

**Raising the regional Leviathan: a relational-materialist conceptualization of regions-in-becoming as publics-in-stabilization**

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3 **Raising the regional Leviathan: a relational-materialist conceptualization of regions-in-becoming as**  
4 **publics-in-stabilization**  
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15 **Abstract**  
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17 The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the understanding of how spatial entities in general – and  
18 those spatial entities that are defined as ‘regions’ in particular – form, evolve and sometimes stabilize.  
19 Inspired by the scholarship of Noortje Marres the paper explores how regions in becoming may be  
20 gainfully conceptualized as publics in stabilization. In the paper it is argued that some of the mechanisms  
21 involved in such processes pertain to how territorially framed issues sometimes become formulated as  
22 loosely articulated propositions for regionalization. These can with time generate emergent stakeholder  
23 communities which in turn may become stabilized and delegated to more durable forms and materials –  
24 and finally naturalized as recognized regions. A suggested conceptual model is utilized to perform an  
25 analysis of empirical material from three contemporary processes of regionalization in Northern Europe  
26 with the purpose of examining and discussing some of the potential merits and shortcomings of the  
27 conceptual model. It is concluded that adopting the proposed perspective can enable scholars to  
28 highlight some of the mechanisms whereby vague and non-coherent propositions for regionalization  
29 within time may be singularized and stabilized to such a degree that they become taken for granted as  
30 naturalized spatialities.  
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36 **Keywords:** regions, regionalization, institutionalization, publics, issues, stakeholders, materialization  
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## Introduction

In an important commentary on the surprising persistence and mutability of the concept of ‘the region’ Paasi (2010:2296) has noted that in the seemingly endless scholarly debate concerning the ontological status of regions (‘are they constructed or not?’), it at present appears as if the idea of the region as a ‘social construct’ has become close to an axiomatic truth. Nevertheless, Paasi observes that it is very often unclear what is meant by this statement and further – if the region is a social construct – how, by whom, and through what materials is it constructed in practice? Or posed differently: *how do regions become?* Taking Paasi’s questions as a cue, the purpose of this paper is to contribute to the understanding of how spatial entities in general – and those spatial entities that are defined as ‘regions’ in particular – form, evolve and (sometimes) stabilize. Following Latour (1988:185) the launching point of this paper is the suggestion that regions do not hold together because they are “really out there”. Rather, because they (sometimes) hold together, we say they are really out there. The questions asked in this paper thus do not concern whether regions are constructed or not but rather how regional constructs may come to last and even become taken for granted, by asking following Munk & Abrahamsson (2012): “how does it hold together, how does it endure, how does it come to appear as singular?”.

In what is generally recognized as one of the most influential social constructivist accounts, Allen et al’s *Rethinking the region*, it is stated that a region should be seen as a “product of a particular combination and articulation of *social* relations stretched over space” (Allen et al, 1998:143, emphasis added). Both drawing on and diverging from this basic definition, this paper will ask what can be gained in our understanding of regions and regionalization processes if we jettison the qualifier [social] from the above definition, or at least reconceptualize the ‘social’ as not only having to do with linguistic and symbolic practices but also encompassing the concrete association of such heterogeneous non-human components as bridges, motorways, maps, legal code, tourist brochures and railway ticketing systems. Again, building on Latour’s argument (1988), we may come to see that regions stabilize and endure precisely because they hold on to many *things* –thus tying their fate to anything at hand that is more solid than mere fleeting words, and thereby further putting the materiality or materialization of stabilized regions into central research focus.

The conceptual model developed in the paper will be based upon a drawing-together of elements from human geographical theories on regions and regionalization, planning research on practices of place-making and strategic planning and the array of relational-materialist research practices often referred to

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3 as Actor-Network Theory (ANT). The paper also engages with so-called 'after-ANT' thinking on spatiality  
4 and the construction of durable (spatial-ized) entities, and ANT-related political theory on the interplay  
5 between processes of issue formation and the emergence of publics, as developed in the work of  
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7 Noortje Marres.  
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11 Finding their inspiration with Callon & Latour (1981), Metzger & Schmitt (2012) have suggested that a  
12 regionalization process can be likened to the raising of a 'regional Leviathan'. Following Hobbes  
13 (1651/1997) and Callon & Latour (1981) a 'Leviathan' can be understood as a relationally constituted  
14 entity made by and partially made up from humans which is brought into being through a process  
15 whereby "the many have become one, and are increased by one" (Stengers quoted in Haraway, 2008:  
16 244; see also Cooren, 2010:167), that is: as the relational constitution of an emergent effect through  
17 which a new semi-autonomous entity, which adds up to more than the sum of its constituent parts,  
18 comes to populate the world. In this paper this analogy will be further explored and developed: if the  
19 region is an entity constructed by humans, yet not wholly human in its constitution – by what  
20 mechanisms, processes and through what materials may such a collective (and collecting) being come  
21 into existence? Inspired by the scholarship of Marres (2005a, 2005b) this paper explores if the raising of  
22 such regional Leviathans may be gainfully conceptualized as the stabilization of issue-centered publics –  
23 given that we allow ourselves to re-articulate the concept of 'the public' along the lines suggested by  
24 Marres so as to go beyond the conventional idea that these must by necessity be made up only of  
25 'locals' or laypersons, and instead allow the concept to encompass the full motley assortments of  
26 heterogeneous and geographically potentially dispersed actors that become attached to a specific issue  
27 or problem. It is argued that the conceptualization of regions-in-becoming as publics-in-stabilization can  
28 enable investigators of processes of regionalization to identify and highlight important aspects of such  
29 processes that might otherwise be difficult to conceptualize, articulate or discuss – particularly  
30 pertaining to the mechanisms through which regions become stabilized into taken-for-granted realities.  
31 It may particularly serve the purpose of not only highlighting the processual and contingent character of  
32 regions but also to enable a discussion on the entangled interplay between elements often labelled as  
33 on the one hand human and/or 'discursive' and on the other hand non-human and/or 'material' in the  
34 unfolding of the processes where-through the entities we come to know as regions emerge.  
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53 In the paper ANT is approached as an "adaptable, open repository" of concepts that may be used to "tell  
54 cases, draw contrasts, articulate silent layers, turn questions upside down, focus on the unexpected, add  
55 to one's sensitivities, propose new terms, and shift stories", and "not to purify the repertoire, but to  
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3 enrich it” (Mol, 2010). Thus, this paper has no ambition of ‘applying ANT’ to the subject of  
4 regionalization. Rather it attempts to explore and tinker with some components of the broad conceptual  
5 repertoire which over the years has developed in the broader context of ANT scholarship, and more  
6 generally to experiment with the radical relational-materialist ontology that has been cultivated in ANT-  
7 related research. Relational materialism can in the most general terms be described as an ontology that  
8 skirts any a-priori distinction between ‘social’ or ‘material’ (or ‘discursive’, ‘cultural’, ‘economic’,  
9 ‘technological’, etc) aspects of unfolding worldly events and instead prompts the researcher to  
10 empirically explore the heterogeneous linkages *between* elements regularly slotted into these different  
11 categories. According to John Law, relational materialism thus “effaces the analytical divisions between  
12 agency and structure, and the macro- and the micro-social, but it also asks us to treat different materials  
13 – people, machines, ‘ideas’ and all the rest – as interactional effects rather than primitive causes” (Law,  
14 1992: 389). It invites the tracing and mapping of ‘coming-togethers’ of diverse elements and materials,  
15 and how the relations between these elements appear to make a difference in the unfolding of events.  
16 Some particular such relations may be unique and contingent to a situation at hand, while other  
17 mechanisms may appear to be more stable and to have repeated, recognizable or reproducible effects  
18 across contexts under certain specific circumstances or conditions. From such a position it makes little  
19 sense for the social scientist to attempt to uncover some *primus motor* behind specific developments,  
20 and instead invites a focus on how things come together, sometimes repeatedly, to produce more or  
21 less specific, unique and/or repetitive or stable effects. This paper aims to broadly explore how such an  
22 ontological intuition may potentially provide new insights and tools for studying the formation,  
23 evolution and stabilization of the lumps of partially stabilized heterogeneous relations that sometimes  
24 come to be taken for granted as natural and self-evident ‘regions’.

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42 In addition to this introduction the paper consists of four main sections. In the next section a selection of  
43 human geographic and planning studies literature on regionalization is drawn-together with elements of  
44 ANT and ‘after-ANT’ theory, to function as a launching point for the argument presented in the sections  
45 that follow. Departing from the broad poststructuralist approach to spatial entities, the trope of the  
46 Leviathan is mobilized to discuss how a relational-materialist/ANT take on spatial entities diverge from  
47 more common social constructivist strands of regional theory, a difference which particularly boils down  
48 to the question of the importance of materiality. It proceeds to discuss the mechanics of regionalization  
49 processes from a relational-materialist perspective, arguing that we in such process can see how regions  
50 are institutionalized through the delegation of initially vague propositions for regionalization into more  
51 durable material forms which eventually may come to stabilize the region to such a degree that it  
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3 becomes a taken-for-granted or seemingly self-evident reality. Building upon the sensibility and  
4 concepts introduced in the previous section, the third section of the paper outlines a proposed  
5 conceptual model of regionalization processes which is based upon the apprehension of regions-in-  
6 becoming as publics-in-stabilization – sketching a roughly sequential order of different mechanisms of  
7 stabilization and alignment that appear to often come into play in regionalization processes. The fourth  
8 section of the paper applies the previously presented conceptual model to three quite heterogeneous  
9 empirical cases, representing contemporary processes of regionalization in Northern Europe, with the  
10 purpose of teasing out some of the merits and shortcomings of the presented model. This section also  
11 contains an ‘empirical postscript’ which, building upon material from the empirical cases, discusses the  
12 position of the model in relation to the immense complexity and unpredictability of regionalization  
13 processes. In the final section a concluding discussion collects, recapitulates and further reflects upon  
14 the previously presented arguments – also pointing the way towards the need for further research.  
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### 24 **The formation of the regional Leviathan**

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27 Within poststructuralist spatial theory it is often argued that territorial entities such as regions don’t  
28 come into the world neatly bundled, wrapped up and packaged. Rather, they can be seen as  
29 spatiotemporal frames established through intensive labours and political interventions (Callon & Law,  
30 2005; Painter, 2008; see also Jessop, 2006). Activities of spatiotemporal framing establish relations of  
31 inclusion and exclusion, sameness and otherness – and thus function to ascribe what is to be considered  
32 to be on the “inside” and “constitutive outside” of a specific, named spatial entity (cf. Hillier 2007 and  
33 specifically concerning regions also Syssner, 2006) [FOOTNOTE 1]. Instead of a-priori ontologically given  
34 “structured coherences” (cf. the discussion about Aydalot, 1976 in Jessop, 2006) there are all sorts of  
35 semi-structured and (with great effort) semi-bounded parts that can be bundled and hedged up in all  
36 sorts of ways, and where the specific principle, method or technology for bundling, hedging or  
37 articulating the region will produce different effects in the world, depending on how it is performed  
38 (Painter, 2008). In relation to regions, particularly Anssi Paasi (e.g. 1986, 2002a, 2002b) has relentlessly  
39 highlighted how processes of regionalization are always interventions in the world through which the  
40 drawing up of boundaries tacit and explicit, internal and external generate effects of inclusion and  
41 exclusion in relation to a particular spatial entity.  
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54 ANT can in the broadest sense perhaps be labelled as a specific variant of such a poststructuralist  
55 approach (cf. Murdoch, 2006). It originally emerged in the field of Science and Technology Studies in the  
56 1980s and has since then achieved some degree of impact in the wider social sciences, perhaps  
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3 especially in human geography (including influential works by e.g. Thrift (1996), Whatmore (2002) and  
4 Massey (2005). Still, with regards to the study of regions ANT has still so far had only a limited impact –  
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6 even though some contemporary approaches clearly draw inspiration from or display an intellectual  
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8 family resemblance to an ANT-like sensibility (see e.g. Gibson, 2001; Donaldson, 2006; Healey, 2007  
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10 Painter, 2008).

