between

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23. Lyman, M., & Potter, G. *Organized Crime*. Boston: Pearson, 2015.

external and internal actors. A central instrument in this endeavor was to relabel the region. Instead of appropriating the term Triple Border and reversing its negative connotation the strategy consisted of replacing it altogether. Appropriation would have entailed to continue framing the region around the border as the central feature. The proposed alternative was to replace the term Triple Border with Iguazu region (or Iguaçu in Portuguese). Iguazu is the name of the river that crosses the region and partly serves as borderline. The claim of the new name thus refers to a physical topography rather than an administrative demarcation. It suggests the existence of a seemingly more natural, long-standing and less controversial region. Naming nations and other administrative entities after rivers is common in the Southern Cone of South America (e.g. the country names of Paraguay and Uruguay). In addition, the term evokes an association with the nearby Iguazu Falls, which are one of the major tourist attractions in South America and thus positively connotated internationally. This reframing from a borderland to a topographic identity also resonated with local administrations that rejected the idea that the space they governed was lawless. The idea of an Iguazu region could rely on already established multiple formal frameworks for mutual cooperation.[24]

Third stage: institutionalization—the production of a region

The third stage refers to the institutionalization that further engrains the region. This third stage also builds on the ideas and symbols of a region from the first and second stage, but it also partly occurs in parallel to the second stage by accompanying and reinforcing it. Symbols and labels of a region are institutionalized by using them in all spheres of societal life from media to education to legislation. The region also becomes a tool that is exploited to advance other spatial processes such as marketisation or territorialization. Stage 3 is a steady process during which the region can acquire a legal status that allows it to be represented vis-à-vis other institutionalized spaces. A region-based social system is established, often to the detriment of (or at least at odds with) other overlapping spatial categories such as local communities or nation states. Expectations towards the inhabitants of the region are formulated and codified. The selective process of stage 2 is more rigidly adhered to, as the selection gains a dom-

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24. Rhi Sausi, J.L., & and Oddone N. "MERCOSUR: El Caso de la Triple Frontera Argentina-Brasil-Paraguay". In *Gobernanza y Prevención Transversal en la Frontera Norte de México*. Mexico: Centro de Alta Dirección Pública, 2013, 157–204.

inant status. The historicizing, visualization and stereotyping of the region emerging from the second stage enshrined in institutions and reproduced through school curricula or official maps. The third stage not only enables the production of a region but also its social reproduction by formally establishing the region as a political and social entity through institutions and by granting the region as such an economic, social and political purpose. Region-based institutions turn into the most powerful entities in the region. They for instance establish who is part of the region and how one can become a part of it. In this respect, Paasi also highlights the third stage as a transformation from nature as part of the idea of a region in stage one towards the abstraction of landscape. The concept of landscape embodies the expectations towards the internal and external representation of a region and the iconography forging a set of values that eventually can be used for a regional ideology - a regionalism in a meaning akin to nationalism. The antagonism between those advocating the region and those that defend other spatial formats gradually comes to the fore, sometimes overshadowing but not replacing the competition inside the region concerning the shape and purpose of the region.

The Iguazu case appears to have only partly gone through the third stage. Nevertheless, certain elements emerged.

First, the internal regional counter-narrative of a cross-border alternative to the Triple Border was driven in particular by the Brazilian and Paraguayan population of Arab descendant, who mainly settled in the area from the 1950s onwards and worked as small-scale merchants. The idea of a positive notion of the Triple Border materialized in the movement "Peace without Frontiers", which held mass gatherings and cultural festivals, thus indicating a first step of institutionalizing activity. In line with stage 3, the rationale was to tap into an existing sense of community along the border and to mobilize citizens on a common basis that would supersede ethnicity, nationality or religion and other identities fragmenting the population [25]. In the end, however, the internal glue holding together a regional community remained feeble and volatile. The attempt to create a more formal Iguazu region was not able to supersede existing antagonisms. Notably, the latter do not primarily mirror the existing borders, as they do not follow lines of nationality. Also, religion appears to only play a secondary role. By contrast, social and economic divisions are deeply rooted and cut across

25. Karam, J. T. "Crossing the Americas: The US War on Terror and Arab Cross-Border Mobilizations in a South American Frontier Region". In *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*. Vol. *31*, No. 2, 2011, 251-266.

the other categories. For instance, large-scale soy farmers and indigenous peasants form transnational groups that are difficult to curb within one regional frame [26]. The strongest asset of a formal Iguazu proposal was thus to embody a reaction to external narratives that used the region as a danger zone, although internal divisions prevented further institutionalization.

