



Performance of regional identity in the implementation of European cross-border initiatives

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Abstract

The European Union's cross-border cooperation policy is regarded as a key instrument through which to promote regional cohesion, competitiveness and identity. This paper studies performances of regional identity within the framework of the EU's INTERREG North cooperation, and especially in the Finnish/Swedish border area. The performativity approach shifts the focus from the question of whether regional identities are fixed or hybrid, and thick or thin, toward the question of how regional identities are manifested in border regions. The point of departure in the study, based on policy documents, fieldwork and interviews with local actors involved in the implementation of the INTERREG initiatives, is that spatial identity is not a feature that regions have but something that is actively performed. Performances of regional identity in this northern border region do not create continuous and parallel sets of practices. Instead, different kinds of directions and disjunctures emerge in and between different interest groups for which local, national and transnational all serve as important scales of coming-togetherness and differentiation.

Keywords

Border, border region, cross-border cooperation, performativity, regional identity

Introduction

One of the main objectives of the territorial policy of the European Union (EU) is promoting regional cohesion and the competitiveness of regions. European border regions have become pivotal areas for the furthering of territorial cohesion by means of joint cross-border infrastructures, increased networking and communications; and the symbolic significance of border regions in the EU integration process has perhaps attained even more significance. Cross-border cooperation, supported and partly financed by the European Regional Development

Fund (ERDF), is understood as a significant force for change with regards to the functions of borders and as an expression of how increasing mobility and transnational partnership can act as a catalyst for fostering the emergence of transnational identities (see, for example, EC, 2011: 10).

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The aim of this paper is to contribute to the discussion about spatial identity by studying the performance of regional identity in the context of the INTERREG cross-border cooperation in the North Calotte. There is an on-going discussion concerning the transformation of European border regions; the debate centres on whether national and transnational identities, especially 'European identity', are competitive and in conflict or are peacefully coexisting (Bucken-Knapp, 2002; Eder and Sandtner, 2002; Häkli, 2002; Ivic, 2010; Knippenberg, 2004; Kramsch and Hooper, 2004; Lagendijk, 2005; Löfgren, 2008; Pinheiro, 2009: 81; Simonsen, 2004). The conclusion that many scholars have drawn is that, regardless of cooperation and the diminishing importance of borders, people continue to make sense of the world and their activities through national lenses. This is also argued to be the case in the Finnish–Swedish border area in the North Calotte, which is often presented as one of the EU's most advanced 'internal' border regions in terms of cross-border cooperation (Jukarainen, 2000; Lundén and Zalamans, 2001; Westman and Ronkainen, 2007).

However, despite the fact that national identities are still regarded as dominant, many scholars studying regional identities have turned away from the conception of identity as something territorially and temporally fixed. According to Kuus (2007), however, what is problematic in many studies discussing regional identity is not that identity is understood as something pre-given and eternal but that regional identity is considered as *a feature*, as something that regions have. Accordingly, spatial identities should rather be studied through the performativity approach, shifting the focus away from an investigation of *what identity is* and onto the matter of *how* regional identity is performed and materialized. Similar arguments have been put forward by Kaiser and Nikiforova (2008), who remark that performativity of scale has been largely overlooked, particularly in the contexts of identity and region-building. Also left unaddressed is the notion that research on regional identities often 'itself performatively constructs the object that it ostensibly describes' (Kuus, 2007: 97).

This paper first develops a theoretical framework for the study of regional identities, the point of departure being that regional identity is not a feature that regions and their inhabitants *have* but rather something that is actively *performed*. When regional identity is approached through the multi-sited performances and processes of narrativization, it is possible to take a step away from the question of whether regional identities in border areas are fixed or 'hybrid' (Anzaldúa, 1987; Vila, 2003) and whether they are thick or thin (Terlouw, 2012), and focus rather on the question of *how* regional identities are created and effected in and through everyday practice and projects, and any possible disjunctures that exist. Second, the paper will analyse the definition and creation of regional identity in the EU's INTERREG North programme area, where the key objective of the on-going programme period is promoting regional competitiveness, cohesion and identity. The paper's main focus will be on the cooperation and initiatives that have been implemented in the Swedish and Finnish border municipalities in the Tornio River Valley, with particular emphasis placed on two initiatives, *The School of Language and Culture in Pello* and *On the Border*, which were both implemented by means of several injections of INTERREG finance. Drawing on programme documents and fieldwork and interviews with locals active in the cross-border initiatives,¹ the paper underlines that performances of regional identity do not create continuous and parallel sets of practices and 'speech acts' but rather that different kinds of directions and disjunctures emerge in and between different scalar dimensions and interest groups.