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12 One of the earliest sketches of an embryonic ANT research approach and explicitly relational materialist  
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14 ontology that appeared in English was in a book chapter from 1981 by Michel Callon and Bruno Latour  
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16 with the title *Unscrewing the big Leviathan: how actors macro-structure reality and how sociologists*  
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18 *help them to do so*. In the text Callon & Latour discuss Thomas Hobbes' classical account concerning the  
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20 emergence of the state as a *Leviathan*, an "Artificial Animal" or collective entity through a contractual  
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22 arrangement whereby a sovereign is authorized as the singular legitimate voice and sole representative  
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24 of a previously cacophonically chattering and strife-ridden multitude. What Callon & Latour note to be  
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26 the highly original contribution of Hobbes is that in his account the sovereign is not above the people, it  
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28 is "the people itself in another state" an "artificial body" which stands in for "the sum of the multitude's  
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30 wishes". Thus, to Hobbes "the Leviathan says nothing on its own authority... [n]othing without having  
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32 been authorized by the multitude, whose spokesman, mask-bearer and amplifier he is" (278).

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34 Callon & Latour extend Hobbes' concept of the Leviathan to include not only the state per se but all  
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36 types of societal macro actors, arguing that far from being a self-sufficient "totalitarian monster" a  
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38 *Leviathan can rather be conceptualized as a relationally constituted, semi-autonomous macro-entity* – a  
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40 connector or relay composed of many other connectors or relays an actor "made to act by many others"  
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42 but also acting back on them (Latour, 2005b:46, see also Paasi, 2010) – and which comes into existence  
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44 through complex series of "negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion and violence, thanks  
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46 to which an actor or force takes, or causes to be conferred on itself, authority to speak or act on behalf  
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48 of another actor or force" (Callon & Latour, 1981: 278). The singular voice of the Leviathan may thus  
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50 shut up the babble of the multitude and the many come to appear as a single entity – but only with  
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52 great effort, investments and upkeep. The emerging Leviathan, as the concomitant formation of a  
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54 mouthpiece and body politic, is thus constituted through power and produces sometimes fearfully  
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56 powerful effects – but cannot be explained through pointing to a priori existing 'interests'. Rather, its  
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58 formation entails the processes whereby new collective (and collecting) interests are formed and  
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60 stabilized. Examining the formation of a Leviathan thus necessarily entails an exploration of the concrete

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3 mechanics of how societal power emerges rather than resorting to power as a *deus ex machina*  
4 explanatory variable.  
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8 The above given account of Callon & Latour's discussion about the Leviathan as a collective (and  
9 collecting) macro-actor would if applied to the study of regions and regionalization processes generally  
10 chime well with by now established broadly social constructivist strands of research on regions and  
11 regionalization processes (see e.g. Paasi, 1986; Allen et al, 1998; McLeod & Jones, 2001). Still, a major  
12 divergence between a general social constructivist approach to the study of regions and an alternative  
13 approach inspired by Callon & Latour would be the latter's insistence on the fundamental importance of  
14 investigating and highlighting the materiality of regional macro-actors or Leviathans. If materiality only  
15 figures vaguely, if at all, in social constructivist analyses of regions and regionalization processes, for  
16 Callon & Latour this aspect takes centre stage. Callon & Latour thus ask themselves: if there is  
17 ontological integrity or stability to a Leviathan, how do the macro-actors we observe in the world  
18 become so seemingly solid and durable? The answer they give is that they, even if constructed *by*  
19 humans, do not only consist *of* humans but also more "durable materials", thus "replacing unsettled  
20 alliances" with "walls and written contracts" (284). As Latour notes in a later text (2005a), the stabilized  
21 Leviathan is not only made up of people but is "thick with things... an immense complex technology of  
22 gathering, meeting, cohabiting, enlarging, reducing and focusing". So if not a monster, the Leviathan is  
23 still a motley entity indeed – a heterogeneous assemblage of partially congealed speech acts, legal code,  
24 emotional attachments, concrete, bricks, railway tracks, fiber-optic wire, planning documents, and so on  
25 – the emergence of which proceeds through the assembly of disparate materials and chiasmic  
26 ontological transformations: loose talk about what can and should be transposed into concrete and  
27 metal – and back again (cf. Olsson, 2007).  
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43 Even though focus on materiality is paramount for Callon & Latour this does not in any way imply that  
44 their approach discounts the role of language as in any way secondary to other factors. Rather, language  
45 here figures as an ordering and organizing supplement in the world, a connector which holds together a  
46 macro-actor such as a region and supplements it with a proper name (Latour, 1988). But this does in no  
47 way imply that it exists only in language or as "discourse", nor that discourse is the only type of glue that  
48 can be used to compose the region. This would indeed be a very weak Leviathan. Instead, we must see  
49 the proper name and related linguistic practices as one specific type (among many) of connectors or  
50 relays that link up all sorts of heterogeneous materials, not in the form of 'representation' but as  
51 association and translation, and as a form of order- and coherence-generating 'glue' that functions to  
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3 'lasso', grasp and glean out apparent or potential dimensions and circuits of coherence out of complex  
4 entanglements and multiplicities (see also Latour, 2003 and further Olsson, 2007). The weakness of  
5 linguistic statements as connectors is that they are highly prone to second-order capture, active  
6 rearticulation and/or unintended translational drift. Therefore the highly fluid connections performed  
7 through discursive statements can often be stabilized to a higher degree when transposed to more  
8 durable materials (see further below).

### 14 *The articulation of propositions for regionalization: capture, connection, organization*

17 To put regions more clearly in focus and begin to explore how the above sketched relational-materialist  
18 perspective might grant us new purchase on these issues we may experiment with taking as our point of  
19 departure the intuition that regions as we come to meet them 'out there in the real world' – the already  
20 existing regional Leviathans – always are the results of regionalization processes. Here it is therefore  
21 proposed that we should find inspiration with Stengers (2011) and Latour (1999, 2004) and use the term  
22 *proposition for regionalization* when discussing processes towards regionalization – to remind us of the  
23 fundamental poststructuralist insight that a certain frame of regionality being put forward is always at  
24 least potentially in contestation with alternative ways of partitioning, bundling and hedging the world.  
25 Some other pertinent qualities of the proposition are, in the context of this paper, that propositions can  
26 be either accepted or declined (an aspect which is further developed below), and also that propositions  
27 have to be *articulated* – that is: given a syntactic form by connecting bits and pieces together into a  
28 (seemingly) coherent, comprehensible and supposedly desirable suggestion. Since the establishment of  
29 regionality from this perspective always involves a process of regionalization through the formulation of  
30 a proposition for regionalization, regionality can be described as a property that is *enacted* (Law, 2004)  
31 or *performed* through various heterogeneous practices and interventions in the world (Donaldson,  
32 2006; Gregson & Rose, 2000; Law, 2007, 2009). Ascribing regionality – proposing a region – is thus a way  
33 of intervening in the world, a proposition for a particular way of organizing a part of the world, always in  
34 direct or indirect competition with other possible alternatives. Thus, the ascription of regionality is  
35 always deeply *political*, in the meaning that it carries power and potentially – when successful – can  
36 have radical repercussions on the organization and distribution of resources, rights and entitlements  
37 and many other aspects of collective and personal life.

54 The one drawback of using the descriptor 'proposition' for that-which-may-become-established-as-a  
55 region is that this noun may be read as implying some form of first-order action or primary motion. But  
56 of course, propositions for regionalization never emerge in a vacuum, but *in media res* of a world

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3 always-already going-on –overflowing with other complementary, competing and/or partially  
4 overlapping propositions for regionalization both under the same and divergent proper naming, most of  
5 which will never gain any stronger traction or wider adherence in the world but will rather wither away  
6 or fall to the wayside, whereas others will be vested with greater degrees of staying power. Far from  
7 amounting to some form of spontaneous stabs at order out of the blue, propositions for regionalization  
8 constitute responses to concrete problems or challenges for some actor or group of actors that the  
9 current established spatial arrangements are unable to tackle or amend. Even though generating  
10 emergent effects, such propositions are also by necessity always derivative of the multilayered  
11 social/political/economic/technical/cultural configurations of the particular time-space conjunctures at  
12 which they are articulated (and then, given shifts in the configurations, iteratively re-articulated) – and  
13 hence not reducible to any single logic such as ‘state formation’ or ‘capital accumulation’.[FOOTNOTE 2]  
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23 Taking form in a world always already ongoing, and to its nature being a relational entity, the nascent  
24 emergence of a regional Leviathan as encompassed by a proposition for regionalization thus always  
25 entails a coding or overcoding operation of *capture* (i.e. demonstrating that the region *already is*),  
26 *connection* (i.e. claiming that the region *can/must be*) and *organization* (i.e. making the region *become*);  
27 all three aspects most often in one way or the other sliding or vovnen into each other in operations of  
28 extraction and binding-together of some features and elements of a complex reality that appear to  
29 connect or could be made to connect – while ignoring or actively countering other existing or potential  
30 connections (cf. Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). These operations of attempted capture, connection and  
31 organization can be performed through intentional or strategic discursive interventions – but also in  
32 many other ways. For we mustn’t forget all the ‘silent’ articulations of a region that constantly circulate  
33 and enact the region without much fanfare or fuss, that is – not in the form of passionate pledges of  
34 allegiance or visionary statements but rather through less conspicuous media that generate more  
35 implicit and/or taken-for-granted assumptions of territorial ‘belonging-togetherness’ through  
36 producing/reproducing spatialities by way of ‘hardwiring’ into maps, software, transport infrastructure,  
37 legal code, financial support programmes, etc. – all of which contribute to more or less actively ‘doing’  
38 (enacting/performing) a certain spatiality in a particular way, i.e. a particular version of the region (for a  
39 similar perspective concerning ‘the city’, see e.g. Latour & Hermant, 2006).  
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### 53 *Propositions for regionalization that travel and stick*