Second, although criminal actors in the Triple Border do not relate to a specific institutional region-building process per se, there is a convergence around a specific characteristic, namely, to establish a region devoid of a state presence capable or willing to interfere with illicit cross-border activities. The activities chiefly consist in trafficking drugs, weapons and people, but also include counterfeiting and money laundering. These illegal aspects of transnational economic activities have become institutionalized in the region, where they are not necessarily concerned illicit, benefiting over time from the limited interventions by governments to an extent to be able to resist the actions of international organizations and even specialized task forces.[27] There is no coherent or unitary actor representing this specific institutionalization of the region. Rather, numerous organized groups that at times compete, at times collaborate and at times directly conflict, share a specific interest in maintaining the porous character of the Triple Border or Iguazu.[28] A large part of the actors is located outside the region, including criminal networks originated from China, Korea, Russia, Italy or Nigeria [29]. They typically do not conceive the Triple Border as a region to be considered in its own right but rather as a region that is integrated in a larger notion of transcontinental space that is not geographically continuous. The geographic aspect of this global integration is fluid and amendable but serves the purpose of stage 3 to institutionalize a spatial economy. Many forms of mapping overlap depending on the activity or goods at stake. One of the main purposes of the Triple Border is to connect the Andean hinterland to the economic capitals of the continent Sao Paulo and Buenos Aires and from there further overseas. The connection also proceeds vice-versa. The region in its economic institutionalization performs two key functions for illicit activities and goods. The first constitutes a market, which in-

26. Fogel, R. "La región de la triple frontera: territorios de integración y desintegración". In *Sociologias*. Vol. 10, No. 20, 2008.
27. Jusionyte, I. "On and off the record: The production of legitimacy in an Argentine border town". In *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*. Vol. 36, No. 2, 2013, 231-248.
28. Costa, T.G., & Schulmeister, G.H. "The puzzle of the Iguazu tri-border area: many questions and few answers regarding organized crime and terrorism links". In *Global Crime*. Vol. 8, No. 1, 2007, 26-39.
29. Lyman, M., & Potter, G. *Organized Crime*. Boston: Pearson, 2015.

cludes a strong element of barter, for instance directly swapping weapons against drugs. The second one constitutes a transformative space. Channeling people, money or stolen goods through the Triple Border does not only occur in view of a changing ownership but also to blur and replace previous identities. Local organized crime has also taken advantage of the situation and constitutes a relevant element in many economic activities. However, the importance of external actors in this realm underlines the previously unveiled notion of a region that is primarily built from outside rather than from within.

Third, the main official project to formalize a cross-border region was the establishment of Ciudad del Este as a free trade zone, an arrangement that facilitated both informal and formal, licit and illicit economic activities. The free trade zone has however not coincided with a political project seeking representation or administration and did not rely on a historic narrative to claim its existence as a political space. This practice is not unique to the region but often occurs in the context of special economic zones [30] or development corridors.[31]

Fourth, institutionalization in terms of exercising regional control was further advanced, as the Triple Border attracted international attention, in particular in the US. The narrative that successfully achieved this was to depict a "black hole", a secluded den that harbored terrorists with impunity, where attacks were conceived and where financial and logistical support was organized (Zinno 2008). This narrative benefited from referring to the existence of a large Arab minority in the Triple Border as well as from allegations that some organized crime groups operating in the region were linked to the economic and financial activities of the Islamic group Hizbollah (Hudson 2010). The Triple Border as an external frame is thus based on a perception of a security threat linked with a focus on specific elements of identity and economy.

Fourth stage: the region as a system

The fourth stage is interlocked with the third stage and starts while the latter is still in process but has already reached an advanced stage of in-

30. Maruschenk, M. "Special economic zones and transregional state spatiality". In *The Routledge Handbook of Transregional Studies*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2019. 221-227
31. Söderbaum, F., & Taylor, I. "Transmission belt for transnational capital or facilitator for development? Problematising the role of the state in the Maputo Development Corridor". In *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. Vol. 39, No. 4, 2001, 675-695.

stitutionalization. Although the region does not gain a monopoly in terms of spatialization, it becomes an essential unit in the spatial structure and unavoidable by any participant in that structure.

