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During the last two decades, Europe has seen far-reaching societal reconfiguration, demonstrating the historical contingency of the nation state, the socially constructed nature of territoriality, and the emergence of new political orders within and across nation states. Numerous transnational initiatives receive support through European Union (EU) programs wishing to foster territorial cohesion. The European Commission describes these programs as “a means of transforming diversity into an asset that contributes to sustainable development of the entire EU.” Increasingly, these programs also must comply with sustainable development

References

2 European Commission 2008, 3.
objectives as a means of reconciling environmental, economic, and social policy goals. With
the parallel emergence of territorial cohesion and sustainable development as overarching
policy principles, understanding the relationship between the two at the transboundary level
has become a key task for scholars and policy makers.

Transnationalization and regionalization, in Europe and elsewhere, have been important foci
of attention in the social sciences. Although economic-political integration and security
dynamics dominate this research agenda in international relations, work on regional
environmental cooperation is becoming more widespread. Efforts to improve the match
between biophysical features and political jurisdiction have a long history, as exemplified by
John Wesley Powell’s watershed-based designs for the nineteenth century US West. Renewed
interest in ecologically defined regions as a suitable locus for addressing a range of
environmental problems, however, sufficiently differs from earlier interest in two important
respects—transboundary scope and multi-stakeholder involvement—to warrant the term “new
environmental regionalism.” “Regionalism” refers to the political-ideological motivation that
underpins “regionalization.” Since the latter typically involves some element of the former,
the two cannot easily be separated, and should be considered together.

This article explores the implications of new environmental regionalism for sustainable
development. Recent writing on sustainable development suggests that sustainable
development has become a concept that is impossible to oppose but lacks a taken-for-granted
quality. In international law and international politics, sustainable development holds an
uncertain place, variously described as a principle, an umbrella concept, a body of
international law in its own right, and an influential concept that lacks the status of a legal
norm but has enormous actual and potential significance for legal norms and institutions.
Despite the concept’s ambiguity, two features of sustainable development are now widely
recognized. The first concerns the interlocking nature of economic, environmental, and social
spheres. Which sphere should have priority remains hotly debated; however, the inherent link
between the three spheres is now largely accepted. The second feature is a view of
sustainable development as a political process that can generate multiple sustainabilities,
rather than one universal definition. Sustainable development as used in this article thus
refers to a procedural norm or principle for reconciling actual and potential conflicts between
environmental, economic, and social goals.

The integrative objective of sustainable development is often intended to counteract the
effects of fragmentation, which has received growing scrutiny in international law and
politics. Although scholars have identified advantages and disadvantages, the negative effects
of fragmentation in a functional area governed by multiple legal and institutional orders—the

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3 Balsiger and Debarbieux 2011; Breslin and Elliott 2011; and Church 2010.
4 Balsiger 2008; Balsiger and VanDeveer 2010; and Chester 2006.
5 Ellis 2010; Adger and Jordan 2009.
6 Bruyninckx 2006; Leach, Scoones, and Stirling 2010, 42.
7 Paton 2011.
8 Leach, Scoones, and Stirling 2010, 64.
9 Biermann, Pattberg, van Asselt, and Zelli 2009; Fischer-Lescano and Teubner 2004; Oberthür and Gehring
2006; and Raustiala and Victor 2004.
term “functional” as used here refers to “issue-specific” or “sectoral”\textsuperscript{10}—are generally found to outweigh the benefits.\textsuperscript{11} The institutional and substantive aspects these studies highlight are relevant for global as well as regional governance. Below the global level, however, fragmentation has a more distinctly spatial implication, since the territorial reaches of functional orders rarely correspond with each other. New environmental regionalism initiatives, which advocate territorialization at the ecoregional level, reveal this implication as they tend to intersect the spatial perimeters of other functional orders.

International fragmentation and the emergence of transboundary functional orders raise three questions. First, what are the contours of arguments concerning the origins of functional differentiation, which arose most succinctly in the context of state formation, and how well do they transfer to the transboundary level? To address this question, I examine Stein Rokkan’s analysis of the relationship between polity formation, external boundary building, and internal political structuring. His framework implies that new environmental regionalism is a consequence of governance rescaling, yet its focus on state formation undermines its explanatory purchase for transboundary contexts, where functional orders are not bounded by any single sovereign polity.