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56 Since the region as an actor (i.e. the region ‘as a region’) at an early non-institutionalized stage primarily  
57 holds together in the form of discursive statements and is not itself endowed with the capacity to speak  
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3 for itself and make itself heard, others' reproduction and multiplication of those statements becomes  
4 crucial for its existence. One could almost say that for a specific regionalization to "stick" it also has to  
5 "travel", through being carried by other actors (see also Albrechts, 2010; Barnes, 2002; Healey, 2007;  
6 Latour, 2005b). Ironically, considering the everyday use of the terms (where the one signifies mobility  
7 and the other inertia), the more a certain proposition of a region can travel – that is, be picked up and  
8 carried around and placed in new contexts through the adaptations and translations of and by new  
9 actors – the better are its odds for sticking around (Latour 1999, 2005b). 'Sticking around' would in this  
10 context refer to gaining staying power through becoming objectivized and 'real' in the banal, common  
11 sense use of the term – as the opposite of 'fictitious' (See Latour 1987, 1999, 2005b). In a different  
12 wording: a region, as a proposition, must be both durable and mobile (Law, 1992), and rely on other  
13 actors to carry it and to extend its reach through immaterial or material practices, because – as related  
14 above – a specific composition of a region, viewed as a proposition for regionalization, can either be  
15 picked up or let down (cf. Latour, 1987:29). Propositions for regionalization that fail to be widely  
16 communicated, that fail to travel, will most probably also fail to stick and become institutionalized. Of  
17 course, propositions for regionalization in the form of discursive statements cannot travel in some form  
18 of mysterious extra-material symbolic dimension. All travel takes place through very concrete material  
19 media which often include human bodies that can communicate directly with other humans in person-  
20 to-person interaction, but almost always also in the form of other types of material devices that more or  
21 less faithfully can transport and communicate discursive statements across geographic distances – e.g.  
22 in the form of documents, maps and computer code – which again function as relays in the formation of  
23 emerging regional networks always consisting of both human and non-human components (see  
24 Czarniawska & Sévon, 2005:8).

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42 In the process of travelling through being 'passed on' by other actors, which has been called both  
43 translational (Latour, 1987) and citational (Gregson & Rose, 2000), a certain degree of fungibility and  
44 mutability appears to work to the gain of the proposition, making it more translatable into the schemes  
45 and interests of others and making it easier to adjust to the particularities of new actors and contexts  
46 while still holding some degree of agency and continuity (see also Lagendijk & Cornford, 2000; Law &  
47 Mol, 2001). Thus, as a proposition for regionalization is passed on between actors, we can expect that  
48 displacements, translations and negotiations back and forth of what the region really *is* and *should be*  
49 will occur as different actors translate, displace and modify the proposition in their own way and  
50 according to their perspectives and perceived interests at a specific given point in time (Paasi, 2012; cf.  
51 Latour 1987, 1999). Seeing that various propositions for regionalization relating to the same geographic  
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3 area may be in circulation at any given time, and that these propositions are likely to mutate as they are  
4 passed along, this means that we often cannot talk of the region in the singular, but must rather refer to  
5 it in the multiple – as simultaneously existing, alternative propositions for regionalization that are  
6 sometimes (but only sometimes) mutually exclusive (see further Law 2000, 2007; Mol, 1999). In the  
7 quest for coherence that practically amounts to an ‘ontological-political’ (Law, 2009; Mol, 1999) jostle  
8 between different versions of the proposition for regionalization – the more allies a certain version of  
9 the region will be able to muster, the more influential and dominant it will become, leading to increasing  
10 costs (both financially and otherwise) for those who wish to dispute or challenge this particular  
11 proposed version (cf. Latour, 1987).  
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20 *Stabilizing the regional Leviathan: institutionalization through delegation into durable materials*  
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22 As a certain version of a proposition for regionalization gains momentum and weight, and increasing  
23 degrees of closure are achieved around a singular version of the region, the specific proposition may  
24 within time become extremely difficult and costly to attempt to challenge or reverse (Paasi, 2001;  
25 Painter, 2008; see also Latour, 2004). In this context, partly inspired by Paasi (1986) but more directly  
26 building on Latour (2004:109, 243), the term *institutionalization* may be used to refer to the processes  
27 through which propositions for regionalization are increasingly stabilized through delegation into more  
28 durable sociomaterial forms than discourse – for instance organizations, transport links, legal statutes,  
29 etc (Latour, 1999:187; Law, 2001). Therefore, following Law, we can say that propositions for  
30 regionalization and the way they are composed really do *matter*, in both meanings of the word (Law,  
31 2004). To give a very brief example from Northern Europe, the bridge across the Øresund sound, linking  
32 up Copenhagen to Malmö, is a very material performance of the proposed Øresund-region, and it is also  
33 performative in itself in that it facilitates practices, such as commuting, that increasingly will strengthen  
34 the staying power of the proposed regionalization.  
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45 Of course, also non-human articulations of the region, such as bridges, can with considerable effort be  
46 challenged and disbanded or destroyed, but once a region becomes increasingly institutionalized it may  
47 require a much costlier and more sustained effort as it is often politically, economically and practically  
48 more challenging to reconstruct or tear apart motorways, fibre-optic cable networks or town settlement  
49 patterns than just going up against a region that so far only consists of vague speech and some  
50 inscriptions upon paper (even though very vague and thereby fluid spatialities can be highly challenging  
51 to eliminate once and for all, see e.g. Metzger & Schmitt, 2012 concerning the British ‘home countries’).  
52 This can be seen as the background to Latour’s (1999:210) claim that non-human allies to a proposition  
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3 often are more reliable than human allies, as they tend to “remain in place” (Latour, 2005b:199), and  
4 facilitate higher degrees of irreversibility or ‘stickiness’, thus in many ways being more durable (Law,  
5 1992). Through their often dumb, unintentional and unreflective agency non-humans often facilitate  
6 processes without questioning them, which humans sometimes tend to do – making humans into more  
7 fickle and unreliable allies. Following this line of reasoning, it can be argued that propositions for  
8 regionalization that succeed in being delegated into non-human agency generally tend to become more  
9 durable, and thereby also more non-negotiable in their existence than the propositions for  
10 regionalization that fail to do so; and where those that fail to do so as a result most often will come to  
11 be sorted under the common perception of having been a ‘mere social construction’ (cf. Paasi 2001,  
12 who distinguishes between “regions on paper” and “regions as social practice”).

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21 Here we might also find a tentative explanation as to why some regions seem more ‘natural’ to us than  
22 others: they are simply institutionalized to a higher degree and have often stayed in place for a very long  
23 time – and are therefore also made to travel on a daily basis, quite unproblematically. In the  
24 terminology of Callon & Latour (1981:285) they have become “black boxes”: “those things whose  
25 contents have become a matter of indifference”. The generation of such black boxed-relations which  
26 come to constitute undisputed and seemingly self-evident taken-for-granted realities are according to  
27 Callon & Latour the foundation of any durable and successful Leviathan for “[t]he more elements one  
28 can place in black boxes – modes of thought, habits, forces and objects – the broader the construction  
29 one can raise”. When successfully performed, black-boxed relations, for instance a specific proposition  
30 for regionalization, thus come to be reproduced unreflexively and unproblematically as a *collateral*  
31 *reality* (Law, 2009), without much of a fuss or conscious reflection. But those regions which we  
32 apprehend as ‘artificial’, on the other hand, are usually not so well institutionalized yet, and therefore  
33 still only travel with a large amount of effort involved, not having achieved any considerable degree of  
34 staying power yet.

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46 From such a perspective there is thus no ontological or perhaps even methodological distinction to be  
47 made between ‘old’ and ‘new’ regions. Rather, ‘old’ regions seem natural to us because they are the  
48 ‘success stories’ that have through various measures managed to stick on and become black-boxed  
49 taken-for-granted realities since long, and therefore are seen as completely natural and proper.  
50 Nevertheless, the existence of such ‘still living’ and naturalized propositions for regionalization must not  
51 make us lose sight of the overflowing graveyard of all the other, failed, ‘old’ propositions for  
52 regionalization – those that never caught on or fell to the wayside at one point or the other. So the  
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3 difference between ‘old’ and ‘new’ regions must not be mistaken as ontological, but is rather perhaps  
4 best conceptualized as an evolutionary difference – where ‘new’ regions simply have not yet been along  
5 round enough to pick up the status of unreflected, taken-for-granted collateral reality.  
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9 To conclude, this means that the ‘objectivity’, i.e. the stability and integrity of a region-as-object, does  
10 not hinge upon it fitting with some underlying reality, but rather with how well-established and  
11 institutionalized it has become. Such a perspective may help shift the discussion on regionality from  
12 dead-end philosophical debates over whether regions are ‘real’ or ‘constructed’, to instead begin to  
13 empirically consider how multiple and sometimes competing propositions for regionalization may come  
14 to be successfully singularized and institutionalized – ‘black-boxed’ – through delegation into stabilized  
15 sociomaterial forms (see also Paasi 2010). Still, in their paper on the Leviathan, Callon & Latour  
16 (1981:285) argue that “black boxes never remain fully closed or properly fastened... we are all  
17 constantly struggling for closing leaky black boxes”, a point which we will find reason to return to  
18 towards the end of this paper.  
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### 27 **Conceptualizing regions-in-becoming as publics-in-stabilization**

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29 Paasi (1986) has suggested an analytical model of four non-sequential stages for conceptualizing the  
30 formation and institutionalization of regions. Even though the model presented by Paasi successfully  
31 draws attention to the historical contingency and conditionality of processes of regionalization, it can be  
32 argued that his model primarily focuses attention upon important objects of contestation in processes  
33 of regionalization – such as the territorial shaping, symbolic shaping and institutional shaping of a  
34 region-in- becoming. These outcomes and objects of contestation are of course important components  
35 of regionalization processes, but Paasi’s model does not supply any particularly concrete conceptual  
36 tools for empirical investigations of the *dynamics* between actors in the described processes towards  
37 regionalization. If we instead wish to focus upon the unfolding of the processes through which these  
38 outcomes are achieved with the purpose of developing a further understanding of the mechanics of  
39 such processes, we might instead let ourselves be influenced by a different literature emerging in the  
40 cross-currents between pragmatist political philosophy and ANT. Drawing primarily upon the work of  
41 Marres (2005a, 2005b), it is thus suggested that processes of regionalization, when successful, might be  
42 conceptualized as the development of loosely knit regional publics into emergent regional stakeholder  
43 communities, which may eventually also become stabilized in more durable and costly-to-reverse forms  
44 and materials – finally achieving a naturalized status as a taken-for-granted regional territorial entity.  
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3 The proposed model sketches three consecutive phases through which such processes often appear to  
4 progress:  
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- 7 1) *The emergence of a regional public* through intertwined processes of [a] *articulations of*  
8 *territorially framed common concerns* and [b] *regional stakeholder subjectification*  
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- 10 2) *The stabilization of a regional public* through [a] *the formation of a regional stakeholder*  
11 *community* and [b] *the singularization of the proposition for regionalization*  
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- 13 3) *The institutionalization of a region* through [a] *the formation of recognized regional*  
14 *spokespersons* and [b] *the delegation of the proposition to more durable sociomaterial forms*  
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19 According to this proposed model each sketched step of the regionalization process entails a “double  
20 articulation” (moments [a] and [b]), where the content and form of the proposed region become  
21 concomitantly produced through co-constitutive and mutually reinforcing mechanisms and  
22 developments (cf. Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). It is in no way meant to be read as a teleological model.  
23 Not every proposition for regionalization will go through these stages, not even those that appear to  
24 have begun to embark upon a trajectory towards institutionalization. Thus perceived, regionalization  
25 processes can, and often are, interrupted or completely arrested at any given stage of development.  
26 Further, it is often impossible, other than post-hoc, to conclude which processes will pick up momentum  
27 and which will be thwarted or derail – even though there of course are more or less likely candidates at  
28 any given point in time. The above sketched model, which will also be further elucidated below, is thus  
29 not intended to function as any form of predicative tool – but rather as a heuristic device to enable  
30 researchers of regionalization to grasp some of the dynamics and mechanics of these processes that  
31 may otherwise be difficult to get a handle on. [FOOTNOTE 3]  
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#### 42 *The emergence of a regional public*

