Euro-politics of scale: competing visions of the region in eastern Germany

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Abstract:

As John Agnew (Political geography: a reader, 1997) has argued, political and economic change often occasions competing visions of the scales that are appropriate for organizing particular political and economic activities. Nowhere is this more evident than in the European Union, and eastern Germany offers compelling evidence of the contested nature of contemporary scalar politics. Yet a recent debate in human geography (see, e.g. Marston et al., Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 30:416–432, 2005) calls into question the very concept of scale and rejects its hierarchical conceptualization. In light of this debate, it is appropriate to draw on real-world case studies to examine the ways in which geography figures into policy. Drawing on field work in Saxony, evidence is offered in the form of competing visions of regionalism in the EU context. The evidence presented complicates both hierarchical and flat notions of scale. The current process of querying space to identify those scales that are best-suited for the globalized economy offers insights into both the socially constructed nature of scale as well as the ways in which scalar lenses help to illuminate the geographical aspects (and consequences) of strategies for coping with structural changes.

Keywords: regionalism | European Union Germany | transboundary cooperation | political geography | geography | politics

Article:

Introduction

How are we to make sense of new, innovative spaces of governance in modern Europe? Obviously, this is a question that has been the subject of robust discussion in geography, political science, and other social sciences (Brenner 2000; Gualini 2004; Hooghe and Marks 2003; Jönsson et al. 2000; Keating 2003; Le Galès and Lequesne 1998; MacLeod 1999; Paasi 2002).

The European Union (EU), through its regional policy, has provided local, regional, and national policymakers, as well as private interests and NGOs, with the means to act outside of the neat containers of classical, hierarchical political geographies of the state. With the speed of change, there is of course the risk that the novelty of new spaces of governance be overstated. After all, the structures of the EU were set up to ensure the ongoing influence of the national member states. Even in some ostensibly novel political geographic contexts, ranging from the drawing of administrative boundaries for statistical gathering purposes (NUTS) to the establishment of international cooperative arrangements between communities and regions, national states continue to leave their own bureaucratic imprint upon what might otherwise be considered uniquely "European" spaces. Yet it is also increasingly clear that we can no longer treat the delimitation of space under the pretense of Europe as just another in the neat, logically nested levels of territorial organization with the nation-state forming the focal point.

In this article, the approach to these geographical spaces makes use of the analytical lens of scale. In human geography, scale is perhaps most usefully viewed as an epistemological lens that shapes perceptions of social activities and relations (i.e. politics, economics, etc.). On this subject, Adam Moore has noted that far from scale being a meaningless abstraction, there are

very material consequences when specific scalar formulations are successfully disseminated and utilized by powerful political actors and institutions to further specific political projects (2008, p. 214).

Examples of such "material consequences" are examined later in the paper.

At the same time, it is important to point out that the example of transboundary regionalism used in this paper is not the only possible entry point into the usefulness of scalar perspectives on contemporary territorial restructuring in Europe. One possible alternative is offered by work by Church and Reid (1996) on cross-border interurban policy networks across the English Channel. Such interurban networks are not particularly prevalent along Germany's eastern border, the area examined in this paper, though there are undoubtedly some of the same issues at hand.1

It would be incorrect to assume that regionalism occurring with the financial blessing of the EU is simply the regional scale (transboundary place) being activated by another scale (EU) to create success stories at yet another scale (global). Such a narrative, which is fairly typical in the literature on European regionalism, paints a neater picture than my own research supports. In fact, regionalism in this part of the EU is not only mediated, but also actively co-opted by local, regional and national actors for their own purposes—ones not always in line with the stated goals of regional policy. Consequently, EU institutions are perhaps best seen as one of the governance contexts within which local and regional actors must negotiate (see Hooghe and Marks 2003).

With this background in mind, my purpose in this paper is twofold. First, focusing on one particular instance of transboundary regional cooperation along the international border of the federal state of Saxony, Germany, I examine how transboundary space is being incorporated into

strategies for coping with structural change in eastern Germany. The use of the term "transboundary" is intended to encompass the range of terms (in English, crossborder, transnational, interregional, in German, grenzüberschreitende Kooperation) used to describe regional cooperation across international borders. This provides a timely illustration of the strategic mobilization of transboundary regional scale by various actors, and it offers insights into the experimental character of transboundary governance. Second, the larger relevance of this case is considered in the second part of the paper. In particular, the case study is situated within ongoing debates in human geography over the appropriateness of scalar-driven analysis. Regionalism strategies under the auspices of EU is at least in part viewed by local, regional and national elites as one out of many strategies for addressing perceived inadequacies of post-unification restructuring strategies pursued to date in eastern Germany. Scale proves a useful tool in order to examine and make sense of this type of regionalism.

Situating eastern Germany in Europe

Of late, since around 2000, many stakeholders in Germany—voters, political leaders, and business elites—have grown restless with the progress made in their national unification project (see Cooke 2005; Dennis and Kolinsky 2004; Lentz 2007). The enormous idealism and political capital generated by events in 1989 sustained the notion that eastern Germany should be lifted up based on a national-political ideal ("we are one people"), but many signs suggest that those sources of sustenance have run their course. Results to show for the trillion-and-a-half euros invested (west → east) are perceived as being too thin. With the enlargement of the EU, moreover, there is a growing sense that investments in eastern Germany are futile without radical structural reforms to stop the bleeding of capital and skilled labor occurring there. It seems eastern Germany offers little to corporate leaders and other potential investors that is not available further to the east (at much lower cost), nor does it offer enough opportunities to young people entering the labor market, which helps explain the migrations to job markets in Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, and other points in the West.