Discussing regional identity

Geographers have long emphasized that regions and regional identity should not be taken for granted. As Entrikin (1991: 16; see also Allen and Cochrane, 2007: 1163) notes, places and regions do not have natural-born meaning or 'identity' but people assign them value in relation to their projects; in other words, region-building and the performance of regional identity are normally corollary to political, economic or cultural projects and the interests of

some groups and communities. Second, the idea of a place or region as a container of identity is increasingly being replaced with a relative understanding of place as an arena for multiple identities, with borders being understood not as exclusive differentiators of places but as *porous* lines (Massey, 1995: 67–68). According to Allen et al. (1998: 10), identities of regions are relational because, through the evolution of their historical relationship to one another, regions are part of a *system of representation* in which they are defined as core or peripheral, poor or rich, local or global etc. Similarly, Paasi (2003) defines ‘regional identity’ as a set of collective narratives about ‘our region’ and how we and our region are understood to differ from others. According to Paasi, regional identity can be constructed through all such elements and categorizations which help people to explain what a region is and how it can be distinguished from other regions: ideas on landscape, nature, the built environment, culture/ethnicity, dialects, economic success/recession, periphery/centre relations etc. Tomaney (2007: 370) argues that in the (extreme) relational approach the narratives of regional identity are sometimes even considered dangerous, referring to the writings of Amin (2004), who has emphasized that national identity narratives have often legitimized the subjugation of regional minorities and their identity narratives. Scholars now emphasize the importance of conceiving the multiplicity and coexistence of regional identities; there is no one single identity narrative in a region, but often an overlapping of political and cultural identities (Ivic, 2010; Kaplan, 2000).

However, since the creation of state borders has often divided economically and culturally homogeneous areas – and because the very existence of a border and particular border-crossing activities entails new cultures of being – in many cases one can find various determinants of regional identity across borders. Indeed, border regions have long been conceptualized as regions which have their own characteristics, cultures and identity (Anzaldúa, 1987). The motives, however, for mobilization of regional identity in borderlands are diverse and driven by multiple political, economic and cultural interests (see Prokkola and Ridanpää, 2011; Sparke, 2005). It has also been propounded that people living near a state border embody particular ‘hybrid’

border-crossing identities, referring to the identity of an individual whose life is entangled with border crossings, multiculturalism and resistance to unnatural boundaries (Anzaldúa, 1987). Some (particularly ethnographers) argue that not all the people who live near a border carry the special multicultural ‘border crossing identities’ (Vila, 2003), but that a person’s identification may often be tied to cultural and ethnic membership (Wilson and Donnan, 1998). Geographers also have been keen to identify and map the different identities that coexist within regions. In their study on local cooperation and ethnic diversity in the Haparanda–Tornio twin cities, Lundén and Zalamans (2001: 36) for example classify four different population groups: the *Finland Finns*, the *Sweden Swedes*, the *Tornio Valley inhabitants* and the *Sweden Finns*. What is common to these studies of borders and identity is their emphasis on utilizing cultural determinants to define the regional identity of border inhabitants. Other scholars emphasize that spatial identifications are not merely cultural products but identity constructions are also intertwined with material relations, often unequal distributions of capital (Mitchell, 1997). Performances of regional identity cannot be understood as separate from people’s life experience and ambitions, or from the material conditions which enable them to carry out their projects.

According to Boman and Berg (2007), historical-cultural identity involves ethnic, cultural or historical affinity, whereas institutional identity exists when the population is aware of the possibilities cross-border institutions provide and integrate some of those opportunities into their everyday practices. New transnational regional identities are often understood as being institutional ones, contrasting with existing historical-cultural identities, and the performance of the new identities is seen to be effectuated by existing or emerging cross-border institutions and multi-level governance. It has been argued that, in contrast to historically well-established regional identities stemming from the shared cultural, ethnic and linguistic background of its inhabitants, the political definition of new cross-border regions in the EU’s INTERREG programme represents a ‘top-down’-driven region-building activity in which promoting the competitiveness of regions is a primary objective. According to Terlouw (2012: 4; see also Antonsich, 2010: 273),

the new 'co-operation regions' are so unstable and disunited from the established regions that there are no possibilities for developing 'a distinct traditional regional identity'. Therefore Terlouw (2012) uses *thick* and *thin* regional identities as two binary categories of analysis. The key aspects of thick regional identity are closed spatial form, institutionalized organizations, defensiveness, historical orientation and that the participants of this identity are 'general population'. In comparison, thin regional identity is characterized by open and networked spatial form, project-like organization, economic interests and global- and future-oriented focus. Second, in the context of planning and administration, regional identity often becomes connected with network ontology, which means that it becomes emphasized as thin and, as such, contrasts with the thick identities of bounded regions and states (Axford, 2006). Thus, the concept of identity becomes almost synonymous with the concept of image, as both are used rather instrumentally for branding regions through representations of differentiation. However, branding entails some idea of boundedness as well, for even fuzzy regions and networks tend to become bordered through their representations (Zimmerbauer, 2011).