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44 In *No issue, No public* Marres (2005a) explores processes of issue formation and how the formation of  
45 contentious public issues engender the emergence of publics that raise demands towards the  
46 settlements of such issues. According to Marres’ argument the formation of a public is always  
47 irrevocably bound up with the emergence of a specific issue or problem that the actors constituting the  
48 public find themselves entangled in, and hence seeking redress for. Marres argues that such publics  
49 arise when existing institutional frameworks prove unable or ineffective at settling the issue in question,  
50 thus generating a public controversy of some sort or form in which actors become caught up – in the  
51 process forming a public. Marres thus uses the concept of ‘the public’ to come to grasp with the  
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3 heterogeneous and potentially geographically dispersed assemblages of actors that become attached or  
4 caught up with a specific public issue or problem. In her discussion of the concept Marres notes that the  
5 “prototypical” public is often thought of as consisting only of laypeople (Marres, 2005a: 99), but may  
6 according to her definition nevertheless be used as a designator for all the clusterings of actors carrying  
7 conflicting positions, interests and views that become articulated in relation to a specific issue, thus  
8 forming the nexus of an imbroglio. Following this line of reasoning, it can thus be argued that the  
9 emergence of a *regional* public is a process where issues are put on the table, and these issues are being  
10 articulated either as demanding solution through regionalization. Further, conceptualized along these  
11 lines, the regional public that may come to assemble around such issues need not be limited to only  
12 laypersons living in the proposed region, as defined in Euclidean space, and isn’t even limited to  
13 ‘individuals’ – but may rather consist of all sorts of geographically dispersed networks and organizations,  
14 including (but not limited to) business promotion networks, government agencies and cultural  
15 associations, who become topologically rather than topographically attached or caught up in a  
16 regionalization process generated by the issue – either by way of their own deliberate actions or  
17 commitments, or as the consequence of the purposeful or unwitting activity of others.  
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22 When a regional public begins to emerge as the result of the regional territorial framing of common  
23 concerns, we are at the same time witnessing a process through which territorial, regional *stakeholder*  
24 *subjectivities* are coming to be established thus constituting a regional “community of concern” (Marres,  
25 2005a:61), or “community of fate” (Braithwaite, 2008). This stage of the process enacts the binding  
26 together of actors that are beginning to become mutually implicated in the proposition for  
27 regionalization but who have previously been attached to different logics of operation. What is going on  
28 in this stage of the process is the establishment of how concerns are (or rather can be) shared and how  
29 interests (can) converge. The establishment of regional territorial logics through the fostering of  
30 stakeholder subjectivities thus implies what planning scholar Patsy Healey describes as a “bringing  
31 together on a territorial basis relations which have been separated off in many cases into institutionally  
32 distinct functional sectors... in order to identify precisely where the points of strategic common interest  
33 lie, and to build on that institutional capability to address them” (Healey, 2006:77). As Healey puts it,  
34 this is the moment when actors begin to “think about the complex interrelations of what happens in a  
35 place and where their concerns fit with those of other[s]” (Healey, 1998:1539). So it is not only a process  
36 of sharing interests and concerns, but also about how these interests and concerns are framed and  
37 contextualized in territorial terms – as part of a wider taking-in-regard of the well-being of a specific  
38 area, about placing concerns and interests within a specific regional territorial frame.  
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3 At this stage actors pursuing discursive methods and devices to proactively lobby for the regional  
4 territorial framing of the raised issues and concerns might be seen as of crucial importance, as it is at  
5 this stage of the process that actors become woven together through the establishment of a climate  
6 that generates a sense of ‘your concerns are mine, but my concerns are also yours’. To achieve this,  
7 there must be agents for regionalization setting up forums that enable a “fusion of interests” (Latour,  
8 1983:150) and where “mobilizing talk” is being performed through the “lassoing” or “envelopment”  
9 (Latour, 2003) of actors in a common territorial framing by arguing that their particular concerns and  
10 interests can only be tackled through the adherence to an integrative, territorial logic that establishes a  
11 specific spatially defined area as a shared co-responsibility and concern of the actors. In this context,  
12 ‘stakeholderhood’, the subject position through which an actor concerns itself to ‘have a stake’ in and  
13 therefore committed to the fate of a specific entity, is never an actor-property that is ontologically  
14 given. Rather, as Marres (2005a:62) succinctly argues: “the state of being affected by an issue should not  
15 be understood as given, but rather as the achievement of a process of ‘learning to be affected’”. In the  
16 same vein, Featherstone (2007:298) notes that we should not view solidarities as fixed interests formed  
17 around a static object, but rather see that interests and solidarities “become constituted through  
18 ongoing, contested, multiple practices that are engaged in actively shaping the world”. [FOOTNOTE 4]

### 31 *The stabilization of a regional public*

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34 As issues that cannot be satisfactorily settled within existing institutional arrangements are framed in  
35 territorial terms and regional stakeholder subjectivities begin to emerge, we might see the formation of  
36 a loosely knit ‘community for the interest of the region’, or *regional stakeholder community* which  
37 carries forth a proposition for regionalization. The composition of this community will to a large degree  
38 determine the ‘essence’ of the proposition for regionalization, the communicated idea of what the  
39 region *is* (and, very importantly, by defining what the region is – also sets a trajectory for what it  
40 reasonably can be expected to *become*). ‘Essence’ must here of course be understood in fully relational  
41 terms, as an attributed ‘virtual’ and thus contestable property: the emerging results of operations of  
42 capture, connection and organization according to a principle of ‘belonging-together-in-space’ (see  
43 Latour, 2004:241 on the attribution and stabilization of essences, and also the discussion in Paasi, 2010).  
44 Thus, one could claim that when a proposition for regionalization is being articulated, the stakeholders  
45 carrying the regionalization are being articulated (or articulate themselves) with it (cf. Gregson & Rose,  
46 2000:442). Thus, the perceived or attributed essence of a regionalization is never ontologically given.  
47 Regions and stakeholder must be seen as co-constituted in the process of regionalization as various  
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3 actors become subjectified as stakeholders and thus attach themselves to the proposition for  
4 regionalization. Context and content become mutually constitutive (Callon & Law, 1995). Regional(ized)  
5 stakeholders begin to act as mediators for the proposition for regionalization, carrying it further, arguing  
6 for it and attaching their own concerns to it –and at the same time – attaching themselves to the region-  
7 in-becoming.  
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12 Here, it is also important to remember that through the formulation of issues and of the ‘stakes’ of  
13 actors in these issues, and through framing these stakes territorially by tying them to a certain  
14 proposition for regionalization, the proposition for regionalization is modified, or ‘translated’. But so are  
15 the actors being tied to the proposition as allies. So, as previously stated, here we are witnessing the  
16 formation of an emerging region and an emerging community of stakeholder subjectivities that are  
17 carrying each other that are mutually constitutive. We can also see that when an actor is being  
18 translated/translating itself into an ally for a proposed regionalization, the proposed regionalization  
19 gains in weight and momentum, but at the same time the proposition for regionalization is modified as  
20 new concerns and causes will be added to the proposition for regionalization, modifying its essence. The  
21 cause or concern of the actor attaching itself to the region also gains new momentum, as it is then no  
22 longer just a cause or concern of a lone partisan actor, but now rather has been transformed into a  
23 cause or concern of the (proposed) whole region.  
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34 As an increasing number of actors are attached to a successful proposition for regionalization, the more  
35 momentum it gains and the region begins to ‘stick’ through ‘travelling’. The ensuing formation of a  
36 regional stakeholder community who recognize each other as mutually implicated in a series of  
37 entangled and spatially framed co-affective issues, will often lead to the establishment of a discourse of  
38 caring and planning for the future of the territorial entity imagined as best suited to provide the means  
39 for practically addressing the identified issues. The articulation of such a discourse of mutual worry,  
40 caring and planning – signifying the emergence of a regional stakeholder community – can therefore be  
41 conceptualized as an important moment in the establishment of the preconditions for aligning a loosely  
42 formed regional public into a more stabilized proposition for regionalization.  
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50 As actors start to become tied together and attached to a certain proposed regionalization, the  
51 proposition for regionalization will also become increasingly singularized as commensurabilities are  
52 generated in the process of establishing what concerns and interests can be shared between actors as  
53 concerns and interests *of the region*. It is in this process of *singularization of the proposition for*  
54 *regionalization* that values are made to meet, and new values are generated (Corvellec, 2001:202). In a  
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3 way then, this stage of the regionalization process actually entails the negotiation of the essence of the  
4 region. During the course of these negotiations, incommensurates – the issues which actors really  
5 appear to be unable to share – will be shifted out of the process; and with that some actors that are  
6 strongly attached to these issues might fall off as they are unable to agree upon what perhaps could be  
7 called the emerging ‘terms of regionalization’, that is, the emerging attributed essence of the proposed  
8 region. At the same time it will also begin to appear as all the more inevitable and undisputable to  
9 actors that the region is an emerging reality that must be taken in regard, which means that new actors  
10 will begin to be drawn into the process.  
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### 13 14 15 16 17 18 *Institutionalization of the region* 19