The widely-held belief that East Germany could be subsumed into West Germany's governance and economic structures and rise to the West's level of development if only enough money were spent across the entire space of East Germany has been nearly completely abandoned. A consensus has emerged among policy elites in the West and East of Germany alike that the process of 'rebuilding the East' [Aufbau Ost] has not sufficiently taken into account the realities of an increasingly global economy, for which even the western part of the country was not well-prepared (Müller 2005).

As the recriminations of each side against the other grow louder in the media and the body politic, the inadequacy of existing territorial structures has emerged as partly to blame for the lack of progress. As Agnew (1997) has pointed out, political and economic change often

occasions competing visions of the scales that are appropriate for organizing particular political and economic activities. In light of the political imperative that has emerged to "fix" the inadequacies of governance approaches in eastern Germany, a number of strategies have come to the fore as promising remedies, such as focusing resources on promoting industrial clusters, consolidating jurisdictional territories deemed too small for global competitiveness, and pursuing closer cooperation with neighboring regions in Poland and the Czech Republic. The latter of these offer insights not only into how processes of territorial restructuring in Germany are being shaped and impacted by European integration, but also into how the concept of scale can assist us in making sense of such processes. The goal of such strategies it seems is to turn a liability of geographical location—along a border with lower-wage locations to the east and south—into a strategic advantage by transgressing the border. This is, naturally, easier said than done. Yet the key point from a geographical perspective is that the existing structures and options for expanding horizons across borders are not sufficient for the task at hand. In light of this, how local and regional elites have become creative and experimental, encouraged in turn by the national level, is a key avenue for understanding the nature of territorial restructuring in contemporary Europe.

Regionalism in eastern Germany

The current process of querying space in Germany to identify those scales that are best-suited for the globalized economy includes transboundary regionalism. Unlike western Germany or the rest of western Europe, regionalism in eastern Germany was imposed practically overnight as the two Germanys reunified and the East was incorporated into the structures of the European Community. Regionalism did not evolve over a lengthy period in a context of flush public coffers and post-war making-up as it had in the West. Aside from its border with the FRG, East Germany bordered only other communist states (Poland and Czechoslovakia), which entered the EU much later (2004). As a result, transboundary regions are institutionally and functionally less well developed along eastern Germany's borders with the Czech Republic and Poland than, for example, the Maas-Rhine Region (D-B-NL) or the Upper Rhine Region (D-CH-F).2 With the accession of eastern neighbors to the EU, however, there has been awakened interest in cooperation, or as one official put it to me, "coopetition" [in German: Koopkurrenz], a neologism appropriated from the realm of business intended to suggest places across the border from each other are both cooperating and competing for investment at the same time.3 Yet the character of cooperation has undergone a perceptible shift from one of 'feel-good' collaboration to one geared towards finding a place on a global map of attractive places.

Case study: German–Czech–Polish border area

Perhaps nowhere is the changing character of transboundary regionalism more evident than in the border area between Germany, the Czech Republic, and Poland. For purposes of simplification, I have focused my attention on Saxony, eastern Germany's largest state in terms of population, and the one with the longest international border (with the Czech Republic and Poland) at 577 km. Saxony is the lead partner on more international cooperation arrangements than any other region in Europe, and within Germany, Saxony has the largest number of partnerships financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).4

The role of the EU

Regions under the EU rubric Interreg IIIA, soon to be IVA, which are often referred to as Euroregions, have historically been the most important component to cross-border regionalism in Saxony and elsewhere in Europe. Such regions are generally designed to foster cultural exchange and 'good feelings' in a border area, as well as to pursue more functional integration of infrastructure and services. These regions are typically circumscribed by territorial and administrative boundaries reflecting the participating states' administrative political geographies. As such, Euroregions tend to be

1. focused on projects with particular relevance to rural areas (such as environmental management, school exchanges, and infrastructure linkages),

2. economically peripheral, reflecting their location along national borders with previously low levels of permeability, and

3. below the radar of state-led, urban-centric governance strategies for growth, such as industrial clusters, strategic R&D investments, and investment attraction.

Given relatively recent histories of war, expulsion, and expatriation in this particular area, few would question the utility and potential benefits of such regions in lessening the role of borders as national markers. Yet such goals are somewhat passé in a Europe where the focus of late has been on making its "fast world" of global cities even more powerful, while the more peripheral "'slow world' of catatonic rural settings, declining manufacturing regions, and disadvantaged slums" falls even further behind (Knox 2002, p. 329).

Contemporary efforts at regionalism within the context of the EU may today be only

[…] regions in discourses' and 'regions on paper', but they may some day turn into 'regions as social practice' with very concrete effects on the daily lives of people. (Paasi 2002, pp. 198–200)

Here is not the place to review EU regional policies in any detail. Suffice it to say that since the mid-1970s, when the focus of redistribution in the European context shifted from sectoral supports (e.g. steel and agriculture) to geographical supports (e.g. regional policy), regionalism initiatives have become increasingly widespread. Such redistributive mechanisms became even more pressing when the single market was enacted in the 1980s, and EU leaders sought to blunt anti-Europe sentiment that might be caused by growing regional disparities brought on by lowered trade barriers (Hall and van der Wee 1995, p. 9). With multiple enlargements, the focus on redistribution has shifted more to socio-political and economic integration as the primary goals of regional policy, and examples are found along the borders between the original EU members and recent entrants.