This leads to the second question: how can transboundary functional differentiation be conceptualized so as to offer insights into the relationship between new environmental regionalism and sustainable development? Here, I probe two perspectives that acknowledge functional differentiation and make it possible to highlight different aspects of the nexus between sustainable development and new environmental regionalism. One perspective entails multiple, overlapping functional domains and the prospects for sustainable development to manifest itself at their intersection. The other perspective suggests that regional collective identity and public spheres are identifiable as diverse domestic expressions of regional themes such as sustainable development, rather than as homogenous, region-wide phenomena. Instead of opposing these two perspectives in a test of explanatory strength, I argue that they make different features visible and are therefore both necessary for a better understanding of new environmental regionalism.

The third question I address in this article builds on the first two and concerns the empirical traction that the preceding conceptual exploration can produce. Using the European Alps as an illustration, I show that the region is both the bounded object of an international legally binding agreement asking its signatories to formalize sustainable development, and also the intersection of multiple overlapping functional spaces. My reading of recent developments in the Alps lends support to Rokkan’s claims, but posits that complementary perspectives generate a more fine-grained image of new environmental regionalism as a multifaceted phenomenon that can facilitate sustainable development in the face of international functional differentiation and governance fragmentation.

\textsuperscript{10} Frey and Eichenberger 1996; and Nahrath 2007.
\textsuperscript{11} Bernstein and Ivanova 2007.
Regional Sustainable Development

In 1991 six European countries and the European Union signed a legally binding agreement for the “preservation and protection of the Alps.” Plans to create an agreement for the Alpine Convention date back to the 1950s, when the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA) was established. CIPRA’s ecoregional orientation highlighted common environmental challenges and opportunities of the mountain range. By the late 1980s, however, getting Alpine states to support such an agreement required the inclusion of a broader range of issues. Although the ecoregional scale of the treaty was retained, and many concerned parties continue to view it primarily as an environmental agreement, the Alpine Convention recognizes the Alps as “an economic, cultural, recreational and living environment, accentuates the need for economic interests to be reconciled with ecological requirements,” and portrays itself as a blueprint for sustainable development.

In view of the functional differentiation that prevails in international governance, the efforts of Alpine states to formalize sustainable development at the transboundary level presents a critical case. The Alpine Convention draws attention to the link between governance rescaling and functional differentiation, which in turn bears on the relationship between new environmental regionalism and sustainable development. Understanding the reasons why such a link is argued to exist not only influences the nature of analytical critiques, it also offers a basis for assessing ways to promote transboundary sustainable development. The issue is timely, as the Alpine Convention, which celebrated its twentieth anniversary in 2011, has received criticism for its implementation failures, not least due to the fact that Switzerland has failed to ratify the convention protocols.

The impact of governance rescaling on functional differentiation has been observed historically in the development of nation states, as analyzed by Stein Rokkan, and is increasingly demonstrated in the context of European integration. Rokkan’s primary aim was to explain the evolution and diversification of European states, proposing a causal link between territorial consolidation, external boundary building, and internal political structuring. He argued that the territorial merger of new states always entails a tradeoff between the possibility of “exit” by local-regional actors and the provision of “voice” in nationally organized functional domains, which in turn serves to elicit “loyalty.”

12 The signatory countries include Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, and Switzerland, while Slovenia and Monaco signed in 1993 and 1994; Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Monaco are not members of the European Union. See Price 1999a.
13 Debarbieux and Rudaz 2010.
14 Alpine Convention Framework Convention Preamble. While the term “sustainable development” does not appear in the text of the framework convention, explicit use is found in the substantive protocols. Furthermore, while the environmental and economic dimensions are clearly represented in the convention protocols, the social dimension only has explicit expression in the 2006 Ministerial Declaration on Population and Culture. Balsiger 2008; Church 2010; and Debarbieux and Rudaz 2010.
15 Patriarca 2011; and Schleicher-Tappeser 2006.
17 His choice of the terms “exit” and “voice” builds on Hirschman (1970).
In this framework, functionalization at the national level is a consequence of state rulers’ desire to preempt previously independent entities from organizing territorially and thereby posing a threat to the new center. In contrast to local polities that became incorporated (often by force) into the emerging state, transboundary institutions are often governed as “negotiated and agreed partnership institutions”\textsuperscript{18} and as such are rarely, if ever, equipped with the level of authority embodied in a nation state.\textsuperscript{19} In spite of the difference in territorial cohesion between states and transboundary regions, however, exit and voice play a similar role. As Veggeland argues, exit from a transboundary partnership entails different kinds of sanctions (e.g. naming and shaming, ineligibility for funding), newly created venues for comprehensive bargaining processes provide access to a “diversity of transnational and interregional voices” (through inclusive governing bodies and associated institutions), and the partnerships themselves can foster loyalty (e.g. by regulatory means or by legal surveillance).\textsuperscript{20} This mode of decision-making provides a strong incentive for actors to “stay in the game” rather than exit after repeatedly losing against a dominating actor or winning coalition. Similarly, although territoriality in transboundary institutions is not on par with a state’s capacity to establish and maintain borders, partnership institutions can stabilize a region territorially through the creation of entitlements to material and cultural resources.\textsuperscript{21} In turn, exit options become a judicial matter tied to negotiated partnership treaties, agreements, and contracts. If participants are able to exit from a governance arrangement at relatively modest cost and without suffering retaliation, the threat of doing so (which may be considered a normal aspect of procedure) can help keep the dominant group in line.\textsuperscript{22}