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21 It is in this next stage of the process that those who see some value in distinguishing ‘real regions’ from  
22 ‘regions on paper’ often put a great emphasis. If a regionalization process reaches this stage of  
23 development, the region has in some ways already become very much ‘real’ through the emergence of a  
24 community of stakeholders who are attached and committed to the proposed regionalization. Still, the  
25 vast majority of propositions for regionalization never stabilize beyond the state of a non-coherent,  
26 vague and fragmented regional public or loose stakeholder community, while a small number of  
27 propositions might succeed in becoming stabilized to such an advanced degree that they within time  
28 become widely taken-for-granted and natural(ized) regions. To be able to do so, the proposition for  
29 regionalization and the essence and interests of the region must be further stabilized through the  
30 endowment of an actor with a widely recognized responsibility to legitimately act as a designated  
31 common spokesperson, with the right to speak on behalf of the interests of the proposed  
32 regionalization.  
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42 The actor(s) who take upon themselves or are vested with the capacity to act as the voice of the region,  
43 to speak of and for the region can be seen as attempting to assume a status as a clearing house of  
44 regionality and takes upon itself the right to formulate the interests of the region and the power to  
45 define what belongs to the region and not (Latour, 2005b:31), hence both positioning itself as the  
46 legitimate embodiment of the voice of the region, and at the same time articulating the essence of a  
47 particular proposition for regionalization (cf. Cooren, 2010; Latour, 2004). Of course, as a proposition,  
48 the version of the region being touted by a specific, maybe self-elected, regional spokesperson can  
49 always be challenged; and often we will see many different actors scrambling to make a claim to being  
50 the legitimate spokesperson of a region, all with their own slightly (or majorly) different propositions for  
51 regionalization (cf. Cooren, 2010:168). But as already related above, if a number of actors begin to align  
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3 around a certain definition of the region and its interests, and directly or indirectly grant the  
4 spokesperson authority for that version of the region to a certain actor, we can sometimes see the  
5 development of a type of snowballing logic, whereby an increasing array of actors more or less willingly  
6 or coercively become locked-down into the configuring network being woven around a specific  
7 prospective regional spokesperson authority. As the spokesperson succeeds in mustering an increasing  
8 number of such allies, it will to increasing degrees come to resemble the mouthpiece of a regional  
9 'Leviathan' as other actors accept the authority of the spokesperson to speak for their essence and  
10 interest in exchange for the envisioned benefits or necessity of 'buying-in' into the emerging terms of  
11 regionalization, further also leading to increasing difficulties for those who attempt to dispute or  
12 challenge this particular proposition of the region.  
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21 It is also at this stage that not only the mouthpiece of the Leviathan becomes clearly formed but also its  
22 body, through the delegation of the proposition towards regionalization into more durable and costly-  
23 to-reverse materials – thus further stabilizing it. This may for instance occur through the formalization of  
24 organizations and political-administrative units or through the construction of physical infrastructure or  
25 other durable land-use developments that materially locks down or 'hard-wires' the recurrent and  
26 stable enactment of the proposition for regionalization into the fabric of various broad aspects of  
27 everyday life, be it through financial distribution mechanisms, land-use planning or any other  
28 material(izing) mechanism that will silently and relentlessly constantly reproduce the specific  
29 proposition for regionalization without any need for fanfares or fuss, making the region 'happen' by  
30 bearing down upon or formatting worldly events on a recurring and regular basis . The agency of the  
31 region as an actor or 'actant' in its own right already begins to appear in the early stages of the  
32 regionalization process through the emergence of regional stakeholder subjectivities that generate  
33 territorial attachments and there-through come to guide action and decisions; but it is primarily through  
34 this materialization in durable materials that the region becomes not only an actor made to act by  
35 others– but also extensively comes to act back upon or even steer others' actions as an actor or 'actant'  
36 in its own right.  
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### 50 **Studying three contemporary processes of regionalization as publics-in-stabilization**

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52 In the previous sections of the paper it has been claimed that studying regions-in-becoming as publics-  
53 in-stabilization might help researchers illuminate the contingency of stabilized regions, and further that  
54 such a perspective might give us new purchase on how regions form, evolve and (sometimes) stabilize.  
55 In this section of the paper, the conceptual model sketched above will therefore be put to work in the  
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3 study of three contemporary processes towards regionalization in Northern Europe, with the purpose of  
4 learning what aspects of these processes the model will help us highlight, and what challenges that arise  
5 when the model is applied to concrete empirical material. The three cases that will be granted a closer  
6 examination in the paper are the *Mälardalen region* – the wider sub-national regionalization of the  
7 greater Stockholm area, the *Øresund region* – the cross-border, transnational regionalization between  
8 Sweden and Denmark, and finally the *Baltic Sea Region* – the ‘macroregional’ regionalization of the  
9 Baltic Sea area. The chosen cases purposely have radically diverging geographic scopes and reaches, and  
10 all to various degrees cross administrative borders such as national borders, to illustrate that processes  
11 of regionalization are trans-scalar occurrences that, more than anything, bend existing scalar structures  
12 and institute new scalar entities. Further, the examined cases all have very divergent institutional  
13 backing and structures – which hopefully might show whether the model for conceptualizing processes  
14 towards regionalization outlined above can be relevant in diverse administrative-judicial environments  
15 and contexts, and if it may serve to highlight oft-shared aspects of processes towards regionalization  
16 notwithstanding important contextual divergences.  
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28 The regionalization of *Mälardalsregionen*, or *Stockholm-Mälärregionen* as it is also known, has primarily  
29 been documented by Westholm et al (2008). Mälardalen as a region is not defined by any formal  
30 territorial boundaries, and no formal political-administrative institution that corresponds to it exists.  
31 Nevertheless, for many political and administrative actors in Sweden on all levels of government the  
32 region of Mälardalen is today considered to be a very real and active entity, endowed with both powers  
33 of agency and rightful claims (Stenlås, 2008:17). But this perceived regional unity is a relatively new  
34 phenomenon. The area today generally considered to compose the Mälardalen region has historically  
35 rather been marred by considerable political-administrative strife and animosity along a number of fault  
36 lines, including – but not limited to – conflicts between the City of Stockholm and surrounding  
37 municipalities, between the County of Stockholm and surrounding counties, between the northern  
38 supposedly wealthier parts of the greater Stockholm area and the more populous south, and between  
39 the Stockholm County to the east (containing the capital city), and the historically powerful industrial  
40 towns further west along the shores of Lake Mälaren.  
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51 The case of the emergence of the transnational *Øresundsregion*, across the *Øresund* strait between the  
52 cities of Malmö in Sweden and Copenhagen in Denmark, has been well documented, for instance in the  
53 volumes edited by Lyck & Berg (1997) and Berg et al (2000) and by Jensen & Richardson (2004).  
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56 [FOOTNOTE 5] The *Øresund* region is today considered one of the real success-stories of European  
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3 cross-border regionalizations, with a grand centerpiece in the imposing and impressive Øresund Bridge  
4 that physically ties together the city of Malmö in Sweden with the capital city of Denmark –  
5 Copenhagen; and on a wider scale, the Scandinavian Peninsula with the rest of continental Europe. Still  
6 Berg (2001) notes that the idea of a regionalization tying together Sweden’s southernmost area, Scania  
7 – where Malmö is located, with the Danish island of Zealand – where Copenhagen is located, was long  
8 considered a complete pipe dream, a “re-li-gion” more than a “region” (Berg 2001:175). Still, today, very  
9 few will question the reality of the Øresund region. It has become almost ubiquitous due to the high  
10 degree of cross-border commuting, transnational settlement patterns and co-operations on all levels  
11 that exist today across the narrow strait.  
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20 With regards to the transnational *Baltic Sea Region*, the process towards regionalization has previously  
21 been explored by, among others, Lehti (2009) and Metzger & Schmitt (2012). Since the fall of the Iron  
22 Curtain, there have existed numerous initiatives for a proposed regionalization of the wider  
23 transnational Baltic Sea area, most often envisaged as including countries such as Sweden, Finland,  
24 Denmark, the Baltic Republics (Estonian, Latvia, Lithuania), parts of Poland, parts of Germany, parts of  
25 Russia – and sometimes also countries such as Norway and Byelorussia. But already towards the end of  
26 the 1990s, as the initial scramble for regionalization of the Baltic Sea appeared to mellow out, it seemed  
27 as if the proposed regionalization of the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) was already a lost cause as a future-  
28 region (Lehti, 2009:18). Nevertheless, with the launch of the *European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea*  
29 *Region* (EUSBSR) in 2009, the regionalization of the BSR appears to be one of the most active and  
30 institutionally backed conscious region-building projects in contemporary Europe.  
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45 Table 1 has been organized according to the proposed conceptual model consisting of three  
46 interconnected phases. These phases include the *emergence phase*, when a regional public begins to  
47 take form through the articulation of *territorially framed shared concerns*, which occurs in parallel with  
48 the *formation of regional stakeholder subjectivities* that bind together actors who have previously not  
49 seen themselves as belonging together or sharing concerns or a common fate. In the *stabilization phase*,  
50 a *regional stakeholder community* begins to take form and become organized, although often in rather  
51 loose and informal forms. Relatedly, a *singularization of the proposition for regionalization* through the  
52 emergence of a more unified or singularized discourse outlining the attributed essence and interests of  
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3 the region can often also be witnessed in this phase. Finally, in the phase which entails the  
4 *institutionalization of the region* we will most often see widely recognized *spokesperson* authority  
5 concerning the articulation of the essence and interests of the region being bestowed upon some  
6 particular organization or agency. This spokesperson formation can also be seen both as part of further  
7 contributing to a further delegation of the proposition for regionalization into more costly and difficult-  
8 to-reverse forms of stabilized sociomaterial relations such as infrastructure development, and these  
9 further often become the publicly *recognized 'concrete outcomes'* of regionalization processes that are  
10 used as examples of a particular region being 'real'.  
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### 20 *Emergence phase: territorially framed concerns & regional stakeholder subjectification*