Nevertheless, Euroregions (and other mesoscale transboundary regions with different labels) still make up the lion's share of monies (approximately 75%) available to local and regional actors wishing to cooperate across borders. My research suggests that the trend is away from the cultural interchange ('people-to-people' projects) and low-level cooperation on issues such as environmental management, and towards more "unusual regionalism" in terms of cross-border cooperation (Deas and Lord 2006). In the case of the former, big ideas of fostering transboundary interaction often involved quotidian things directly relevant only to those in the immediate vicinity of that border: which fire department would respond in case of a forest fire; how public transportation schedules might be coordinated to lessen the disadvantages of peripheral location along an international border; how schools could foster the learning of the language spoken just across the border. As the case study I draw on below illustrates, border Euroregions are viewed to serve a useful purpose, but the requirements of global competition require 'scaling up' of transboundary space if it is to meet the demands of global capitalism. The reasoning is really quite simple: a region must possess a critical mass of strategic assets such as infrastructure, labor, educational and training facilities, and amenities in order to be attractive for global investment, and Euroregions are viewed as being too small to be serious global contenders (Fig. 1).
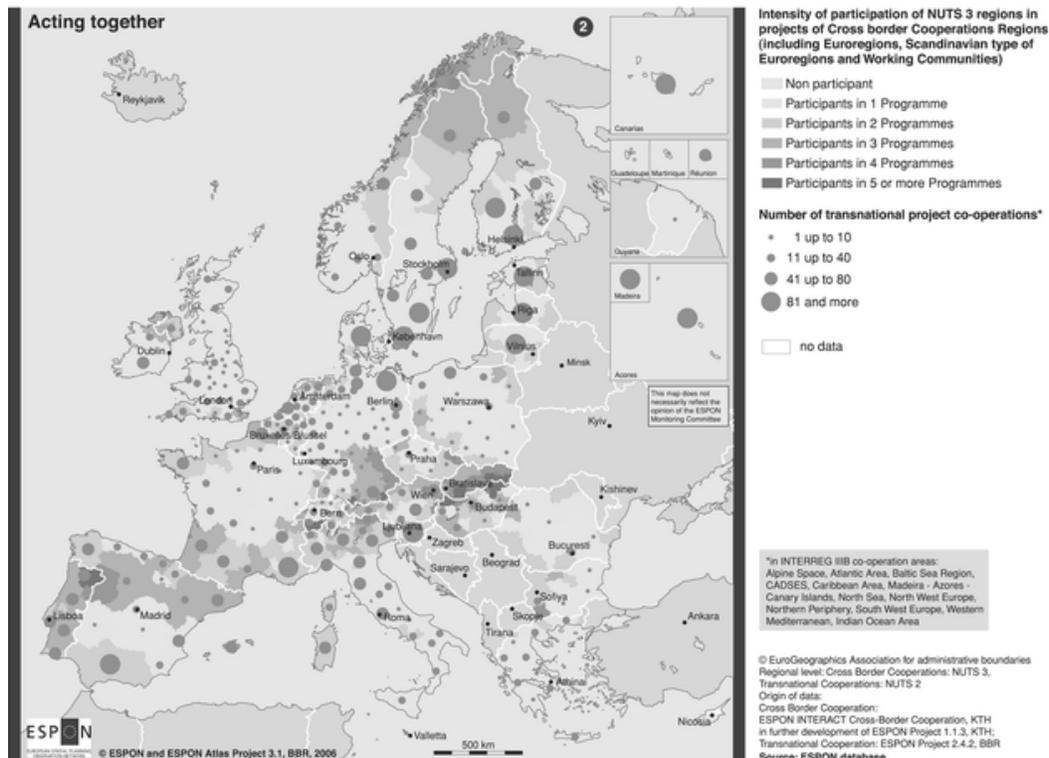
Fig. 1

Intensity of transboundary cooperation in the European Union. Source: ESPON Atlas: Mapping the structure of the European territory, October 2006, p. 57, http://www.espon.eu/mmp/online/website/content/publications/98/1235/file_2489/final-atlas_web.pdf

As a consequence, local and regional elites—enabled by officials at state and European levels—are increasingly looking past Euroregions in their attempts to 'create' regions capable of 'going global.' Quite obviously then, scale, as it has been defined and deployed by geographers in the last two decades, is invaluable in understanding such processes. In order to explain this line of reasoning, I move briefly through the actors involved in setting up transboundary space as a site of competitive advantage.

Role of the German state

As other authors have noted, the state is an active participant in territorial restructuring and rescaling strategies (Brenner 2003; Mansfield 2005). This extends to regional cooperation across borders. The federal government of Germany views this as an opportunity for eastern Germany to become less dependent on transfers from the West. As described earlier, pressure has been steadily increasing to show progress in 'rebuilding the east,' and excerpts from texts by Wolfgang Tiefensee, a former mayor of Leipzig and since 2005 the federal official responsible for the New Federal States,5 illustrate that transboundary space is to play a key role in this:

The large structural political challenges in Europe require increasingly not only international cooperation between states, but between all actors who partake in regional development—particularly regions, cities and communities. […] Locational advantage and development chances of a region depend today no longer just on geographical position, infrastructure, or economic structure, but rather just as much on the ability to work together in European projects and political projects. This is particularly the case in eastern Germany and the new member states of eastern Europe, which had been cut off from European economic integration processes for many decades. (Wolfgang Tiefensee in Federal Ministry of Transport Building and Urban Affairs (Germany), 2006, pp. i, my translation)

The message is clear: by encouraging economic contacts, cooperation across borders thus can improve the economic possibilities for struggling regions in eastern Germany. Given Germany's central location [Mittellage], eastern Germany's existing networks and expertise in eastern Europe and the sheer number of active cooperation arrangements, the same report concludes that eastern Germany can serve as mediator between the two sides of Europe:

The eastern part of Germany serves in the role of mediator in this process. The new federal states profit from experiences of the old Länder and west European regions. They take this knowledge and adapt it based on their own experiences and according to the concrete conditions on the ground and pass this value-added know-how along to east European partners. (Federal Ministry of Transport Building and Urban Affairs (Germany), 2006, p. 1)

With the declining importance of spatial redistribution as a raison d'état, transboundary regions fill a certain role here by "allowing structurally weak areas to tap into specific development potentials and thus diminishing economic and social disparities" (ibid, p. 44). Importantly, as pointed out by Preusscher (2005, p. 6), regions have little choice but to listen to the federal government in this regard, since receipt of money from Brussels is often contingent upon co-financing from the state. In the case of eastern German Länder, regional governments are also dependent on the federal state for continued financial supports as mentioned above. The imprimatur of the state—while mediated heavily by other levels—is thus assured.

