Cultural Sustainability and Regional Development

Theories and practices of territorialisation

Edited by
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Cultural Sustainability and Regional Development

Meeting the aims of sustainability is becoming increasingly difficult; at the same time, the call for culture is becoming more powerful. This book explores the relationships between culture, sustainability and regional change through the concept of 'territorialisation'. This concept describes the dynamics and processes in the context of regional development, driven by collective human agency that stretches beyond localities and marked-off administrative boundaries.

This book launches the concept of 'territorialisation' by exploring how the natural environment and culture are constitutive of each other. This concept allows us to study the characterisation of the natural assets of a place, the means by which the natural environment and culture interact, and how communities assign meaning to local assets, add functions and ascribe rules of how to use space. By highlighting the time-space dimension in the use and consumption of resources, territorialisation helps to frame the concept and grasp the meaning of sustainable regional development. Drawing on an international range of case studies, the book addresses both conceptual issues and practical applications of 'territorialisation' in a range of contexts, forms and scales.

The book will be of great interest to researchers and postgraduates in sustainable development, environmental studies, and regional development and planning.

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Territorialisation, a challenging concept for framing regional development

Elena Battaglini, Lummina Horlings and Joost Dessein

Several strands of literature highlight the regional dimension of development processes: neo-institutional economics, the study of regional versus national competitiveness, the theory of comparative advantages and the focus on industrial districts. Despite a body of studies that, until the first half of the twentieth century, had not taken the variables of time and space in their analysis of development into account, places are taken in their specificity as the founding element for describing (and for some authors, interpreting) the constraints and opportunities of regions for their historical, cultural and socioeconomic conditions. The neoclassical theory of growth, based on the model of the Nobel laureate Robert Solow, expunges the spatial variable and is then gradually questioned in favour of the so-called endogenous regional development approach (Stimson *et al.*, 2011).

Over time, places take on the role of a favourable (or unfavourable) environment for business, making the creation of external economies (or diseconomies) possible, and giving rise to specific forms of cooperation between companies and developmental actors. At least some authors assert that development and innovation in certain successful regions are not produced by the assertion of a single company but rather by the competitiveness of the entire territory as expressed through the synergies between institutions and socioeconomic actors. These synergies are the basis of the processes of accumulation of knowledge and the dissemination of information and opportunities useful for supporting development in the context of effective planning (Battaglini, 2014).

Debates on regional development have described the relevance of social networks, proximity and organisational models to point to the importance of cooperation and trust between actors on the regional scale. Since the 1950s scholars seeking the roots of local competitiveness have progressively shifted their emphasis to the less material aspects of development. The central role initially attributed to the presence of infrastructure (1950–1960) was subsequently assigned to exports (1960–1970), to endogenous development, to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and to districts (1970–1980). Later, it shifted to innovation, to technology transfer, to innovative milieux (1980–1990), to the learning economy of intangible factors and collective learning (1990–2000) and finally, to relational capital and local culture (from 2000 to the present day).

In the latter stages in particular, the milieu has become a key concept – the focus of interesting ongoing debate. 'That something in the air', meaning the ideas and secrets inherent in all work that children can learn in an unconscious way (Marshall, 1890) can be understood as the local atmosphere that explains and interprets the networks of cooperation – the *untraded interdependencies* (Storper 1993, 1995). These are expressed in the specific diffusion of knowledge, the organisation of production and the division of labour, the reproduction of professional skills and in forms of social regulation (Camagni, 2008; 2009).

Although culture has been recognised as an element of milieu, its role has not been described explicitly in literature on regional development. Our book therefore attempts to analyse how culture in its interplay with environment strongly contributes to a local specific milieu.

Why territorialisation?

The cases described in this book highlight the time-space dimension of development and the ways in which people use resources. Culture, in its interplay with nature, influences the ways in which people shape their territories. It mediates practices and institutions but also the senses; it is expressed in subjective perceptions, sense-making and the construction of narratives and regional identities, pointing to how people assign value to their resources and thus influence sustainable local and regional development. Culture further influences ways of life and human intentionality, thus providing insights about why people would contribute to change.

The role played by culture in regional development and sustainability is discussed using case studies from North and South America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Australasia. The role of culture implicitly and explicitly relates to what we intend by territorialisation – it provides us with a lens to understand how culture influences multi-scale spatial development. All the case studies focus on concepts such as region and place. Despite their varied etymologies and meanings, all share the focus on and the significance of how space is represented, performed and thus bound to the natural, cultural and social characterisation of a specific context.