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23 In all the three examined empirical cases the articulation of new, territorially framed concerns played a  
24 central role in the early stages of the formation of a regional public. Sometimes these concerns were  
25 previously not articulated but were now put on the table as specifically regional concerns, in other  
26 instances they were previously debated concerns that were now rearticulated in a regional territorial  
27 framing, or as the basis for a supposedly needed collective regional mobilization. It can further be  
28 noticed that in all three cases, new collective subject positions are being invoked in the articulation of  
29 these concerns, and these collective subjectivities are often selectively contrasted against and/or linked  
30 up to other existing or potential subject positions such as local, national or European identities.  
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38 In *Mälardalen*, national county administration boards (*Länsstyrelser*) and municipalities (*Kommuner*)  
39 formed taskforces in the late 1980s to begin to probe what were seen as issues of common concern that  
40 needed to be dealt with collectively in the wider region – for instance the water management of lake  
41 Mälaren, located in the centre of the region, but also common interests in transport infrastructure  
42 development such as the planned extension and refurbishing of the national railway network and the  
43 supposed effects of this upon the counties and municipalities around lake Mälaren. Central to this  
44 process was the emergence of the idea that there existed common interests and concerns that were  
45 specific to the Mälardalen counties and municipalities in opposition to the interests of other perceived  
46 regionalizations, such as the northern parts of the country or the urban areas around Gothenburg and  
47 Malmö. Also, the articulation of common concerns were put into direct contrast against the previously  
48 existing, ingrained local identities of different parts of the Mälardalen area, which were increasingly  
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3 framed as irrelevant and even dangerous due to the resulting incapacity to act collectively on pressing  
4 regional matters.  
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7 Around Øresund vague ideas existed already in the late nineteenth century, especially on the Swedish  
8 side, to connect the Swedish southernmost region of Scania to continental Europe by ways of an  
9 overland connection. But the idea of the economic development potential of a shared Swedish-Danish  
10 cross-border regionalization only picked up real momentum in the 1970s, and then primarily on the  
11 Swedish side among local politicians and academics in Scania but without any wider initial support from  
12 the Danish neighbors or any national government. In the 1980s the idea of a shared regional fate  
13 between the Swedish region of Scania and the Danish region of Zealand was infused with new energy,  
14 among other things due to the articulation of these concerns also within the frame of a discourse of  
15 europeanization, and mounting suggestions that national governments needed to tap into the potential  
16 of a common Swedish-Danish Øresund region in competition with other strong European cross-border  
17 regionalizations. So the emerging collective subject for action that emerged was articulated on the one  
18 hand against existing national identities that supposedly clouded the cross-border regional interests and  
19 potentials, and on the other hand in relation to other regions in Europe that would be slipping too far  
20 ahead of the Øresund region in terms of economic development if efforts to further develop cross-  
21 border regionalization were to be postponed.  
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34 As for the *Baltic Sea Region*, during the last awkward years of Soviet rule on the eastern shores of the  
35 Baltic sea in the late 1980s, activists both within academia and politics in countries such as Germany and  
36 Sweden had begun to articulate common cultural heritages and calling for a revival of a Baltic Sea  
37 collectivity based on a shared common heritage and mutual contemporary concerns, such as the  
38 potential for becoming a core economic region within a revamped European community. The collective  
39 subjectivity being called upon in these discourses was posited primarily against the perceived  
40 unnaturalness of the East-West divide of the region imposed by the cold war, and further drew upon the  
41 idea of a shared community of fate for the areas around the Baltic Sea, as against more narrow forms of  
42 national identification.  
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#### 50 51 *Stabilization phase: stakeholder community & singularization dynamic*

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53 In this moment in the regionalization process we can in all three cases observe the emergence of  
54 nascent, more or less formalized stakeholder communities in the form of network structures or more or  
55 less informal and non-committing organizations. These function as forums for discussions around issues  
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3 of common concern and to various degrees also serve to generate shared, collective self-knowledge as  
4 the basis for collective action and/or generating public debate and publicity concerning common  
5 concerns. This both occurs through person-to-person contact in e.g. meetings or conferences, but also  
6 through other devices and material media – a veritable flurry of maps, plans, strategies and brochures.  
7 Further, in this stage of the regionalization process, it is also possible to observe some form of a  
8 singularization dynamic and slowly emerging partial consensus regarding the essence and interests of  
9 the proposed regionalizations, with the BSR constituting somewhat of an exception in this case.

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11 In the Mälardalen region, the 1990s saw the formation of a number of organizations and networks  
12 speaking for, and about, a proposed/supposed Mälardalen region. This included both  
13 'Mälardalsgruppen' (later becoming 'Mälardalsrådet', see further below) and more informal networks,  
14 such as the regular cooperation that emerged in the later part of the 1990s between the various  
15 national county administration boards for the counties surrounding Lake Mälaren, together with the  
16 regionalized national infrastructure-providing agencies such as the national road authority. With regards  
17 to the singularization of the proposition for regionalization this development was advanced for instance  
18 through the production of common strategic document and reports, outlining collective regional plans  
19 and goals. Especially the local process underpinning the publication of the OECD *Territorial Review of*  
20 *Stockholm-Mälars Region* (OECD, 2006) has been highlighted as a key moment in the generation of a  
21 shared, common idea of the essence and interests of the Mälardalen region (cf. Stenlås 2008).

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23 In the Øresund area, the 1990s saw a veritable boom in transnational regional organizations and  
24 networks, tying together both public and private actors and NGOs in sometimes unexpected ways. One  
25 observer has noted that over 500 organizations were active in the various projects, programs, events  
26 and activities that could be ascribed to the regionalization process in the area from the mid 1980s and  
27 up until the beginning of 2000 (Berg 2001:178). From 1991 up to 2000, over 150 strategy documents  
28 were produced regarding the emerging region, including vision statements and strategic plans – in  
29 addition to a number of regional policy documents sponsored by various national and regional  
30 authorities in both countries. Consolidation of plans and shared ideas concerning the essence and  
31 interests of the region only emerged slowly from this plethora of documents, and patchily at that.

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33 In the Baltic Sea regionalization process, the 1990s saw the initiation of numerous initiatives, programs  
34 and organizations aiming at furthering the regionalization of the area surrounding the Baltic Sea.  
35 Initiatives often came from the western shores of the Baltic as part of the enthusiasm to include the  
36 recently independent Baltic republics into a new European transnational community. These included

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3 various EU *INTERREG* programs, the *Council of Baltic Sea States*, the *Nordic Council of Ministers*, the  
4 *Baltic Sea States Sub-Regional Cooperation*, *Union of Baltic Cities*, *Baltic 21*, the *Helsinki Commission* and  
5 the *NB8-group* – to mention but a few of the organizations and constellations that are sometimes  
6 referred to as the ‘alphabet soup of the BSR’ due to the many acronyms of organizations with  
7 overlapping agendas and activities in the region. Soon enough, though, it turned out that there existed  
8 widespread dissensus regarding the desirability of a Baltic Sea regionalization. While the western  
9 countries of the Baltic Sea area found themselves within an emerging process of neo-regionalization, the  
10 former communist republics were still focusing on consolidating borders and national boundaries, and  
11 were busy crafting a national – and to some extent ‘western’ and European identity, wherein a label of  
12 “Balticness” was not seen as very befitting. This led to a mellowing out of the first scramble for  
13 regionalization of the Baltic Sea towards the end of the 1990s. But even if the BSR regionalization efforts  
14 of the 1990s failed to really travel widely, they still left a living heritage of a wide and disparate  
15 organizational patchwork of actors that saw themselves as part of a wider BSR context, even though all  
16 articulating the essence and interests of the region in sometimes very diverging terms.  
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#### 28 *Institutionalization phase: spokesperson formation & recognized outcomes*

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31 In the examined empirical cases we can in all three instances distinguish a third stage of regionalization  
32 following upon the previous two in which the region – from having been a type of project or proposed  
33 entity – begins to become all the more taken-for-granted and considered a natural reference point of  
34 established reality. In this phase we can in all three cases observe the emergence of recognized regional  
35 spokespersons, endowed with more or less privileged rights of speaking in the name of the region. Also,  
36 in this phase regional concerns have become so widely accepted that they now also appear to guide or  
37 at least influence difficult- or costly-to-reverse patterns of development, such as major infrastructure  
38 projects or land-use developments, which then also come to be recognized as not only concrete  
39 outcomes of regionalization processes, but also as signs of the solid reality-status of the regions as  
40 something ‘existing out there’ which comes to function as a seemingly self-given reference point in  
41 reality.  
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51 In Mälardalen *Mälardalsrådet*, which was founded in 1993 and with a membership of 56 municipalities  
52 and six counties, has increasingly come to be treated as a legitimate spokesperson for the wider region.  
53 It is a pronounced network organization with only a handful of employees. The member delegates meet  
54 up once a year at the *Mälartinget* assembly. The organization also has a civil servant coordination group  
55 and four standing committees on culture, business development and R&D, infrastructure and planning,  
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3 and environmental issues. The organization participates in political processes as a joint representation  
4 for the member organizations, especially in national infrastructure processes. Still, formally, it is an  
5 interest organization with no formal administrative or political status. It is politically non-partisan and  
6 has no (formally) delegated powers of representation. With regards to recognized outcomes, the  
7 articulated common interests of the Mälardalen region have, among other things, also had a  
8 pronounced impact upon the strategic development transport infrastructure in Sweden, among them  
9 the so-called 'Stockholm agreement' on major infrastructure development in the Stockholm area.  
10 Another important recognized outcome that also functions to strengthen the regional linkages in  
11 Mälardalen, and there-through generated a daily 'enactment of the region, is the public transportation  
12 co-operation within the companies MÄLAB and TiM that are co-owned by the individual Mälardalen  
13 counties' public transportation agencies. These organizations have with increasing intensity contributed  
14 to a coordination of the public transport systems of the Mälardalen counties, i.e. by instigating and  
15 financing new cross-county rail commuting , offering subsidized monthly commuter cards for cross-  
16 county commuting and also through organizing a partial merging and harmonization of ticketing and  
17 timetable systems across the counties, all of which has greatly contributed to simplifying daily cross-  
18 county commuting across the wider Mälardalen region.

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20 Today the so called *Øresund committee* is generally regarded as the legitimate spokesperson of the  
21 Øresund region, an organization with a structure and modus operandi very similar to that of  
22 Mälardalsrådet, albeit with a somewhat higher degree of resources and activity. Some of the most  
23 influential constellations during the early stages of the regionalization process were never transposed  
24 into any durable forms and rather withered away or fell apart. The most widely recognized outcomes of  
25 the Øresund regionalization is of course the towering bridge-tunnel transport link across Øresund,  
26 creating a land transport connection between Sweden and Denmark – but also the increasing patterns  
27 of cross-border commuting and settlement, partially resulting from the construction of the bridge, are  
28 today widely drawn upon as evidence of the 'objective' existence of an integrated cross-border region in  
29 Øresund.