Role of the region: a case from Saxony

The relevance of transboundary regions to processes of rescaling becomes visible in the regions as well, and my research along the Czech-German border is an appropriate case study in this regard. Officials in local and provincial governments in Dresden, Saxony, Germany, and Ústí nad Labem, Czech Republic were interviewed in 2006 and the summer of 2007. I also examined a variety of official documents from the relevant government institutions and press releases related to cross-border cooperation. During the winter and spring of 2006, I also observed a coordinating meeting of the 3-CIP cross-border region in Ústí (February 2006).

In the case of Saxony, enthusiasm for cooperation with Poland and the Czech Republic is motivated by a sense of opportunity and 'this is where our future is,' but also partly by a sense of admiration and nervousness. When a factory worker in Chemnitz looks eastward towards Poland, where wages are much lower than what she is earning for a similar job, and where workers demand far less of management, the writing is on the wall. There is a fairly widespread perception among Germans in the state of Saxony, judging by an analysis of regional newspapers, that Poles and Czechs—especially those just the other side of the border—have more of the same qualities they associate with themselves such as work ethic, job skills, and dependability as contrasted with someone from further to the east in Belarus or Bulgaria.

Experimental regionalism and the EU

"Viewed globally, [cross-border cooperation] is really our only chance to develop collectively. We can't do it on our own." Interview with official of the state of Saxony, March 30, 2007 (author's translation)

Within the regional government in Saxony, a collective wisdom has emerged that the EU enlargement of 2004, which made its border no longer the 'eastern frontier' of Europe, must figure into development strategies. Saxony, along with most other German Länder, has a sizable section of its state government devoted to international relations and projects, and its top ministers will travel 'abroad' several times a year on trade missions. The smaller scale of immediately bordering regions, such as Euroregion partner regions, are typically not high enough profile for top ministers so that such tasks are left to lower level bureaucrats. Meanwhile, a figure such as the Minister President is engaged in a regular foreign policy, attempting to profile his/her region throughout the world. The meaning of official appointments only with others 'auf Augenhöhe' ('at eye level'), once an almost sacred German bureaucratic principle, has been broadened in such a global-player context, and might even include a meeting with the Russian president or the Israeli prime minister. While the jurisdiction of ministers of a Land is geographically clearly delimited, there is obvious appeal in increasing the spatial reference points in order to make the region more attractive. To paraphrase the typical discourse in this regard, Saxony is not tucked away in a forgotten corner of south-eastern Germany, but rather it is located at a crossroads in the heart of Central Europe [Mitte Mitteleuropas]. It not only

encompasses the territorial expanse labeled "Saxony" on a map, but it functions in a mediating role between East and West, and so forth.

The territorialization of these regional strategies is growing in size. Euroregions, as previously mentioned, are intended for human interactions on relatively small scales, but investors do not think in these terms. This helps to explain the emergence of "large-space projects" ["grossraum Projekte"] such as the one described below.6 3-CIP (3 Countries Innovation Push), the rather unsexy project name for a collaborative arrangement pursued under the aegis of the EU's Interreg IIIC program, is one case worthy of further attention. This region encompasses the states of Brandenburg and Saxony in Germany, as well as three districts of northern Bohemia in the Czech Republic (Karlovarský kraj, Ústecký kraj and Liberecký kraj) and the Polish voivodeships Dolnośląskie (Lower Silesia), Lubuskie, and Wielkopolskie (Greater Poland). Curiously, the German city-state of Berlin, whose government declined to participate, creates a hole within the region, which certainly presents a challenge to the coherence of such a region down the road. It is possible that Berlin, whose global city aspirations are no secret, was uncomfortable considering itself as being on the periphery of a central European economic region. (Figs. 2, 3).
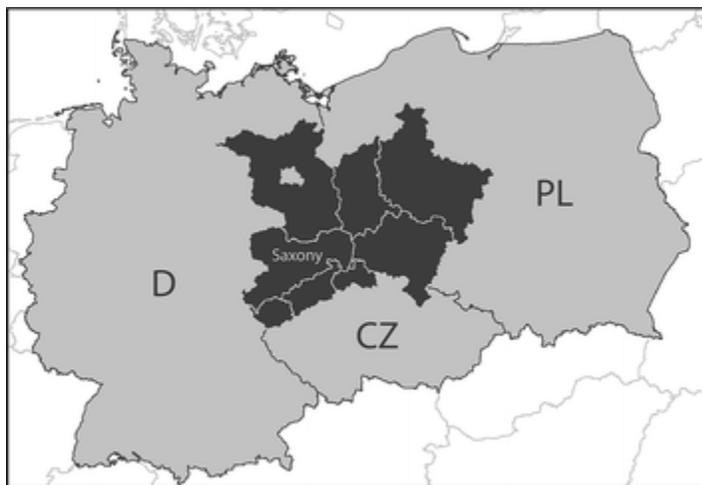