The main aim of this book is to bring the semantic efficacy of the concept of *territory* to the fore as compared to the notions of *region* and *place*. The word *territory* has an etymological link to 'terrain', through the Latin *terrēnum* (ground) and *terra* (earth). It therefore offers a clear reference to the natural features of places (see also Horlings *et al.*, 2015).

In our view, when engaging with development processes in the light of sustainability, the word *territory* – much more than *region* or *place* – stands for the complex relationship between local communities and their environment, and between nature and culture. If we take our investigation further, territory possesses this semantic power in the way in which it alludes to the dynamic of appropriation of space as a key to understanding social life, its processes and its social and economic development. We thus agree with Chiesi (2015) in conceiving of territorialisation 'as the core of many social dynamics'. It relates to the primary

set of experiences of perception, symbolisation and valuation that actors develop with their immediate surroundings or larger spaces, as 'low-level processes are the constituents of high-level ones, and not vice-versa ... (because) any territorial experience, regardless of scale, happens with the engagement of the body–mind system with the surrounding environment' (Chiesi, 2015: 76). Territorialisation thus allows us to ground the analysis of higher-scale concepts – such as region, development and globalisation – to the microscale of these primary experiences.

Measuring these different scales is also crucial for what we have called the 'institutional dimension' of territorialisation (Horlings *et al.*, 2015), its organisation and planning towards sustainability (Padt, 2015). Here territorialisation is intended from the point of view of researchers or planners and their modalities for framing and constructing territories through 'scientific evidence, anecdotes and metaphors'. From this perspective, territorialisation as a discourse of defining and shaping territories is 'a struggle between powerful and less powerful scientists, policy makers, politicians, citizens, business people and their organisations' (Padt, 2015: 164).

The process of territorialisation has relevant bottom-up dynamics, which are almost always pluralistic and often conflicting. They hardly fit into GDP or other indexes that measure development or well-being. Grasping the symbolic dimension of place or intangible culture from the top down is either a conceptual or a methodological challenge, as Cicerchia discusses in Chapter 9:

> 'Feeling at ease' in different places (home, neighbourhood, school, workplace, city, etc.), the awareness of the *genius loci* or of the cultural meanings of places, landmarks, etc., the ability to access and to take full advantage of the resources locally available are basic requirements for sustainable endogenous development. Measuring them and transforming them into policies is the challenge that lies ahead.
>
> (Cicerchia, 2015: 142–143)

Chiesi and Costa, in Chapter 10, discuss how community practices, as co-design and cultural mapping, can foster many forms of territorialisation. Here this concept is intended 'as bottom-up appropriation of space' (Chiesi and Costa, 2015: 148) by collective and deliberate intentions ascribed to it. These methodologies are excellent instances of participatory action research: they could improve territorial planning at any level of scale by the increase of the 'degree of congruence' between the conceptual word of planners and designers and that of users and citizens, promoting place-attachment.

Assemblage theory, as discussed by Woods in Chapter 3, has the strength and the consistency to parallel the main arguments of our book by focusing on the material components 'both natural and manufactured, but also technologies and people' (Woods, 2015: 30) and the expressive components that drive the affective modalities of how assemblages are perceived and managed. By adopting assemblage theory, rurality or urbanity as social constructs (previously detached) are reconnected to territories as place identity, either urban or rural, could refer to the same space. Claiming that the properties of an assemblage cannot be reduced to the properties

of its components – and that a place cannot be reduced to, or be constrained by, its territory or environment – Woods stresses the role of the theory in countering the environmental determinism of early geographical traditions.

In theorising spatiality, sociologists – like geographers – have traditionally confronted the epistemological black box of the nature–culture divide. On one hand, sociology has favoured the concept of space over that of place, with the latter being considered lacking generality, as it relates to the context in which it is used rather than having a meaning per se (Manuel-Navarrete and Redclift, 2010). On the other hand, with the need to locate sociological analysis in values, interests and practices, the concept of space had been depreciated (or even neglected) with the concern either of falling into some form of environmental determinism or compromising the explanatory power of mainstream sociological variables and the capacity for generalisation possessed by the social sciences (Chiesi, 2010).