Each of the approaches to regional identity provides a useful lense through which it is possible to compare and classify regional elements and the processes of region-building, yet in this paper we propose to push the idea of regional identity-building further by focusing on the materialization of identity in the practices of cooperation. By doing this, we take seriously the notion offered by Kuus (2007) that identity should be conceptualized not as something that states, groups and individuals have but as something that is actively performed. The argument is primarily grounded on the writings of Butler (1993, 1997) who positions the theory of performativity as an alternative to the radical constructivist positions in which linguistic construction is understood deterministically, and in which verbal action is seen to presuppose the subject. According to Butler, performativity should be understood as 'a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of

which it is a repetition' (Butler, 1993: 5–6). Kuus (2007) underlines that the theory of performativity shifts the focus from linguistic constructivism towards 'speech acts' and the actual practices through which discourses materialize. Similarly, Kaiser and Nikiforova (2008: 541) underline the potential of the performativity approach, which shifts the focus to 'the citational practices and scale effects they produce as a process of signification'. Thus, performativity relates to scale talk and scale politics in place-making and identification, which highlights also the 'gaps and fissures' of those processes (see also MacKinnon, 2010). However, regarding the performativity and constructivist approaches as complementary offers a more constructive means of considering regions and regional identity than does their juxtaposition. Through the performativity approach, social construction becomes understood as an on-going process whereby boundary and fixity are produced, albeit often through network ontology (cf. Axford, 2006); the approach also links scale talk and scale politics to identification and place-making, as it entails the idea of scale as practised and emphasises power structures, agency and the idea of constant becoming. The performativity approach to regional identity, therefore, is focused more on the practices and use of identity claims than on the textual representations and images of a region.

Performance of regional identity in the implementation of cross-border initiatives in the INTERREG North

Directions of cooperation in the North Calotte

The Finnish and Swedish border municipalities in the North Calotte area, often represented as leaders in cross-border cooperation, provide an interesting case through which to approach the process and performances of regional identity-building in the European border areas. There is a long tradition of cooperation in the area, despite the fact that the Swedish–Finnish border (Swedish–Russian border until 1917) policy brought some historical political

contradictions, and the Cold War division and questions concerning the rights of the linguistic minorities (*Meänkieliset* and *Sapmi*) have created a certain degree of disjuncture between different groups in the border area (Elenius, 2001). Early cooperation in the North Calotte came into being in the late 1950s with the establishment of the North Calotte Region in 1957. Since its inception, this interregional cooperation has been supported politically and economically by various state institutions and by the Nordic Council of Ministers. Additionally, an agreement signed between the Nordic countries in 1979 provided for official cooperation between border municipalities in the Tornio River Valley. Bilateral cross-border organizations uniting the border municipalities, *Provincia Bothniensis* (the cities of Tornio and Haparanda) and the *Council of the Tornio River Valley*, were established in 1987. In addition, a new stage of cooperation was reached in the North Calotte region in 1995 when Finland and Sweden joined the EU. As a result, cooperation in the North Calotte was inextricably linked to European institutions and modes of governance and regulation, i.e. to the new 'methods' of coordinating activities and social relations and allocating resources, of which the INTERREG programme is a case in point (see Perkmann, 1999).

The North Calotte programme is one of the currently 53 INTERREG cross-border cooperation programmes for EU internal borders, whose objective is to develop new social and economic centres and zones which straddle borders (EC, 2011: 13). Perkmann (1999: 665) defines cross-border cooperation in the framework of the INTERREG as 'a process of institution building' which involves multiple and complex networks that are simultaneously authorizing and constraining participating actors. The mode of implementation upon which the initiatives are premised is the multi-scalar mode of governance, which means that local and regional authors create diverse partnerships within and across national borders. The first programme, INTERREG I, was set up in 1989 (1989–1993) and has been followed by three further programme periods, 1994–1999, 2000–2006 and 2007–2013. The programme and initiatives are financed by the ERDF, but national funding

is also required. In addition, to gain financial support from the programme, the initiatives must have cross-border importance, involve parties from at least two countries and not distort competition (INTERREG IV A North, 2007: 76).