Fig. 2

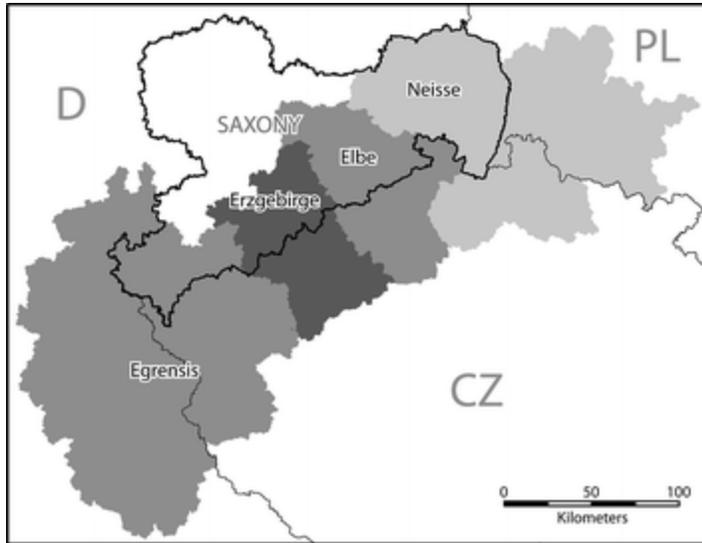3-CIP region, Germany, Poland, Czech Republic

Fig. 3

Euroregions along the border of Saxony, Germany

EU projects such as this one require a lead partner, and unsurprisingly, Saxony is the initiator and lead partner for 3-CIP. The vision of a globally relevant region in the heart of Europe (with Saxony at the center) clearly attracts varying degrees of enthusiasm among participating regional governments and institutions. Such a region, so the hope, couples the strengths of both the German side (superior infrastructure, transparency in bureaucratic order, and dependably well-trained workforce) with those of Poland and the Czech Republic (basically, low wages and high-skills). But arguably the image conveyed by such salesmanship is more favorable to the German side, as the Poles and Czechs are not rushing out to call attention to higher levels of corruption, opaque bureaucratic structures, or substandard infrastructure. Moreover, the different respective political structures essentially propel the German side into the driver's seat. Germany can be considered a strong federal state, where the individual Länder, including Saxony, have fairly clearly defined administrative competencies, and as a consequence, they are able to pursue relationships across borders relatively unencumbered by the national government in Berlin. Poland, by contrast, is still quite centralized, with the voivodeships maintaining very little autonomy vis-à-vis the central government in Warsaw. The Czech case lies somewhere in the middle: in spite of recent (2000) administrative reforms and decentralization, the kraje (regions) are still less self-assured in the European context than their German counterpart regions, though the imprint of the national government in Prague on the foreign affairs of the kraje is still less than in the case of Poland. Such a description is to be expected given the fact that eastern Germany simply had the well-established federal structures and relatively clear divisions of power of the West imposed immediately after unification, thus highlighting eastern Germany's divergent post-1989 path from its other post-socialist neighbors.

A bit of exploration of 3-CIP documentation is instructive in this regard. The following quotes from strategy documents and public proclamations offer insights into the thinking of regional officials (again, particularly on the German side) with respect to how and why such a regional mobilization is pursued:

Border regions are often disadvantaged regions. In consequence of [being peripheral] in national structure[s], they have to struggle with location's set backs. Huge distances to economic centers, poor infrastructures and transport connections [mean] that border regions are less attractive for potential investors. They endanger themselves to be demoted to regions with transit function. Language barriers and different administration structures accrue in addition. (3-CIP Steering Group 2004)

Whether more integration would remedy all of the symptoms of being a border region enumerated above is questionable. But moving on, there seems to be little choice but to cooperate:

[…] with the enlargement of the EU area there are new chances for joint development. A lot of contacts and co-operation between German, Czech and Polish partners are developed daily and are being developed very well. A good foundation for the new Europeans challenges in the conflict between globalization and regionalization emerges from there. (ibid)

This is framed not in the terms of low-level, 'feel-good' cooperation of Euroregions, but rather in the lofty, post-national, global-ese of Ohmae (1995) and others. More to the point, there is historical precedent for regionalizing here:

There is yet another advantage: We can build on a historically grown economic area, which had been only once separated by the Second World War and which we now recollect. (ibid)

Certainly it is not novel to use economic integration as an appropriate jumping off point in Europe. Indeed, the entire European integration project is more or less premised on integration of commerce preceding other sorts of integration (culture, etc.). But in this particular corner of Europe, relating again back to the delicate histories of dislocation, expulsion, hegemony, and so on, the reference to the historical economic integration of Northern Bohemia, Lower Silesia and Saxony/Brandenburg is not necessarily a fact taken for granted on all sides. It would be naïve to believe that the passage of time, or the "integration" of Europe, has caused all resentments to disappear—and my interviews confirm this is a constant, if publicly unmentioned, backdrop to discussions between Polish, German, and Czech partners.

Drawing the seemingly arbitrary borders of the region in this way, it has some 16 million people, is physically as large as Austria and Switzerland, and has an economy as strong as Greece's (3-CIP Steering Group 2006). This region, with its "centuries-long" common history has the potential, according to its visionaries, to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by EU enlargement "for borderless economic cooperation […] between 'old' and 'new' Europe along

important trans-European axes" (ibid.). This "strategic transnational alliance" is about both competition and cooperation ("coopetition"), as that is what makes all sides stronger according to the dominant logic of at least the authors of reports justifying the region's existence.

The vision of this particular transboundary space, linking nine regions in eastern Germany, western Poland and the northern Czech Republic, is as follows:

1. We are convinced that the EU enlargement in 2004 has provided an additional and decisive stimulus for the development of the neighboring regions in the triangle between Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland into a common region of growth and prosperity. It is our firm intention to give our long-term and ambitious support to this development and use all opportunities of cross-border cooperation.