In defining territorialisation 'as coproduction of society and environment where both have agency' (Horlings *et al.*, 2015) we refer to the mutual constitution of the social and the natural, of communities and their living environment, thus challenging the debate over the nature–culture divide.

Territorialisation and human agency: the mediation of culture

Culture is a crucial 'vector' (Redclift and Manuel-Navarrete, Chapter 2) of these dialectics, mediating how society negotiates the definition of space and marking the direction of how space defines the possibility for social behaviour. Redclift and Manuel-Navarrete define culture as 'the opportunities and limits inherent in the local environment within which human agency works' (Redclift and Manuel-Navarrete, 2015: 19). In this perspective, places are not simply the product of human agency but are 'cultural products' that could be 'reinvented' and 'reshaped' within the changing context of policy discourses and the 'rhetoric of sustainability'.

Horlings (Chapter 4) conceives of culture as rooted in human values. She understands territorialisation in different spans of time and space as the expression of individual and collective cultural values (Horlings, 2015: 104). She thus adds an important fourth dimension of territorialisation: 'worldview', referring to people's intentionality and way of life. She describes how the worldview and symbolic dimension of territorialisation offer insights into how values drive people's place-specific motivations, cultural sense-making and sense of place.

In this line of reasoning, Kivitalo *et al.* (Chapter 7) discuss how culture manifests itself in the everyday life of rural people and communities in Finland, and how these people construct trajectories of development and give meaning to rural places in the light of sustainability. Sustainable development processes are thus to be considered as related to 'recognition, dialogue and negotiation between diverse cultural meanings, values and identities' and rooted in 'traditions and emotional bonds toward the place, which are handed down through the generations' (Kivitalo *et al.*, 2015: 104).

The recognition of the specific natural and cultural characteristics of places is also stressed by Thomas Lane *et al.* in Chapter 13, where the resilience of Welsh

communities is challenged by 'generic metropolitan (planning) approaches' that fail to take into account the local need to maintain their distinctiveness in terms of social and cultural capital.

In Chapter 14, the case of seed practices in Luoland (West Kenya) is described as 'embedded and structured by cultural beliefs and associated kinship based practices' (Hebink *et al.*, 2015: 206). These practices are shaped (and challenged) by external interventions that are backed by the state and foreign donors driving local farmers to adopt new, hybrid varieties of maize. Conflicting ideologies about food security socially defend and legitimise farmers' choice of which maize to plant. The authors build on these different conceptions of territorial development, arguing that culture 'stands for making the configuration of the social and material work' (Hebinck *et al.*, 2015: 208).

Culture also matters in the planning processes and in the approaches to urban resilience as Atmanagara discusses in Chapter 12. Building on the empirical results of a European FP7 project survey, she contributes to the understanding of territorialisation by exploring the planning and regulatory strategies of different European cities in regard to urban resilience and sustainability. Here, culture is understood as the intensity of collaboration between key agents, education, knowledge transfer and access to information. These cultural factors play a crucial role in shaping the evolution of urban planning in the selected cases. Urban resilience is a result fostered by planning approaches that 'try to integrate different functions for the same area, involve local citizens and manifold social groups, and constantly evaluate and redevelop the existing strategies and measures' (Atmanagara, 2015: 182) on the basis of territorial specificities.

Another interesting case of urban territorialisation is described in Chapter 15 by Caggiano, who refers to collective gardens set up and run in Paris by local associations on small public plots granted by the local authorities. These *jardins partagés* convey rurality into the city, creating an aesthetic function that inevitably includes ethical, productive, social and cultural functions, and mobilising 'resources and capabilities that are hidden, scattered or underutilised, while promoting a collective well-being based on (and improving) an awareness of place' (Caggiano, 2015: 232). The way this accords with our book's approach to territorialisation is seen in the empirical evidence of processes of coproduction between society and the environment as realised in the gardens through the sharing of experiences, knowledge, memories and imagination. This facilitates the processes of urban transformation, adds value to the urban landscape and reconstructs community relations of solidarity and social bonding.

In Chapter 16, Florit *et al.* analyse how patterns of symbolisation and reification that were imposed during the colonial age in the Brazilian state of Santa Catarina still inform the institutionalising dimension of territorialisation. The examples of tourism and regional branding here are understood in terms of how they update and reinforce environmental and cultural inequities, contributing to the maintenance of a colonial relationship.