The current INTERREG North programme, covering a land area of 413,221 km², provides funding opportunities for municipalities and other public organizations, associations and entrepreneurs in Finland, Sweden and Norway. The responsible authority in the programme area is the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten, in Luleå (Sweden). There were a total of 128 projects in 2000–2006 (with funding continuing until 2007), with the total finances received during this latter period amounting to more than €37m. For the current programme period, 2007–2013, the total budget of the programme is approximately €57m, of which ERDF funding accounts for about €34m. The programme has four priorities: (1) the development of economy, (2) research, development and education, (3) regional functionality and identity and (4) Sami – unbounded development (INTERREG IV A North, 2007). The aim under priority three, for which the approximate total public financing is more than €13m, is to strengthen cohesion through increased cross-border connections, which is then expected to facilitate information transfer and the movement of people, services and goods, and the development of relations that support long-term cooperation (EC, 2011). Whereas in priorities one and two the project leaders and partners are from the entire programme area (in particular from the biggest city centres of Oulu, Luleå, Kemi, and Rovaniemi, where most of the region's enterprises and universities are located), in the third priority the Finnish and Swedish border municipalities have a central role; approximately half of the projects have a lead partner or partners in the border municipalities (INTERREG IV A North, 2011). In this paper the focus will be on the initiatives *On the Border*, carried out by the border municipalities of Tornio and Haparanda, and *Pello School*, established by the municipalities of Övertorneå and Pello. These two initiatives have been relatively long-standing and have gained publicity in the area and also more broadly in Europe.

In search of common interest

The cities of Tornio and Haparanda, located in the Tornio River delta, have had institutional cooperation in various spheres of municipal authority, infrastructures and education since the 1960s. It has been claimed that, in comparison with other cross-border regions in Scandinavia, regionalization in the Tornio Valley region is based more on cultural ties and on the long tradition of cross-border trade and migration than on top-down-driven policy (Löfgren, 2008: 206). However, recent cross-border initiatives, especially the well-known cross-border initiative *On the Border*, in which a key objective has been the construction of new spaces and infrastructures that straddle the border, have to a great extent been supported and co-financed by the EU. In the documents produced by the EU this tradition of cross-border interaction in the Tornio Valley region and the long path of Nordic institutional cross-border collaboration are considered to be indicators of a versatile foundation for further territorial cohesion and identity-building in this northern border area (for example, EC, 2011). The story of togetherness and cooperation draws on the history of the region before the Treaty of Fredrikshamn drew the border along the Tornio River in 1809, and this story is continuously repeated in project documents to drum up support for current activities. Such repetition of 'a region with a history' is a fitting example of the act of performing regional identity in the present:

From the Middle Ages Tornio and Haparanda have been lively places where trading takes place and people meet each other. That is the status we are going to keep and develop it further.

(On the Border – På Gränsen: Info, 2012).

Since Finland and Sweden became the members of the EU in 1995, the *On the Border* initiative has been incrementally implemented by the cities of Tornio and Haparanda, and the project has received funding from the INTERREG A North programme for several activities.² In the first projects that were set up after the EU membership, the cities of Tornio and Haparanda were promoted as a EURO CITY, 'an excellent model for cross-border co-operation in

Europe' (On the Border, news, 2 September 2004). However, according to Lundén and Zalamans (2001: 38), the politically driven 'EURO CITY' project 'never became the success that the authorities were hoping for' because it did not come from business but was driven by political organizations such as Provincia Bothniensis. Second, it has been questioned whether the dual-city initiative has been supported by the 'ordinary' citizens rather than merely by regional entrepreneurs and advocates, because the plan to merge the two cities met with some setbacks when local people in Haparanda voted against a joint city centre in a local referendum in 2002. In spite of the no-confidence vote, construction of the new city centre began in 2003 after the planning report was published and required permission obtained. Recent studies also suggest that continuous cross-border cooperation has generated trust and a strong relationship, at least among the city officials (Häkli, 2009; Jakola, 2011).

Häkli (2002) argues that the reference and use of different place names are one indicator of regional identification, and thus the (re)naming of the cities of Tornio and Haparanda provides an interesting case here. The 'EURO CITY' name, which was chosen especially for branding reasons, it quite visible in the documents published in the early 2000's, but today it has been to a great extent replaced by the concepts *On the Border* and *Tornio Haparanda/HaparandaTornio*. When compared with the EURO CITY concept, TornioHaparanda addresses local cross-border relations more than European identity.