2. Our joint efforts are directed towards representing the region as an attractive economic area in Europe and worldwide. […]

3. A new idea that sets new cooperation standards shall be realised: The joint profiling, presentation and marketing of our Central European economic area. […] (3-CIP Steering Group 2005).

3-CIP was funded during the 2004–2006 EU funding cycle through Interreg III-C.7 Leaders in the relevant regions have agreed in principle to continue the project even without EU monies. The rationale for continuing is outlined in a Joint Declaration in 2007 by the participating institutions (see Table 1):

The joint objective is to establish a profile and to undertake marketing measures to forge a strong and attractive economic region right in the heart of Europe. The participants wish to promote the development of a business region in which entrepreneurs, networks and branches as well as employees will find such beneficial conditions that they will be able to fully develop their true potentials. (3-CIP Steering Group 2007)

Table 1

Selected participating organizations in the successor region to 3-CIP (3-CIP Steering Group 2007)

Germany	Czech Republic	Poland
Saxony Economic Development Corporation (WFS)	Usti Region	Lower Silesian Marshal Office
Dresden Chamber of Commerce (IHK Dresden/Conact Center for Saxon-Polish Economic Cooperation)	Regionální rozvojová agentura Ústeckého kraje, a.s.	DIG Dolnośląska Izba Gospodarcza
Federal Labor Agency/Saxony Regional Office)	Česko-německá obchodní a průmyslová komora	ZIG Zachodnia Izba Gospodarcza
Federation of Saxon Industry (VSW)	CzechInvest, Branch Liberec	EUROPA FORUM
Future Agency of the State of Brandenburg GmbH (ZAB)	Česká sporitelna, a.s.	SYGMA sp. z o.o.
Center for Innovation and Technology GmbH (CIT)	Krajska Hospodarska Komora Liberec Regioinfo s.r.o.	

In observing trilateral meetings of 3-CIP in Germany and the Czech Republic, and in conversations with various officials, it was clear that there were frustrations on all sides, revolving in part around the cultural differences alluded to earlier, but also because of different levels of expectations concerning the project: generally, the German side wanted more cooperation than they were receiving in presenting the region to the outside as a single, unified location fit for global investment, while the Czech and Polish sides were concerned that the German side was acting in its own self interest. Several factors contribute to uneven levels of engagement, but at the forefront among them is the highly developed set of economic development institutions on the German side (and their need to justify their existence by concrete results in a challenging business environment) and the higher concentration of high-wage service sector and technology jobs in and around the urban agglomerations of Dresden and Leipzig.

Planning meetings, which in my experience were attended by local and regional administration officials and economic development officers, generally revolve around the sharing of general information and recent events from each respective participant's region, discussion of matters of note for the region as a whole (such as progress towards completion of the high-speed autobahn linking Dresden and Prague, and discussions of industries that have some cross-border relevance as far as cluster formation is concerned. Even at this relatively small scale, simultaneous translation German–Polish–Czech is provided, though at some meetings the working language is either English, or more commonly, German.

The main focus of this paper is not the cultural-historical geographies of this area, but it is worth mentioning briefly some of the potential hurdles to successful region-building. Focusing on cultural attributes, Knippschild (2006, p. 2) offers a plausible explanation for the lack of transferability of western experience with regionalism to places such as Saxony. The border between Saxony and the Czech Republic and Poland is a "hard border." Linguistic differences, and widespread mutual antipathy towards learning the neighbor region's language, are two complications. Indeed, even in historically German-speaking regions 20 km from the border into the Czech Republic, it was rare to find even well-educated bureaucrats who spoke German. Even rarer was to find officials in regional administration offices on the German side who could exchange even pleasantries in Czech.8 Another factor pointed out by Knippschild is the difficult historical context of this corner of Central Europe. Constructing a cross-border regional identity is complicated by mutual distrust dating to very ugly histories of displacement and expulsion during and after World War II.

Gauging the 'success' of this cross-border arrangement would be difficult for a number of reasons. More important, though, is what such cooperation tells us about scales of exchange and interaction. Local and regional officials in this border area have become thoroughly international in their thinking and orientation, and they have become skilled at deploying funds from the EU and other sources in order to pursue their own localized strategies for making the region competitive under harsh global conditions. Hence, the value in looking beyond existing territorial structures to the geographies of "unusual" or "experimental" regions becomes apparent on the ground.

Scale as a frame of analysis for transboundary regionalism

On its own, 3-CIP, with its youth, a relatively meager budget (around €1 million), and modest name-recognition as far as transboundary arrangements go, is not currently fundamentally changing European geography. Nor is that the point of this discourse. Rather, I have used it as an example of the ways in which transboundary space is being mobilized in the absence of clearly defined, mutually agreed-upon conceptions of what cross-border cooperation in Europe should look like. Given that the "revolutionary transformation" in eastern Germany (Turnock 2001, p. 2)

is still relatively new compared with other major state-building processes in the industrial world, the region makes a particularly attractive site for examining these processes.

More broadly, this discussion can contribute to understandings of space and territoriality in contemporary Europe as places attempt to jump on the boxcar while the globalization train moves at full speed. There is, of course, still much confusion (recall the hole where Berlin should be), and there is as yet fairly little material for scholars to grasp hold of clear territorial demarcations of "new state spaces" (Brenner 2004). This is where the geographical concept of scale is useful.

Scale debates

The last two-and-a-half decades have seen a blossoming interest among geographers in the concept of scale. No longer simply a static gauge (scale = static, pre-1980s) employed at the outset of a research project to delimit the scope of inquiry, many geographers, and particularly critical human geographers, treat scale as a dynamic, politicized spatial trope that helps us understand all aspects of socio-spatial phenomena (scale = structured/constructed, 1980s–2000s). One of the reasons for the prominence, persistence, and passion of debates over scale during recent decades is that they are informed by both structuralist (Smith 1995; Swyngedouw 1997) and poststructuralist (Jones 1998; Marston 2000) perspectives.9 Whether conceived as material (i.e. actually-existing) or socially constructed (i.e. an epistemology), there is general agreement that scale is politicized and instrumentalized.