The complex issue of development is addressed in this book in terms of space and time and the cultural specificities of the local communities who are

confronted with the affordances and potentialities of their endogenous resources, the pressures of the external market and extensive networks over a global scale.

In essence, we locate ourselves in the theoretical perspective inaugurated by Weber in his work *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which highlights the role of cultural factors in the rise of capitalism. Facing the bi-directional relationship linking culture to society, Weber identifies the horizon of meaning of human action in the cultural system. In his methodological writings, he defines culture as:

> a finite segment of the meaningless infinity of the world process, a segment on which human beings confer meaning and significance. This is true even for the human being who views a particular culture as a mortal enemy and who seeks to 'return to nature'.
>
> (Weber, 1994 (1922): 540)

As for Weber, for us the selection of what is valuable (even in trajectories of territorialisation) is an act of identity in a double sense. It refers primarily to the personal and social dimensions of the identity of a subject, to its multiple memberships that transcend the socialisation process that results. Selection is also an act that connects to the cultural identity of an individual who, in the distinction between the self and the other, is based on the meaning and feeling of a common origin that is also territorial.

Agency of nature or nature of agency?

The meaning of nature is continuously negotiated in relation to its supposed counterpart, and is usually defined as 'the other' vis-à-vis human society and culture. Culture is often equated with all human artefacts, and nature with the external environment; that is, culture and nature are distinguished from each other as if they were two separate realms of reality (Haila, 2000: 155). In early sociological efforts to explain human consciousness and the mind, animals were frequently used to describe the uniqueness of humankind; it is in relation to such counterparts that the uniqueness of human agency stands out. In this sense, nature serves to define what being human implies (Uggla, 2010: 81).

To corroborate the hypothesis of coproduction introduced by our book (Horlings *et al.*, 2015), Battaglini and Babović attempt in Chapter 5 to challenge this nature–culture divide by discussing the empirical findings stemming from their Serbian case study. The main aim of their contribution was to understand the process of territorialisation as a co-production of nature and culture in which both have agency. They rely on the concept of affordances (Gibson, 1986) to underpin nature's agency, and on the concepts of cognitive, affective and selective values (Kluckhon, 1951) to operationalise the role of culture in the symbolisation and reification stages of territorialisation. Their analysis shows that access to land, its type, quality and morphology act to afford and strongly define everyday practices as well as the long-term processes of territorialisation. At the same time, the

distribution of land, as well as its valuation by actors during these processes, is influenced by cultural factors, specifically by social norms and values.

The other authors of this book also refer to cases and practices that support our hypothesis of coproduction where both nature and culture have agency. Redclift and Manuel-Navarrete, in Chapter 2, refer to how *ejido* communities convey the natural attraction of the *cenotes* into sustainable forms of tourism, conferring value on their territory and culture. Chiesi then devotes an entire section of Chapter 6 to discussing the heuristic power of the concept of affordances (which Redclift and Manuel-Navarrete might have referred to in the case of the *cenote*) as 'an opportunity for action mediated by the environment' (Chiesi, 2015: 78). He claims that the interminable catalogue posed by the environment and objects

> allows us to get rid of the problematic notion of 'function': the object itself is no longer seen as having one or more functions, but rather the subject is the one who *discovers affordances in the object*. This completely inverts the perspective: our capacity to individuate opportunities in space becomes key, rather than some objective qualities that predetermine its function(s).
> (Chiesi, 2015: 78, emphasis added; see Gibson, 1986: 127–129)

In this sense, this challenges the very nature of agency and the constructivist bounding of culture defined as 'the opportunities and limits inherent in the local environment within which human agency works' (Redclift and Manuel-Navarrete, 2015: 19).

Hebinck *et al.* in Chapter 14 argue that certain local maize varieties and their specific biophysical properties afford specific local agricultural practices. Modes of seed cultivation are thus to be conceptualised as the dynamic interaction connecting the human and non-human elements; processes that 'do not emerge casually nor can they be easily engineered, and generating in turn heterogeneous and highly fragmented development situations' (Hebinck *et al.*, 2015: 207).