One way to approach performances of regional identity is to scrutinize participants' 'speech acts' with regards to the region and especially how they articulate their interests in regional development. In the interviews, the politics of naming – a highly important symbolic performance for a region – came out when the representatives of Haparanda (Sweden) almost systematically used the concept HaparandaTornio and the advocates of Tornio referred to TornioHaparanda in discussions about the notion of a common interest. The concept was used especially when the participants talked about the new positive image that the initiative has been able to export nationally and internationally.

HaparandaTornio is now perceived as 'a good place to live', as one of the representatives from Haparanda (public sector 1) put it. However, it is interesting to compare the concept of TornioHaparandaTornio with another well-established regional cooperation concept between two Finnish cities: *Kemi-Tornio*, in which the bigger city Kemi without exception comes first, pointing out that the hierarchy of cities in cross-border contexts is defined not by size but by national interests.

Contradictory regional interests and the importance of national scale come out in the interview discussions concerning the establishment of the IKEA warehouse in Haparanda in 2006, something that is often represented as a major accomplishment of the cooperative activities (Jakola, 2011). The opening of IKEA created new images of cross-border collaboration; one reason for choosing Haparanda as the site for the new store was its location adjacent to the international border and the inherent transnational image it would burnish. In the interviews that were conducted among the city officials in Tornio and Haparanda in the summer 2010, many of the city representatives recounted the story of the IKEA 'triumph' and joint interests, in particular, when they discussed regional competitiveness. The repetition of the story of IKEA can be read as a performance of regional identity through which the actors create an understanding of the regional spirit and competitiveness:

When we claimed IKEA here, all that long and difficult work, we went together and searched for the best plot. Is it in Tornio or it is in Haparanda [...] We decided that we will not compete with each other [...] If you look where people used to go shopping, it was Luleå, Oulu, Kemi and even Keminmaa that pulled out the money and purchasing power from here, and jobs were transferred too [...] Now it feels that that this is the regional trade centre again, just as it is supposed to be.

(Haparanda, public 1)

Besides such comments highlighting regional togetherness and the importance of the cities in the regional hierarchy of trading centres, the interviews also pointed out that common interest is much more troubled and negotiable than the INTERREG

programme documents suggest. The objectives and descriptions of interregional cooperation in the official documents and project reports emphasize the development of a harmonious cross-border region, but the interviews with the actors show that the choices made at local level are more diverse and overlapping, and that cooperation often serves as a strategy to achieve local and national goals (see also Johnson, 2009; Prokkola, 2011). The following story about 'establishing in' also points out how regional 'speech acts' can be understood not merely as linguistic representations but as acts that produce the very effects:

We do have a common vision that has been agreed in the City Councils of Tornio and Haparanda, but of course we have our own ... we are cooperating when there is a win-win situation, but if somebody comes here and starts to speak about establishing in Haparanda, of course I will speak only about that. I do not have ... I will tell what is in Tornio and how it can help but after all we are two distinct cities.

(Haparanda, public 5)

The interviews and the politics of and disjuncture in naming of the cities of Tornio and Haparanda show that the implementation of the dual-city project was the result of a long process of negotiating possible common interests. For example, despite the fact that alongside IKEA several new stores opened in Haparanda, and although there still exist strong expectations that the development will stop the negative development of out-migration and unemployment in the region, not all interviewed actors considered IKEA a regional success story; some Finnish actors think that most of the benefits are spilling to the Swedish side and vice versa. Separate interests and identification come out in the interviews, in which local, national and transnational all served as important scales of coming-together and differentiation through which regional identity can be performed in the contexts of cross-border initiatives. These scalar dimensions do not necessarily compete hierarchically, but they can be understood as nuanced multi-scalar articulations of power with time-space ruptures and disjunctures (cf. Kaiser and Nikiforova, 2008: 559).