Once neo-Marxist geographers began to fundamentally challenge a taken-for-granted view of scale as merely an organizing principle for the world, studies proliferated that were aimed at understanding how the different scales (along a continuum from local to global) were in fact "brought into being" by specific actors towards particular ends (summarized by Herod 2003). The early period of critical scalar analyses saw fruitful inquiry into world systems theory, in which the global system (macro-scale) interacted with the local (micro-scale) in a regime of "systematic surplus transfers," where an intermediary meso-scale (e.g. regions) played little if any substantive role (Meyer et al. 1992). For the most part, 'the global' was more powerful than 'the local' in early critical analyses of scalar politics; indeed, globalization studies are based largely on the assumption of the local being relatively powerless in the face of global processes of economic integration. Yet in some ways these embryonic writings on scale ran counter to the fact that geographers had, for the most, always been interested in regions as an organizing principle—or organizing scale—of space situated somewhere between the local and global. In the intervening years, regions and regional geography have been partially revived in geography (Allen et al. 1998; Johnston et al. 1990; MacLeod and Jones 2001; Murphy 2006), and this has been accompanied by a return of meso-scale (i.e. regions) analysis of scalar processes. This category of scale complicates a teleological notion of the local-global continuum. The notion that

regions play some sort of mediating role between local and global scales preserves a role for ongoing contact and engagement with regional constructs (for a comprehensive overview of these issues, see Sheppard and McMaster 2004).

For political geographers, the scale debates occurring in the discipline since the 1980 s provide a welcome sharpening of one of the key tools at our disposal, for the analytical lens of scale can be usefully deployed to help understand regionalism in the European Union. Of particular consequence in a geoeconomic and geopolitical context of globalization are these questions (summarized by Claval 2006): what scales should be considered; how are scales being blurred; and, perhaps most important, how are particular scales implicated in fixing capital, and what role do which actors play in such scalar politics?

Transboundary regionalism pursued with the blessing of the EU exists outside the political-territorial structures available constitutionally within the borders of the German state, and yet it is understood as holding promise in helping put the eastern part of Germany on stable footing in a globalized economy. Local and regional elites, with the blessing of European and national officials, construct cross-border regions as a site of global competitiveness. Within these spaces, there is an effective absence of clear divisions of power and responsibility, hence their experimental character. Regionalism of this sort highlights the constructed nature of this scale. By my estimation, this includes portraying transboundary space as

a European space with global import for the attraction of investment

an asset to local and regional economic development efforts ('moving beyond the provincial')

a cultural asset, by emphasizing historical-cultural normalcy of cross-border ties

in the German case, a response to pressure on local and regional governance to appear proactive in addressing the shortcomings of unification.

Inquiry utilizing scale can identify how the geographical imaginations of elites, with both power of purse and the capacity to shape public opinion, construct space to particular ends. A recent provocative polemic by Marston et al. (2005) assesses the state of affairs with respect to scale as an analytical tool and concludes that the concept should be packed off to the trash heap of intellectual history, replaced instead with what the authors refer to as a "flat ontology".

Scale = stale?

Scale as it is frequently deployed, Marston et al. (2005) argue, locks us into rigid hierarchies and results in binaries (e.g. global vs. local) that have no relevance to the ways in which the world is organized, though as I have already pointed out, the meso-scale (represented by regions) has made a comeback of sorts yet is not mentioned by the authors. Related, they criticize the frequent

use of the God-trick in scalar research: invoking the familiar language of poststructural criticisms of positivist spatial science, they argue that "form determin[es] content" (i.e. shape of the scale restricts ambit of inquiry) and an Archimedian perspective assumes the researcher's objectivity (p. 422). In sum, these represent "foundational weaknesses" (p. 417) and justify searching for new alternatives to scale. One must acknowledge that Marston et al. are not alone in questioning the usefulness of scale (they cite, among others, De Landa 2002; Deleuze 1994; Howitt 1993). Moreover, their provocation is in the rich tradition of other critical scholars who have proposed radical solutions as a means of shaking the tree that represents a particularly laden concept (for a proposal to dismiss "culture" from our vocabularies, see Mitchell 1995).

Paasi (2004) acknowledges that scale can be a 'chaotic conception' or a 'bad abstraction' (citing Howitt 1993; Jonas 1994), but unlike Marston et al. (2005), he sees a continuing role for scale in framing the key geographical concepts of place and region. Region and, in particular, geography's "regional method" represent critical intermediaries between the raw, anonymous global forces and the familiar, but increasingly besieged, local. Paasi is surely correct when he writes that

Scales are not fixed, separate levels of the social world but, like regions/places, are structured and institutionalized in complex ways in de/reterritorializing practices and discourses that may be partly concrete, powerful and bounded, but also partly unbounded, vague or invisible. Scales are also historically contingent; they are produced, exist and may be destroyed or transformed in social and political practices and struggles. The institutionalization/deinstitutionalization of region, place and scale are in fact inseparable elements in the perpetual process of regional transformation (Paasi 2004, p. 542).

A number of other respondents have also taken the authors' treatment of scale to task (Collinge 2006; Hoefle 2006; Jonas 2006; Leitner and Miller 2007). This prompt reaction, combined with the lack of any substantive resonance coming from geographers in favor of discarding scale in light of their piece, suggests that scale is withstanding this recent siege.