In Chapter 8, Dessein elaborates further on the encounter, interaction and mutual transformation between communities (each with their system of values, norms, beliefs and symbols) and living nature, framing two different practices of saffron cultivation in Morocco. He connects these culturally embedded modes of production to the local natural conditions through a model where territorialisation can be understood as the combined processes of endogenous regional development and coproduction, defined as the interplay of the social and natural environment. Therefore,

> strong territorialisation can be found with a balance between the endogenous and exogenous forces influencing development in a context of a strong human-nature interrelation (i.e. strong co-production). Weak territorialisation, by extension, occurs under conditions of an unbalanced relation between exogenous and endogenous forces combined with a disconnected human-nature nexus.
> (Dessein, 2015: 110)

Arguing for the nexus between nature and culture in processes of territorialisation, we thus stand for a different nature of agency, one related not only to human intentions but meant to connect the limitations and possibilities inherent in nature to the aims and expectations of human practices. We therefore join Nash (2005) in the need to think about agency in different terms, such as Latour's (1993) notion of 'relational' agency dispersed among humans and natural hybrids in what he terms an actor network. We also go along with Ingold's (1987) efforts to challenge constructionism in the social sciences by analysing organisms in their environment, rather than as 'self-contained individuals with their culture confronting nature as the external world' (Battaglini and Babović, 2015: 70).

Territorialisation: main theoretical challenges

In this book, we deal with territoriality and territorialisation through reference to frames of time and space and to the cultural specificities of local communities in how they tackle either the endogenous potential of their local heritage or the external pressures of the market and globalisation. We have confronted local communities, seen as human subjects who relate to their biologically and culturally inbuilt 'species-being'. Perceptions, meanings and values are therefore understood as part of their embodied experience of relations with their own species and more widely with nature (Dickens, 1992, 2000). Drawing on Dickens, nature is claimed here to resemble that construct of the Chicago School, the 'biotic level' whose characteristics 'open themselves to the senses of observers who initially perceive the materiality and physicality of such resources insofar as they might affect the actors' representations and actions' (Battaglini and Babović, 2015: 61).

The economic activities of the third sector, such as local exchanges and trading schemes, consortia, organic agriculture and other cases examined in our book, seem to attempt to establish new locally controlled ways of working together, 'attempting to realise the biologically-based need of people for a sense of association, security, social identity' (Dickens, 2000: 161) in both urban and rural contexts.

Attention to practices in the way we have framed it on the territorial level goes along with Bourdieu's analytical effort to deny the opposition between subjectivism and objectivism. Emphasising only the role of culture in constructing actors' experiences does not allow us to understand the affordances of natural resources, and therefore the 'material' conditions of their symbolisation and reification – in other words, the 'real' conditions of the possibility of action. On the other hand, stressing only the structural and physical limits and opportunities afforded by the environment might have driven us to the determinism which we avoided through the notion of co-production.

The international cases discussed here make clear that different natures and cultures exist in relation to diverse territorialisation processes. We could therefore assert that the conceptual strength of 'territorialisation' lies precisely in the possibility that it can frame different coproductions of nature–culture within specific strands of time and space. Unlike the broader and normative concept of sustainable development (which could be located in any place and at any time),

the reference to the coproduction of natures–cultures in territorialisation offers an improved understanding of the process underlying regional development, allowing scholars to better analyse the interests at stake, the stakeholders in play, the valued resources to be taken into account for development initiatives and paths and the local efforts to challenge external pressures of the market and globalisation. Its conceptual density permits us to better frame the social climate, the type of coordination or mutual control between development agents and firms, the direction of contacts led by trust and the common sense of belonging to a community – even a business community – that shares similar values and attitudes. The findings in this book can therefore inform the debates on cultural sustainability, providing more insights on how culture mediates practices, symbolisation, reification and institutionalisation in multi-scale spatial development.

With this perspective, the notion of 'territorialisation' further challenges regional studies, especially in economics and sociology. By defining the crucial role that culture and knowledge play, territorialisation reconnects the study to state, market and social dynamics within specific time and space frames, while increasing the adherence of economic structures to historical–empirical reality. In the sociological strand, it challenges the disciplinary divisions among urban and rural social scientists. Physical, biological, social, economic and political relations, processes and practices involving the built and the natural environment – still considered outside the social construction of reality – need to be recognised by both urban and rural sociology in order to avoid ineffective forms of strong constructionism that could lead to disciplinary reductionism.

More knowledge is needed to analyse the type and quality of territorial coproductions, mediated by milieu, but this is a story for another time and perhaps another book.

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