In search of regional culture

The cities of Tornio and Haparanda are often considered as pioneers of cooperation, and the other eight border municipalities also have a long tradition of institutional cross-border collaboration (Prokkola, 2008). The border municipalities are located on both sides of the Tornio River, and the villages and populations and services in the border municipalities are closer to those of their neighbour across the border than they are to their nearest neighbour in their own country. The municipalities have implemented various cooperation projects with the help of INTERREG funding, of which one of the most long-standing initiatives has been *the School of Language and Culture in Pello*, which was established in (alongside) an elementary school in Pello (Övertorneå municipality).³ The school initiative was supported by the projects *Same River – Same People* (2003–2006) and *Harmonization of curricula in the border area between Sweden and Finland* (2006–2008) led by the municipality of Övertorneå. One of the motivating factors behind the establishment of the joint school was the maintenance of basic communal infrastructures and services. The municipality of Övertorneå had previously planned to close down the school because the number of pupils was decreasing in the area, but by setting up the cross-border initiative it was possible to maintain a school in the village. However, without the financial backing of the INTERREG North programme the municipalities could not have supported such a school initiative. Although saving the village school was often cited as a motive in the interviews, it was not mentioned into the official project description (INTERREG III North, 2009). This shows that local people are not merely adjusting to the official goals of the programme but are using regional development infrastructures and funds to support their own interests.

One important objective of the school initiative – which strove to develop a model by which the opportunities of pupils in areas of low population density could be enhanced and diversified by combining the resources available on both sides of the border – and of other projects has been the promotion of regional consciousness and culture, especially among the

younger generations. Regional identity is understood as something that can anchor these young people to the region so that they would prefer to live there in the future. The school was also part of the wider *Languages and Border* network, which aims to unite ‘border regions from all over Europe in intensive co-operation, the main subjects being languages, education and regional cultural exchange’ (Languages and Borders, 2008).

The school initiative includes various examples of ‘methods’ for creating and determining regional knowledge and identification. Some of the concrete achievements of the initiative were that teachers working in the school produced a package of educational material for use in implementing a regional curriculum for the Tornio River Valley. The curriculum (for use in the river valley that straddles the Swedish–Finnish border) offers an alternative definition and description of the region besides that of national border region. In teaching the new regional consciousness, one of the goals of the school curricula has become teaching the pupils about alternative regional historiographies and cultures. Some practical means and methods for learning and studying regional issues were that experts in local culture and traditions visited the school and pupils produced drawings and exhibited works on specific local events and figures, for example. The initiative was very concretely bound with the Europeanization process, which aims at creating a common European identity alongside national identity; according to Jensen and Richardson (2004: 208) the Europeanization of curriculum can be understood as an attempt to control the perception of a European identity. The initiative is interesting because it, in a way, transgresses the process of socialization, a process (and its means) of spreading national identity narratives in which comprehensive education, especially in the subjects of geography and history, has an enormous impact (Paasi, 1996: 54–59).

However, despite the fact that at the time of the interviews the teachers were able to describe local cultures and regional characteristics persuasively, and could also often use the term ‘local/regional identity’ when describing the objectives and achievements of the projects, some reported that when the initiative first began the participants were unaware

what the local culture and identity objective actually meant:

At first it was somehow unclear that what this [cooperation] should include. At that point the information was so confusing that we did not know what we should do with this money. I do not know whether this was because of the teacher responsible who was participating in the meeting or because they [project leaders] didn't know what this culture thing should cover.

(Pello School 8, Sweden)

The above story illustrates how local identities are not something that regions have, but something that people decide to highlight in their projects. The creation of regional identity can be understood as an everyday practice in (and through) which things and actions are positioned to and structured within the discourses of regions. The creation of a regional culture in the Tornio River Valley cross-border area is a multi-dimensional and often contested process that brings together people with diverging interests, a process in which actors strive to find a common language and regional vocabulary, perhaps partly directed by policy guidelines such as those of the INTERREG programmes. In the actors' stories, regional identity was often depicted as the coexistence of local and national cultures and traditions:

First we start with youngest children. They do not yet have so many prejudices and others, because regardless of all we have some minor cultural differences here. I mean in the school culture, otherwise we have common history and culture. For example when the children had a joint project on genealogy they noticed that they have relatives across the [border] river.

(Pello School 7, Sweden)

I felt that it was the most important thing that they [the pupils] will learn that the people across the border are not so strange, that they live very similar lives there although there is ... food is different, for example. When we had common school days we were trying to show ... in that school in Sweden they were serving more Swedish culture – like food.