The above suggests that the dynamics of exit and voice operate not only at the level of the state, but also in transboundary regions, where they reinforce functionally differentiated constellations without being embedded in a sovereign political entity like the state. If governance transfers to the supranational level foster the independent institutionalization of functional domains, then new environmental regionalism can be seen as an expression of just this dynamic. The Rokkan-Hirschman exit-voice-loyalty framework was devised to analyze European state formation. Since a transboundary region constitutes a different kind of polity, however, the framework can only go so far in offering guidance to understanding the implications of functional differentiation. In particular, the framework does not account for the lack of spatial correspondence of functional regions, and therefore can only serve as an initial, albeit revealing, entry point for assessing the relationship between new environmental regionalism and sustainable development as a procedural norm.

\textsuperscript{18} Veggeland 2004, 158–159.
\textsuperscript{19} Keating 2009, 46–47; and Veggeland 2004.
\textsuperscript{20} Veggeland 2004, 159.
\textsuperscript{21} Veggeland 2004, 161.
\textsuperscript{22} Schmitter 2010, 94.
Two Views of Transboundary Regionalism

By shifting the locus of institutions, instruments, and activities to an ecoregional level, initiatives that follow a new environmental regionalist logic seek to address what many see as a lack of fit between ecological dynamics and institutional arrangements.\(^{23}\) Mountain ranges, regional seas, river basins, and other ecologically defined regions have thus become a novel field of intervention for a wide range of actors.\(^{24}\) These fields do not merely intersect established political boundaries, however, they also transcend a variety of other, more or less institutionalized and more or less transboundary functional spaces. For this reason, new environmental regionalism raises a number of conceptual and practical questions with respect to sustainable development. The framework outlined above suggests that a vertical shift of political authority produces functional differentiation. Despite some evidence of the framework’s relevance to the international level, its empirical focus on European state making requires some conceptual modification. In this section, I propose two perspectives that incorporate the assumption of functional differentiation, but offer additional insights into the relationship between new environmental regionalism and sustainable development. In particular, these perspectives seek to identify possibilities of (recognizing) integration through new environmental regionalism against the background of historically evolved functional differentiation. In the subsequent section, I demonstrate—using the case of the European Alps—that the two perspectives highlight different aspects of new environmental regionalism and thereby underline its multifaceted nature.

Regions as Heterarchic Spaces

Environmentally defined regions rarely correspond with political jurisdictions, but the same can be said for economic, cultural, and other types of regions. In Europe, for instance, some thirty-five river basin districts defined under the Water Framework Directive cross an international boundary; fifteen transboundary parks have been certified by Europarc (the network of European protected areas); and a host of economic, sociocultural, and environmental issues have been addressed in more than seventy cross-border Eu(ro)regions. Different functional regions not only manifest in particular spatialities, they are often inconsistent with each other. Keating suggests that functional, political, and institutional spaces may partially overlap, but they rarely coincide in the manner imagined in ideal-typical constructs of the nation state, or may even conflict with each other.\(^{25}\) Keating and others also emphasize the contingent nature of regions and regional processes, criticizing essentialist understandings of regions and regional identities. In their view, regions are products of social relations, rather than asocial features.\(^{26}\) The idea of overlapping and socially constructed