Regionalization as a process can be considered as having been achieved, in the sense of successfully installing a regional structure and dominant imagination of the region as a reference framework for the main social institutions that thus inevitably reinforce the social reproduction of stage 3. Even movements opposing the regional system contribute to its reproduction by acknowledging and engaging with its dominant position. The scattered regional consciousness of stage 1 has given way to a consciousness of one particular region the institutionalized, formalized and thus controlling region. The region becomes a given and can from now on be mobilized as an ideology to attain resources and power. The region acquires an identity on its own, which is fundamentally different from the regional consciousness and imagination of stage 1, in which it is the inhabitants' identification with the region that plays a key role. The identity of a region in stage 4 is primarily a matter of communication and perception, both externally and internally. Externally, the identity of a region comprises the image that a region fosters vis-à-vis others and the expectations others have of the region. This is an instrumental process, where specific narratives are employed depending on the recipient or perceiver. The promotion of a certain type of tourism as well as the image of a region as a conflict zone are both elements of external identity. Internally, the identity of a region serves the purpose of providing a reference point to the inhabitants, defining the region they belong to and delineating exclusionary features. Internal identity is thus a means of exercising social control.

Although the fourth stage does not conclusively have to lead an administrative status, Paasi considers the latter to be the culminating condition. If the region becomes a public administration, institutionalization and formalization reach a point from which it is difficult to fall back to previous stages.

Although the fourth stage cannot be properly appreciated in the Triple Border region, there are some elements that point to the limitations that prevent the region to further institutionalize. Institutionalization in terms of providing the region with an independent status has evidently not occurred in the Iguazu case. The involved central nation governments and the formal intergovernmental regionalisms such as the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) have not shown any particular awareness for the specific regional-building

surrounding the Triple Border. Rather than directly reacting to it, either to appropriate or to counter the cross-border dynamics, the dominant mode is to operate in an isolated fashion vis-à-vis the region. Yet, as a somewhat unintended consequence, the region-building of the Triple Border is directly impacted on by formal initiatives. UNASUR's Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA) as well as formal regional agreements conducted in the framework of the intergovernmental regional organizations MERCOSUR provide both physical and legal conditions that facilitate cross-border economic activities. Organized crime groups and other regional economic actors already engaged in the Triple Border were thus well-placed to take advantage of new infrastructures or free movement of goods. Although the creation a common market also reduces the opportunities to engage in smuggling, sufficient differences in taxation and availability exist between the different countries of the region, and in any case this caveat does not apply to illicit goods [32]. The economic activities in the Triple Border might thus have been facilitated by lax control of some state actors but at the same time they also benefit from formal agreements promoting open markets. Yet, the economic agreements and infrastructures do not occur in a fashion to strengthen the regional shape. Rather they dilute its delineation and aim at producing a region that does not correspond to the Iguazu.

Conclusion

The four-stage model exhibits limitations with respect to its external dimension. It is primarily geared towards the inside, focusing on the relations between inhabitants and institutions of the region. Beel et al.[33] point out that external actors can take part in the process of territorially and socially demarcating a region, but this does not become a central concern. In this regard, insights on regionalism in the field of international relations become relevant on two accounts. Firstly, they highlight that external actors do not only take part in region-building but can even be key drivers of it. The institutionalization of regions can be supported and steered by external actors. Mechanisms can include external funding, formal recognition and manipulation of identity. They can be supportive of an ongoing process or

32. Aguiar, J. C. G. "Cities on edge: Smuggling and neoliberal policies at the Iguazú triangle". In *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*. Vol. 33. No. 2, 2012, 171-183.
33. Beel, D., Jones, M., & Jones, I. R. "City-Region Building and Geohistorical Matters". In *Reanimating Regions: Culture, Politics, and Performance*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2017. 194-2004.

transform an existing but frail region into a dominant structure. The name struggle between Iguazu and Triple Border does not take place between elites and organized communities within the region but rather between external and internal perceptions. As region-building is a long-standing process, the distinctive feature of external actors can over time fade. This is most evident in an imperial region-building process, where the line between external and internal actors can be rather blurred, as despite the power asymmetries and the control mechanisms, the metropolis acts in the periphery as if it were a part thereof, thus legitimizing its presence and influence. The occurrence of regional diasporas can be similarly blurred, as they constitute a social extension of a region, which is located in a spatially distant environment. Paasi[34] and Beel et al.[35] acknowledge that a region is both created in bottom-up and top-down dynamics, and that it can be both territorially bound and spatially diffuse. A third transcending dimension would be that a region is both internally and externally constructed. This multiplicity does not mean that everything can be a region. Challenging dichotomies entail that a region-building process is not reducible to one dynamic or the monopoly of one actor.