(Pello School 3, Finland)

Besides the fact that the school initiative strives to strengthen the pupils' 'Tornio Valley identity', national difference is part of the everyday teaching methods and tasks meant to teach the pupils to think and develop their knowledge in relation to both Finland and Sweden. This is well illustrated in the stories of the participants and in their curricula, which have to respect the requirements of the Finnish and Swedish national curricula. Whereas general education is instructed in 'mixed' groups, the most important subjects, e.g. mother tongue and mathematics, are instructed in national groups (see Prokkola, 2008: 52). Cross-border interaction and cooperation is anchored at the intersection of national, local and transnational ways of organizing space, norms and meanings; and it is in the context of this actual interaction and organizing that spatial identities materialize. The national ceremonies, regarded as a form of school cooperation by the interviewed people, exemplify how collective memories and belonging are performed and given meaning. A story about a Finnish Independence Day ceremony, in which pupils and teachers from a Swedish school across the border participated, points out how local cross-border cooperation sometimes turns into a performance of national differentiation and identity:

The Finnish Independence Day ceremony was certainly an impressive experience for the Swedes, for they do not have this kind of culture of national ceremonies. They arrived at this festival, which started with a blue-coloured drink [the colour of the Finnish flag] and we had flags and ex-servicemen here. They were amazed.

(Pello School 5, Finland)

The stories of cross-border cooperation point out how the creation and maintenance of national identities not only takes place in national institutions and the media, for example, but also is continuously performed in and through cooperative work and bodily practices (see Linde-Laursen, 2010). In this light it is not surprising that many scholars have concluded that despite intense cooperation in the area, in particular between the 'twin cities' of Tornio and Haparanda, a national divide still exists (Lundén and Zalamans, 2001) especially among younger

generations (Jukarainen, 2000). However, besides Europeanization and national signifiers such as the Independence Day ceremony and the national working methods which were illustrated in the planning of the curricula in the Pello School, the actors were able to create their own local strategies and working methods. Similarly, in Tornio and Haparanda the interviewed actors explained that when cooperating they created their own way of doing things, a new working culture which is now conceptualized in regional terms:

It is a well-known fact that people say that Swedes talk and discuss but achieve nothing but Haparanda makes an exception here. Haparanda has learned to act and for example when we have had these planning and construction and other, when we have planned areas for new business it has occurred fast.

(Haparanda, public 2)

Performances of regional identity, however, cannot be considered something that only locals do; rather it must be considered as something that is created for and practised together with visitors, partners and others. The expressions of the region made by 'others' in the cooperation meetings and seminars form an important point of regional reference for locals as well. Many of the interviewed people related that the border, which is basically non-existent for the people living in the river valley, should be made more visible to attract visitors:

We who live here in the river valley, basically there has not been a border for us. It has been open and we are used to move here and there but it is exotic for many people who visit here [...] My idea was that this Krannikatu [street], the lamps there, why not to put blue-whites in the Finnish side and blue-yellows in the Swedish side?

(Haparanda, public 2)

Also border attractions and exotics are an important part of the performance of regional identity regardless of whether they are created especially for reasons of tourism or not. From the performativity

point of view, such commercial symbols of a region are by no mean any less authentic or artificial than other symbols and practices though which the regional is materialized. Especially as a result of the 'promotional shift', discourses, representations and performances of regions are being targeted less at audiences inside the region and more at target groups outside them, at regions defined in marketing strategies and image development programmes and campaigns. As Zimmerbauer (2011) writes, regions are 'created' by representations and symbolization, and, in this sense, regional identity and image can be seen as conceptually intertwined modes of the discursive production of specific regions. This production is substantially fuelled by various regional symbols that are reproduced and renewed at the same time. This approach emphasizes the symbolic performativity of identities, although performativity as such also entails a wide range of activities and social interaction outside the often elite-led regional branding practices.

Conclusions

'Regional identity' is a term increasingly employed in European Union regional strategies and programmes as well as in the literature discussing the development of the European border regions, which often focuses on the thickness of and possible confrontations between different spatial identities. The theorized problem is often predicated on the idea of regional identities as something that regional entities *have*, as a feature that can be identified, strengthened, measured and even quantified. The most recent INTERREG North programme reports provide a fitting example of such a quantitative approach to identity. The reports indicate that the projects have brought hundreds of jobs to the area, and hundreds of companies have launched cooperation within the programme's framework. Similarly, regional functionality and identity is evaluated in terms of cross-border mobility, the number of partnerships and networks established, new information channels and methods, new research, new and preserved jobs and other measurable factors (INTERREG IVA,

2007: 55–59). However, as the stories of the participants illustrate, these indicators of cooperation do not tell us much about the relations and engagements among different actors, nor do they acknowledge the actual practices of cooperation. When the focus shifts from general regional questions to the actual practices and experiences of cooperation, it is possible to gain an understanding of how regional identity is created and which disjunctures exist.