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31 After a long period of apparent stagnation in the process towards BSR regionalization, efforts gained  
32 new momentum towards the end of the 2000s with the launch of the *European Union Strategy for the*  
33 *Baltic Sea Region* (EUSBSR), which was officially ratified and approved by the EU member states in 2009.  
34 With the adoption of the strategy and the related governance structure, the European Commission –  
35 through *DG Regio* – in practicality becomes placed (or rather places itself) in the position of acting as a  
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3 “metagovernor” with the capacity to outline the essential characteristics and common interests of the  
4 region (Metzger & Schmitt, 2012). With regard to concrete, recognized outcomes of this more  
5 formalized institutionalization of the essence and interests of the BSR, it still remains to be seen what  
6 this will/may entail as the regionalization as of yet does not appear to be fully naturalized or taken-for-  
7 granted in any wider circles.  
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### 10 11 12 *Discussion of the model in the light of the empirical findings*

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15 The attempted conceptualization of three different contemporary regionalization processes as publics-  
16 in-stabilization evinces that there are both important similarities and differences between the cases at  
17 hand, both lending support to – and sometimes also putting into question – the relevance and  
18 applicability of the conceptual model being proposed in the paper. To begin with, in all of the three  
19 examined cases, roughly sequential processes can be traced entailing the emergence of regional publics,  
20 their stabilization and their institutionalization as recognized regions – even if the temporal hiatuses and  
21 overlaps in these processes vary greatly between the cases. Further, the mechanisms of emergence and  
22 stabilization sketched to be entailed in these processes also appear to have been at work in all of the  
23 three examined cases including the regional territorial framing of concerns, the subjectification of  
24 regional stakeholders, the formation of a regional stakeholder community, the singularization of a  
25 proposition for regionalization, the establishment of recognized regional spokespersons and finally – the  
26 delegation of the proposition for regionalization into more stable and durable sociomaterial forms.  
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31 Still there are important divergences between the cases in themselves, and also between the individual  
32 cases and the sketched conceptual model. One such divergence concerns the sketched temporality of  
33 the conceptualized phases. For when examining the cases, it becomes apparent that these sketched  
34 phases are not neatly separated discrete stages, but rather blend into each other – both temporally and  
35 thematically. For instance, within the emergence-phase, the processes of articulating common concerns  
36 and the processes of regional stakeholder subjectification to a large degree appear to entail two sides to  
37 the same coin, in the form of a co-constitutive dynamic. But with regards to the relationship between  
38 the formation of a stakeholder community and the singularization of the proposition for regionalization,  
39 the link is not as clear, which also goes for the relationship between the mechanisms of recognized  
40 spokesperson formation in relation to the achievement of taken-for-granted reality status for a region,  
41 not to mention the cross-linkages between the different mechanisms which in this model have been  
42 placed in different phases of regionalization.  
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3 With regards to the temporal relation between the conceptualized phases, particularly the stabilization  
4 phase often appears to overlap with the other two phases to such a degree in the cases that it becomes  
5 questionable whether the mechanisms described under this phase can rightfully be conceptualized as a  
6 separate phase – which is perhaps not so surprising given the nature of these processes. For instance,  
7 the so-called singularization of the proposition for regionalization appears to occur all along in some of  
8 the studied processes towards regionalization, albeit not in a stable streamlining flow but rather in  
9 bursts and spurts. Further, the supposed singularization of a regional essence and articulated regional  
10 interests in the form of coherence is not particularly pronounced, or at least not in any way forced, in  
11 any of the studied cases – but rather occurs more indirectly through the construction and selective  
12 reproduction/dissemination of shared ‘knowledge’, in the form of analyses of regional issues and/or  
13 patterns and projections for regional futures, or through the indirect codifying ascription through the  
14 formatting of particular grant guidelines, etc. Such shared knowledge appears to form an important role  
15 in what perhaps could be called the configuration of common ontologies (see Callon, 1998:8). Still, in all  
16 of the studied regions, up until present time, many different – sometimes partially connecting,  
17 sometimes mutually contradicting – articulations of the regions’ interests and essences appear to be in  
18 circulation, but where some are obviously more influential or have more traction than others (cf.  
19 Legendijk, 2007). These findings thus highlight the difficulties of achieving complete singularization of a  
20 proposition for regionalization, no matter how extensively materialized, and points towards the  
21 possibility that at least some degree or margin of multiplicity may at any given time be a ‘normal’  
22 situation for any proposition for regionalization. This insight thus points towards the conclusion that the  
23 coherence and singularity of a proposition for regionalization may be a very situated, more or less  
24 temporary and often quite precarious achievement.

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42 *Empirical postscript: From the chatter of the multitude to the singular voice of the coherent region... and*  
43 *sometimes back again*  
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46 If we do not subscribe to some form of naive end of history-thesis an important question to ask  
47 concerns what happens at the moment  $n+1$ , when a proposition for regionalization has painstakingly  
48 passed through all the stages of the sketched model. Does the ‘well-constructed’ region now simply  
49 settle into a non-negotiable and non-reversible reality? Has the once so fragile proposition now become  
50 transposed into such a durable and hermetically sealed black-box that it from now and forever on will  
51 be taken for granted as a natural and seemingly self-evident region?  
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3 As noted above, the BSR is still in every way far from reaching such a status, and may still – for all we  
4 know – come out the other end still-born or arrested in its development. With regards to Øresund, a  
5 little more than a decade after the grand opening of the towering bridge the proposition for  
6 regionalization which to a large extent always posited the essence of the region to be cross-border links  
7 and commuting has remained solid enough in wide policy circles to remain a “simple” unchallenged  
8 truth (Ek, 2006). Or rather, even though the region still contains not completely neutralized centre-  
9 periphery lines of conflict, challenges against it have been easily marginalized. An important explanation  
10 for this is that the a large share of the task of holding the region together was delegated to the faithful  
11 *lieu-tenant* (‘place-holder’ in French) of the Øresund bridge, which daily facilitates the reality of this  
12 “transport monotopia” (Ek, 2006) which thus does not require passionate votes of allegiance anymore,  
13 only the non-dramatic daily routine enactment of cross-border flows of goods and traffic. Few except for  
14 the odd regional politician or zealous planner really appear to truly passionately care about it anymore,  
15 but almost no one would question its mundane existence as a simple, commonplace and non-dramatic  
16 phenomenon – well-integrated into the rhythms of everyday life. A (rather dull) taken for granted reality  
17 which simply is taken into account with all the other entities and actors that people the world.  
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30 With the Mälardalen-case the situation appears to have turned out a little differently. Towards the end  
31 of the 2000’s the proposition for regionalization seemed to be on-course towards yet another stage of  
32 institutionalization as it was on a trajectory towards becoming formalized as a Swedish state spatiality in  
33 the form of a new type of regional administrative entity with quite far-reaching legally codified rights of  
34 taxation and political representation. But in February 2007 a committee consisting of representatives  
35 from all the political parties in the *Riksdagen* (Swedish parliament) after four years of investigation  
36 handed in their proposal for a new formal regional administrative organization for the country. In the  
37 final report of the committee it is stated that Mälardalen must be considered to be a functionally and  
38 politically well-integrated region, the development of which is of crucial national interest with regards to  
39 economic growth and competitiveness. But then, as a bombshell, the committee suggests that the  
40 region should not be granted the status of an official administrative region, arguing that a formalized  
41 Mälardalen region would cover such a great proportion of the national population that it would  
42 generate grave national economic and political asymmetries. To prevent such asymmetries from  
43 occurring the committee suggests a population cap of two million inhabitants for administrative regions,  
44 which effectively blocks the official formation of a Mälardalen region, which would land at a population  
45 between two and a half and three million inhabitants.  
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3 Following the committee report the Swedish government invited counties to come together 'from  
4 below' and hand in proposals for mergers into larger administrative regions, with the implicit  
5 understanding that a full Mälardalen region would not be allowed. This sudden turn of events put the  
6 counties surrounding Lake Mälaren in a very awkward position as they had now for a decade and a half  
7 tied their fate to the formation of a common, integrated regionalization with Stockholm, the economic  
8 engine of the country. What were they to do now, when this road forward appeared to be blocked by a  
9 powerful actor, the national government? An outburst of nervous answers rapidly ensued, all of them in  
10 different ways contributing to the consequent unwrapping and destabilization of a regionalization that  
11 but moments before had appeared so solid and self-evident – a seemingly stable singularity that now  
12 rapidly began to blur into multiplicities. Only recently taken for granted truths and settled alliances were  
13 suddenly opened up for reconsideration. In a debate article in a regional daily some elected  
14 representatives from different administrative levels of one of the counties ask themselves: is Stockholm  
15 really a necessary component of an integrated Mälardalen region? Maybe the other Mälardalen  
16 counties only have partially overlapping interests with Stockholm – but more in common together? A  
17 flurry of new maps were produced and circulated, with various versions of Mälardalsregionen of  
18 diverging territorial scope and quite a few without any form of Mälardalen region at all, but with the  
19 Mälardalen counties split between a number of alternative administrative regions.  
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33 The county administrative board of Södermanland, one of the Mälardalen counties bordering  
34 Stockholm, put their cards on the table and unilaterally formally apply with the county of Stockholm to  
35 form a new region together, implicitly excluding some of the other Mälardalen counties. Stockholm  
36 quickly shrugged off this rather brusque invite as the political majority of the county remains closely tied  
37 and loyal to the national government and their informal wish to completely exclude Stockholm from any  
38 newly formed administrative regions. In apparent desperation the Södermanland county politicians then  
39 made a complete turnaround to instead propose a merger with two other Mälardalen counties,  
40 excluding Stockholm – but the initiative was quickly aborted following a threatened revolt by the  
41 county's own constituent municipalities. After the passing of the deadline posted by national  
42 government in February 2012 it turned out that no formal application for new administrative regions  
43 involving any of the Mälardalen counties had been filed. There would be no formal Mälardalen region  
44 either with or without Stockholm.  
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55 One way to analyze the thwarted formalization of Mälardalen into an officially recognized administrative  
56 region would be to see this as a deathblow to the process of regionalization which blocks the route  
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3 towards further institutionalization, leaving the region hanging in a limbo as some form of abortive or  
4 failed region, similar to the BSR in the mid 90ies. But not necessarily. From a different perspective, it  
5 might also be seen as a proof of strength; for even though the Mälardalen 'Leviathan' did not become a  
6 recognized state spatiality, neither was it formally territorially broken up and fractured into other,  
7 competing constellations (e.g. with some of the counties but excluding Stockholm). So in a different  
8 way, if we as researchers do not just stare ourselves blind on formal state recognition as the only trait of  
9 a 'real' region, but rather track all the heterogenous materials and linkages that carry and stabilize the  
10 proposition for regionalization, we might in this case come to see that the Leviathan of the Mälardalen  
11 region perhaps even came out strengthened from this trial of force. For in the process, no actor  
12 questioned whether a Mälardalen region really *existed* (except for the odd marginalized regional  
13 geographer). The disagreement, which then appeared to settle, rather concerned its properly defined  
14 essence and boundaries. Instead, a choir of disparate voices – even including the skeptical  
15 parliamentary committee – kept repeating as in unison: it is a region, tied together by mutual interests,  
16 economic dynamics and (rail-based) commuter flows.

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28 As Metzger & Schmitt (2012) have previously argued, it thus appears important not confuse degrees of  
29 administrative formalization of regions with degrees of durability or staying power. What rather appears  
30 to distinguish a well institutionalized – that is, well stabilized – regional Leviathan is not necessarily the  
31 formal hallmark of a recognized state spatiality. Rather, having travelled widely and become delegated  
32 to both heterogeneous and durable forms and materials it holds firm in its recognized existence against  
33 fundamental challenges. Once reaching such a degree of durability, the Leviathan can even afford itself  
34 to mutate in parts, to slowly change shape, and shift nuances at the edges without rupturing or falling  
35 apart (Callon & Latour, 1981: 285). And so it also does in the case of Mälardalen. Where the  
36 parliamentary committee in 2007 discussed four counties as composing a "functional region" in  
37 Mälardalen – all directly bordering Lake Mälaren, in 2012 the webpage of Mälardalsrådet now lists five  
38 counties, one not directly bordering the lake, as composing the territory of the region. Further, in the  
39 new infrastructure development process initiated for the Mälardalen region, as many as seven counties  
40 are directly involved. At the same time the discussion goes on: maybe the region is not really  
41 fundamentally held together by rail commuting links but by roads ('more money to roads, less to  
42 tracks!')? Maybe what holds it together is that it is a "knowledge region" and/or an "entrepreneurial  
43 region"? The search for the essence of the region goes on, but not once is its status as a firm reality  
44 questioned in this process. Even if there is no final agreement on *what* the region fundamentally is, it is  
45 incessantly repeated over and over again that it nevertheless *is*.