As becomes clear, a major impetus for Marston et al.'s (2005) rejection of scale as a useful tool in the geographer's toolbox is its implication in globalization studies and socio-spatial scholarship more generally. They are not just concerned with geographers' insistence on the use of the global-local continuum, but also how popular authors (most notably Tom Friedman) have employed hierarchical language to send globalization blame up the ladder. Consequently, the blame for layoffs, pollution and other ills associated with global corporations is removed from the real individuals who make decisions, and is instead displaced upon the global (i.e. "global corporation") with the rationale that such corporations can't help but engage in antisocial behavior given the inexorable pressures of "globalization." That climbing the ladder of scale too often suggests somehow a greater degree of causation ("global" as the most powerful causative force in contemporary human affairs) is a valid criticism.

At the same time, however, it is important for us to guard against the tendency for some analytical tool, whether scale, space, place, to be essentialized or imbued with causal force (see e.g. Collinge 2005; Zierhofer 2002). For elected and unelected European officials, local and regional authorities, economic development professionals, etc., the starting point in terms of the constructs addressed in this paper is not a particular scale per se, nor is their intent merely socially to construct something. Much as Murphy (1991, p. 25) observed more than fifteen years ago about regions, another construct utilized for understanding the geographies of economic and political change, scales today are not simply socially, but also literally, "constructed" to fulfill some utility.

As the map of European regional initiatives shows, these spaces are not neatly nested within existing political geographies. They overlap, and it is this imbrication of space that makes scalar analysis useful, as they clearly do not fit well at either end of the global-local continuum. But global and local actors are implicated in making this meso-scale of European transboundary space what it is, as the case of 3-CIP shows. Scalar analysis, sensitive to the construction of a particular space towards a political–economic end, is most useful in understanding how the geography of Europe is changing in modern times.

Conclusion

There can be little doubt that the European project has been at least in part about the purposeful reorganization of space in the service of goals common to the collective peoples contained with the European Union. Going back in time to the very inception of a unified Europe in the aftermath of World War II, one can witness in those early writings a burgeoning sense that there must be territorial reorganization of one sort or another if Europe, or "Europeans," were indeed to become "post-national" (Delanty 2005). And EU regional policy arguably is the clearest and most compelling evidence we have of this reorganization. Begun in the 1970 s, propelled to new heights in the 1980s, and reaching maturity during the past fifteen years or so, regionalism on paper is about breaking down boundaries for the good of the whole. But to what ends, other than the stated goals? How similar are the goals of those actors implementing transboundary arrangements on the ground to the goals of those in Brussels deciding who gets funded and who does not? Is the idealistic purpose of socio-cultural integration sublimated into the more "realistic" policy goal of economic cohesion, and if economic cohesion is more important, where does wealth redistribution fit into the equation?

Using the example of transboundary arrangements along the border of eastern Germany with the Czech Republic and Poland, I have shown that the politics of scale surrounding European regions are largely inseparable from the local and national politics of economic development. In the case of eastern Germany, the project of creating an economically sustainable successor region to the former Communist state—and the desire of local officials to be seen contributing to

this effort—tells us more about the politics of transboundary cooperation than piles of EU communiqués. Mobilizing cross-border space along the border with the Czech Republic and Poland in the interests of European integration, under the scenario presented here, is co-opted by the nationalized context of curing eastern Germany's ills.

What are the implications of this particular politics of scale? At this point the conclusions must be speculative; it is still too soon to determine the "success" of regional construction in this particular part of Europe. Yet if as Jönsson et al. (2000, p. 46) suggest, regions are created by social processes that result in "shared ways of thinking," and only then can lasting structures of integration be built, then regionalism built upon highly uneven engagement (some might say unidirectional) at the behest of domestic political considerations in one of the participating states is inherently problematic. And how are we to understand these processes without using scale, particularly a conceptualization of scale that emphasizes its constructed, produced and political natures? Along the lines of Leitner and Miller (2007), I would argue scale offers an invaluable analytical tool for understanding processes at work in European integration. In sum, the point of the arguments presented here is that scalar politics are so transient, so fixed to the short-term wants of political and economic decision-making, that what is required is a more robust and sophisticated conceptualization of scale, and emphatically not its abandonment as a concept at our disposal. If scalar politics are marked by a fleeting utilitarianism, as I argue here, then the scholar's role is to unveil how and where these processes are occurring, and not to change the terms we use to identify and analyze them.

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Footnotes

1 I thank a reviewer for this observation.

 2 Though as one reviewer points out, even these western regions are not necessarily prominent features on the perceptual maps of citizens.

 3 Common examples of "coopetition" from the business work include when competing airlines form frequent flier and network alliances, or when otherwise competing computer companies (i.e. Apple and Microsoft) cooperate on the development of software.

 4 Saxony Ministry of Economics and Labor, http://www.smwa.sachsen.de/de/Foerderung/Interreg_III_C/100178.html accessed 10/15/2007.

 5The five New Federal States, or neue Bundesländer, plus Berlin, were created in 1990 and integrated into the existing federal structures of the Federal Republic upon unification of the two German states. Under Germany's federal structure the Länder have many exclusive competencies, ranging from education and culture, to law enforcement and taxation. In the

context of this article, it is noteworthy that international relations fall under the purview of the national government.

6 Interview with government official in the State of Saxony government, March 30, 2007.

7 In the current funding framework, the name Interreg IIIC has been replaced by the term "Territorial Cooperative objective."

8 Contrast this with the French–German border, where in German schools French was required, and where on the French side (particularly in Alsace) many learned German. Of course, Dutch, Flemish and German are much more closely related than are Czech, Polish and German; more important in this context perhaps is a well-developed system of learning foreign languages in both the Netherlands and Belgium since the mid-twentieth century, which makes it rare to find an educated person who cannot speak German.

9 I acknowledge the limitations of these two simplified categories.