Looking across the Atlantic Basin and beyond, the case of Iguazu, the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group is one of the starkest examples of a region whose evolution has been dependent on an external sponsor and recognizer, in this case the EU. The ACP group has however acquired a certain identity as a group of former colonies with privileged ties to the EU. This has become visible as the ACP resists the EU's shift from seeing the ACP as a historically contiguous group of former colonies towards an economic segmentation according in order to facilitate trade agreements with congruent sub-ACP groupings. The Sahel is another example in the Atlantic space of external-internal competition over regional narratives, as the intergovernmental G5 Sahel group follows a functional security delineation, contrasting with the circular and dynamic understanding the Tuareg have of the Sahel.

Second, the four-stage model does not pay particular attention to the role and status a region gains within the international system. From their beginning regions hold autonomous capacities, most notable in the later

34. Paasi, A. "The institutionalization of regions: a theoretical framework for understanding the emergence of regions and the constitution of regional identity". In *Fennia-International Journal of Geography*. Vol. *164*, No. 1, 1986, 105-146.
35. Beel, D., Jones, M., & Jones, I.R. "City-Region Building and Geohistorical Matters". In *Reanimating Regions: Culture, Politics, and Performance*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2017. 194-2004.

institutionalization stages, when a region gains a certain independence from its constituents. The concept of actorness is particularly insightful in this regard. In international relations, regions are deemed as actors through their visibility, their recognition and their institutionalization. These characteristics resonate with the four-stage model and they add an important external feature. Visibility, recognition and institutionalization are not considered to be inherent attributes but rather come to being through external interaction. A region that is institutionalized has the capacity and power to interact with other socio-spatial entities, speaking on behalf of its regional constituents. Recognition and visibility are also instrumental in an extra-regional outreach, facilitating the expansion or at least influence of the region in interaction with other regions. The capacity of the region to act beyond its self-defined boundaries would thus be an integral element of the advanced stages in process of regional institutionalization.

A critical application four-stage model also requires more attention to a reversal or stalling of the process. The Iguazu region is largely stuck in stage 2 with little sign of further institutionalizing. Following the diminishing of tension between two regional narratives, the region seems to stagnate. This suggests that the stage model needs to be read in a circular rather than linear fashion. Further research would be required to explain why certain regional ideas institutionalize while others don't, and to understand the process of de-regionalization.

The nuances of Paasi's stage 2 can further be enhanced by not considering it a linear evolution but rather account for a conflictive process. Rather than being reducible to one symbol and one name, stage two is a competitive region-building process. Different names and different shapes are developed by different actors and compete against each other.

A region institutionalizes as a combination of physical features, communitarian sense, as well as internal and external imaginations. Yet, the relative weight of these different aspects can shift over time, as for instance a region can loosen its identification with a certain topography in favor of a value system. The delineation of a region thus reflects a deliberate choice between various available regional rationales each with a different sense of exclusion and inclusion. A region can reflect a certain economic system or paradigm, a history, a language or a dialect. In all cases, a region is negotiated between different constructed and intentional shapes and purposes. Regionalization consequently continuously generates resistance, from within the region against the Triple Border frame and across the region against the Iguazu frame.

The dynamics of the Iguazu region are not singular and there are several other instances in other border settings in around the Atlantic space where at least some characteristics are echoed. Relevant examples include the regions around the border between Colombia, Peru and Ecuador or surrounding Lake Chad. In these two instances, the presence of national state actors is relatively limited and limited intergovernmental agreements are in place, facilitating both licit cross-border activities and organized crime. At the same time, external perceptions of the region do not necessarily coincide with local self-identification. These patterns underline the necessity to understand region-building across the Atlantic space in terms that acknowledge their plurality and their spatial notion. The regional level emerges as a dimension in addition to socio-spatial structures whereas full replacement seldom takes place. As such they become targets of de- and re-territorializing dynamics. Different actors not only create spatial regional formats, but they also reject them, appropriate them and reinterpret them. Actors negotiate with each other but also with the regionalism at stake.

As an impulse for international relations in general and studying the Atlantic space in particular, regionalisms that are not stemming from intergovernmental regional organizations should not only constitute an isolated niche. Taking into account the different stages of region-building also enriches the study of regional organizations to uncover the mutual relationship, even if it occurs on an indirect level or ends in an impasse, as in the case of the Triple Border.

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