### Concluding discussion

A central purpose of this paper has been to explore new ways of studying and conceptualizing spatial entities such as regions which do not take the existence of such entities for given or as independent of human subjectivity, but which neither reduces them to the status of pseudo-real mirages or collectively reified delusions. Through drawing upon inspiration from so-called Actor-Network Theory an attempt has been made to skirt the often recurring question in regional studies: is the region constructed or not? Instead – questions are raised concerning how regions sometimes can be constructed in such ways that they may become taken for granted as seemingly natural reference points in the world. This thus entails a non-denunciatory approach, the purpose of which is not to debunk regions as unwarranted reifications, but which instead conceptualizes spatial entities such as regions as amalgamated relational assemblages composed of both human and non-human components, which are dependent on the human component for their existence but also have a power of agency to guide or even format human action, thus making a definite difference in the world as an actor or ‘actant’ in its own right in the form of a collective macro-actor or ‘regional Leviathan’ (cf. Paasi, 2010). From such a perspective, the formulation of a proposition for regionalization can be seen as an attempted operation of capture, connection and organization where regions emerge as seemingly natural and taken-for-granted spatialities by way of *institutionalization*, which in this case does not necessarily refer to their formal recognition as state spatialities but rather the extent to which propositions for regionalization are transposed into heterogeneous material forms that are more durable than fleeting words – such as transport infrastructure, land-use patterns, financial support schemes and cooperation organizations or legal code – which all in different ways may contribute to generating the region as a taken for granted mundane reality, a ‘black box’.

By paying explicit attention to the initial stages of the processes through which regions emerge in the form of vague propositions for regionalization, and then tracking these processes through gradual stages of stabilization, we might learn to treat spatial entities not as either real *or* constructed, but instead come to appreciate that they are both very real *and* constructed at the same time – and further that the more sturdily constructed they are, the more real they become – sometimes to the degree that their existence in the world becomes naturalized and widely taken for granted. One possible way of making these processes sensible is by conceptualizing regions-in-becoming as publics-in-stabilization. Even this particular approach can of course be operationalized in numerous ways, but has within this paper been approached through the sketching of a rough model comprising three phase – or perhaps rather:

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3 interlocking mechanism – of increasing degrees of stabilization ranging from the initial articulation of  
4 shared regional concerns, up through the formulation of vague propositions for regionalizations that  
5 might or might not ‘travel’ and ‘stick’, to finally sometimes result in the institutionalization of a widely  
6 recognized and taken for granted region. The stages of these processes appear to be entangled and  
7 overlapping in both time and content, even though roughly consecutive in analytical abstraction.  
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12 Nevertheless, we must not fall to the temptation to write Whiggish histories of regionalization. For even  
13 if regions, when they reach an advanced stage of institutionalization, might appear as wholly irreversible  
14 completely natural or organic structured coherences, we must not forget that they are always the  
15 outcome of long processes of singularization and stabilization that never have any guaranteed  
16 outcomes. Therefore, it is important to always see regionalization as a dynamic process, where the  
17 successful stabilization of recognized regions are more exceptions than the rule, but where the regional  
18 entities that have been successfully (temporarily) stabilized are often easier to perceive, grasp and take  
19 for given than regions-in-becoming in various stages of regionalization.  
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27 Since regionalization processes thus can and often are challenged, halted some observers have come to  
28 conclude that regions must be seen as fundamentally contested entities. But in the light of the empirical  
29 material presented in the paper, perhaps this remark must be moderated a bit to conclude that regions  
30 appear to be *prone* rather than *preordained* to unpredictability and contestation. Sometimes there is  
31 wide agreement on what the region is, sometimes there are diverging versions of the region that for a  
32 longer or shorter duration of time may coexist side by side – indicating that regions are not ‘by nature’  
33 contested. Rather, they sometimes “may hang together here, in this instance, for this purpose, while it is  
34 also in tension, there, a little later, in relation to another issue” (Mol, 2010: 260) – their essence never  
35 fully to be settled once and for all, but neither subject to a state of constant controversy. Thus, the state  
36 of ontological multiplicity of only partially connecting propositions for regionalization circulating at any  
37 given time under the same proper name does not always appear as a problem or a challenge. Still, there  
38 may occur points where a seemingly powerful regional Leviathan may face a direct challenge so forceful  
39 that the alignment of multitudes of actors into a seemingly coherent whole rapidly may start to come  
40 apart and begin to turn into a Colossus on clay feet or a chattering Tower of Babel. Alternative versions  
41 of the region and competing spatialities which may have been subdued and marginalized for a period by  
42 the power of the Leviathan again begin to proliferate, at which moment the Leviathan may be fully on  
43 the verge of collapse. Or again – yet still there, but just temporarily somewhat fuzzier, multiple and  
44 unclear in its contours and essence until it regains its composure. From this perspective, it might thus  
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3 perhaps be easier to conceptualize the regional Leviathan as a trajectory more than a stable 'thing',  
4 sometimes seemingly converging into one bold straight arrow towards a clear future, while at other  
5 times only consisting of a more or less consistent, coherent and aligned bundle of only partially  
6 crisscrossing capillaries, sometimes clinging around each other but often shooting off branches into  
7 idiosyncratic directions (cf. Massey, 2005; Hillier, 2007).  
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13 In conclusion, it is important to again clarify that the conceptual model presented in this paper in no way  
14 pretends to constitute some form of general or all-covering theory of regionalization. Rather, the  
15 ambition is somewhat more limited and instead entails an attempt to argue and demonstrate that the  
16 proposed conceptual framework might help scholars shed light on the historically contingent character  
17 of regions and some of the processes through which they sometimes come to appear otherwise. The  
18 point here isn't that regions are somehow conjured 'out of the blue'. To the contrary, they are formed in  
19 the middle of a world always already ongoing, where every outcome isn't equally likely, but often due to  
20 factors beyond the grasp of the moment of action. A world where material structures beckon to be  
21 captured and connected through discourse, and fleeting words reach towards being transposed into  
22 concretized vestiges of bricks and asphalt. Where the fluctuation between these two desires generates a  
23 force-field wherein spatial entities never emerge as a fully linear process *ex nihilo*, but rather as a  
24 fluctuation of creative destruction or a series of trajectories of spatial organization composed out of  
25 temporary stabilizations and alignments of ever mutating patterns of spatiotemporal change where  
26 "some space-times are more durable" while other "flicker out of existence" (Thrift, 2004) and where we,  
27 taking our cue from Harvey (1996), may come to see any perceived spatial "permanences" as always  
28 dependent on the processes that create, sustain and dissolve them.  
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41 This paper ends here – but with a sense of that so much must be left unsaid, a stammering 'and, and,  
42 and...'. So much work yet to be done for which this paper can be but a frustrating vignette. The task  
43 ahead lies in getting even closer up to regionalization *in action* and *in situ* to really get a lively sense and  
44 feeling for the sweatiness and messiness of the birth pangs and growing pains of regional Leviathans. To  
45 rub up against the twin pincers of double articulation at work in various stages of concretization –at one  
46 at the same time generating the form and essence of the region in becoming. To put an ear directly  
47 against the initially faint but increasingly loud murmur being heard as vague publics begin to solidify into  
48 recognizable territorial stakeholder communities: "the region is... The region can be... The region must  
49 be...", in close attention tracing the chiasmic ontological transformations that occur in these processes –  
50 from fleeting but passionate words to hard concrete and cold steel, and then back again.  
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## Footnotes

[1] Of course, lest we forget, there is of course always also an “outside on the inside”, consisting of those elements in geographic proximity that are deemed not to qualify for regional identity, and which thus are deemed alien, and not belonging to the region proper (Painter, 2008). See also Healey’s (2007) discussion on foregrounding/backgrounding.

[2] Nevertheless, the perspective on regional becoming presented here is still (partially) compatible with both established state-theorist and Marxist conceptualizations of the region, given the caveat that a priori privilege or ‘determining in the last instance’-status is granted to neither the mechanism of state sovereignty, nor to capital accumulation – but that these are seen as examples of the heterogeneous mechanisms (albeit potentially very influential such) that may contribute to the process of regionalization.

[3] I wish to thank one of the anonymous referees for pointing out the unintentional but of course not entirely coincidental parallel between the model for understanding regionalization proposed in this paper and Latour & Woolgar’s model for tracing the construction of a fact (Latour & Woolgar, 1979: 82). Along the same lines it can be noted that, perhaps even more distinctly, the model presented here also shares some salient features with Latour’s (2007)suggested conceptualization of the stages of development of political issues.]

[4] A parallel can here be drawn to Benedict Andersons celebrated account of the emergence of the nation as an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983/2006) which he traces as a both discursive and material process, e.g. through the agency of the printing press and other communication and transportation technologies.

[5] The most extensive examination of the regionalization of Øresund is probably Ek (2003), a text which unfortunately has not been translated to English.

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**Table 1** Phases of development and stabilization for three contemporary Northe

<b>Regionalization</b>	<b><i>Mälardalen region</i></b>
Geographic reach	Subnational
<b>Emergence phase</b>	late 1980s-early 1990s
<i>Territorially framed common concerns</i>	Water management, transport, housing, business promotion Primarily in relation to other parts of country, entrenched
<i>Regional stakeholder subjectification</i>	local identities and sectoral interests
<b>Stabilization phase</b>	1990s-mid 2000s
<i>Stakeholder community</i>	Multiple networks and organizations Yes, for instance through generation of shared knowledge base
<i>Singularization dynamic</i>	
<b>Institutionalization phase</b>	late 1990s-2000s
<i>Spokesperson formation</i>	Yes, primarily <i>Mälardalsrådet</i> (founded 1992)
<i>Examples of recognized outcomes</i>	Transport infrastructure

European regionalizations

<i>Øresund region</i>	<i>Baltic Sea region</i>
Transnational	Macroregional
1970s-1980s	late 1980s-early 1990s
Economic development potential, transport, europeanization	Cultural heritage, economic potential, geopolitics, europeanization
Primarily in relation to national identities and other European cross-border regionalizations	In relation to east-west divide, indirectly europeanist and anti-nationalist
1990s	Early 1990s
Multiple networks and organizations	Multiple networks and organizations
Yes, for instance through dissolution or merging of competing networks	No, stagnation of process
1990s-early 2000s	Late 2000s
Yes, primarily <i>Øresundskommittén</i> (founded 1993)	Yes, European Commission through DG Regio's EUSBSR Strategy (adopted 2009)
Bridge	?