In the context of the INTERREG cooperation initiatives, performing identities can be viewed as Europeanization through governance, for it can be understood as an emergent scale of supranational governance (Clark and Jones, 2008). It is also possible to understand regional development policy and strategies per se as a particular performance of regional identity. However, the study of cross-border cooperation and the implementation of the INTERREG initiatives at the level of everyday practices show that performance of regional identity cannot be understood as a continuous process that results in a coherent identity and togetherness among border inhabitants. Cross-border cooperation is materialized in a set of socio-spatial relations and activities, carried out by individuals, and it is through such relations and activities that spatial identity is performed. The study of the cross-border initiatives points out how nationally specified interests often guide the decision-making processes and how the actual cooperative practices, coming together and meetings can be turned into performances of national identity. Hence, cooperation cannot be understood as a straightforward process institutionalizing new regional spaces and identities across borders. Regional identity is something that individuals and groups perform to support their projects in and through everyday practices and speech acts. The identities of many newly conceived cross-border regions are also increasingly performed to attract the attention of tourists and the Eurocrats in Brussels. As the case study shows, regional identity can be created and negotiated in relation to instructions from ‘upwards’ (EU) and ‘downwards’, i.e. from sub-national regions and local communities within and across the border. The performance of the identity of a border region

can emphasise both thick and thin elements of identity, historical and cultural coming together and economic interests, for example (cf. Terlouw, 2012); yet they do not create continuous and parallel sets of practices. As they manifest themselves in cross-border interaction and cooperation, social networks, relations and disjunctures determine which particular spatial identity performances may or may not be possible at a particular time and place. Only by examining the actual practices and methods of identity creation and maintenance is it possible to understand how regionalism and regional identity materialize in border areas.

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Notes

1. The materials for the study consist of policy documents and interviews that have been carried out in the Swedish (SWE) and Finnish (FI) border municipalities with local actors involved in cross-border cooperation in 2005–2010. Altogether 24 interviews were carried out in the municipalities of Ylitornio (FI), Pello (SWE) and Övertorneå (FI) in 2005 and 2006 by Eeva-Kaisa Prokkola, with 19 in Tornio (FI) and Haparanda (SWE) in 2010 by Fredrika Jakola. The interviewed actors came from both countries equally and, with a few exceptions, the interviews were conducted personally. In the rural municipalities of Ylitornio, Pello and Övertorneå, the interviewed people were involved in educational, cultural and tourism projects. In the cities of Tornio and Haparanda the interviewed people were involved in cooperation as representatives of the cities (officials) and of entrepreneurs’ associations. In all municipalities the participants were contacted first by e-mail or telephone, and the focus of the research and interview was explained to them beforehand. Some of the interviewed actors were so-called contact persons, that is, they had a central role in cross-border cooperation, and they then suggested other people for the interviews. The interviews, which can be described as open-ended and were of a nominal duration of approximately 1–2 hours, were tape-recorded, stored and analysed in an ethically respectable way so that the anonymity of the

responders is protected (they have been marked and numbered by the projects). Since the interviewed people have had rather different roles and tasks in the implementation of cross-border cooperation initiatives and the interview stories focus on their own areas of interests in cooperation, both cases (*On the Border* and *Pello School*) are analysed contextually.

The policy documents that have been scrutinized consist mainly of the reports and project portfolios that have been published within the framework of INTERREG North V, III and IV. The documents have been available at the programme's website over the programme period. Some unpublished project documents have been received directly from the local actors who were primarily responsible for implementation of the cross-border initiatives in the border municipalities.

2. The actions include *Eurocity – Jobcentre* (1997–1999), *On the Border – Implementation Plan* (2001–2003) and *On the Border; Infrastructure Storgatan* (2004–2006) projects (led by Tornio), which have focused on the furthering the dual-city relationship and infrastructures, and *Mediapolis* (2002–2005), which has led to the establishment of an international centre of expertise in the media sector and to the creation of 'a brand that would support the overall regional image' (INTERREG III A North, 2007: 7). In the current programme period Tornio leads the project *On the border – På Gränsen – Rajalla* (2008–2010), which aims to 'unite the dysfunctional Centre in the towns of Haparanda and Tornio into one functional unity' (INTERREG IV A North, 2011: 88), and Haparanda is heading a culture initiative titled *War Opera* (2008–2009) and a project titled *Travel centre Haparanda-Tornio* (2011–2013). These projects received funding from the priority 'Regional functionality and identity' (INTERREG IV A North, 2011: 116).
3. Other projects are the *Kulle* (2002–2003) and *Quality in a package and packages in the web* (2002–2005), projects which supported tourism development and tourist entrepreneurs' networking, and a cultural initiative *Strange men and nylon women – Folk opera about smuggling* (2001–2004) created by the Pello municipality.

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