\(^{23}\) Young 2002.
\(^{24}\) Balsiger & VanDeveer 2010.
\(^{26}\) Allen, Massey, and Cochrane 1998; and Paasi 1986.
functional spaces can be captured by the term “heterarchy,” which refers to a situation where overlapping elements lack a clear ranking and have varying degrees of connectivity.\textsuperscript{27} 

A heterarchic view of political and social phenomena appears in many guises. Connolly proposes a “rhizomatic or network conception” that “appreciate[s] how concentric circles of political culture are complicated and compromised by numerous crosscutting allegiances, connections, and modes of collaboration.”\textsuperscript{28} David Held argues that “political communities have rarely—if ever— existed in isolation as bounded geographical totalities” and are most usefully conceived as “multiple overlapping networks of interaction that crystallize around different sites of power, producing patterns of activity which do not correspond in any straightforward way to territorial boundaries.”\textsuperscript{29} Schmitter suggests that “instead of a single Europe with recognized and contiguous boundaries, there would be many Europes: a trading Europe, an energy Europe, an environmental Europe, a social welfare Europe, even a defense Europe.”\textsuperscript{30} 

Beyond using the heterarchic metaphor to underline the territorial restructuring of the contemporary state, some observers explore the implications of intersecting functional spaces. The work of Gehring and Oberthür, as well as Biermann and colleagues, suggests that mutual influence between international and EU environmental regimes may create synergy or undermine and disrupt the effectiveness of affected institutions.\textsuperscript{31} Noting the danger which traditional international lawyers associate with the explosion of legal regimes, Fischer-Lescano and Teubner consider the proliferation of functional orders an “ephemeral reflection of a more fundamental, multi-dimensional fragmentation of global society itself.”\textsuperscript{32} Rather than seeking to foster a clear hierarchy of norms and judicial hierarchy, however, they advocate the establishment of a “specific network logic, which can effect a loose coupling of colliding units.”\textsuperscript{33} The locus and interstices of functional overlaps are also a central theme in the theory of Simmel, who views an individual’s personality as the intersection of multiple circles of social affiliation (family, neighborhood, profession, political party, etc.). As an individual associates with a growing number of groups, his or her personality becomes more differentiated and the likelihood that other persons exhibit the same combination of group-affiliations declines.\textsuperscript{34} In addition to personality, Simmel also argues that social relations constitute space, including through the dividing and connecting role of boundaries, and the changing relations of proximity and distance.\textsuperscript{35} Accordingly, space comes to life and obtains meaning through the countless forms of social interaction, while the sociological characteristics and dispositions of groups shape their spatial orders and give rise to pertinent spatial constructs.\textsuperscript{36} 

\textsuperscript{27} Crumley 1995. 
\textsuperscript{28} Connolly 2000, 603. 
\textsuperscript{29} Held 1999, 91. 
\textsuperscript{30} Schmitter 2000, 17–18. See also Checkel and Katzenstein 2009. 
\textsuperscript{31} Biermann et al. 2009; and Oberthür and Gehring 2006. 
\textsuperscript{32} Fischer-Lescano and Teubner 2004, 1004. 
\textsuperscript{33} Fischer-Lescano and Teubner 2004, 1002. 
\textsuperscript{34} Simmel 1955[1908], 140. 
\textsuperscript{35} Allen 2000; see also Lechner 1991. 
\textsuperscript{36} Frisby 1985.
The significance of a heterarchic perspective is revealed when extending Simmel’s argument to the case of functional regions. In most of the work just cited, the multiplicity of elements in a heterarchy is treated as a given or viewed as a pathology. Although Simmel is primarily concerned with the individual, he views every additional social circle as a factor that contributes to differentiating the intersection of circles and hence the development of personality. When functional regions are understood as socially constructed and spatially differentiated orders of association in which economic, environmental, or social goals prevail, their intersection is revealed as a “site” where sustainable development may materialize. In other words, removing any functional order may undermine sustainable development. This is not to deny that any functional order may be the source of unsustainable practices. Removing it in practice or theory, however, is neither feasible nor desirable, for a view of sustainable development as a procedural norm of integration mandates that tradeoffs be identified and addressed. From a heterarchic perspective, environmental regions are a necessary complement to political, economic, sociocultural, and other types of spatial orders.

Regions as Polycentric Spaces

When regions are understood as products of social processes, issues of collective identity and deliberation in public spheres assume an important role. Collective identities embody shared knowledge that enables individuals to make sense of their social existence and interests, and ties them to various communities. Shared knowledge in turn is produced and reproduced through deliberation in public spheres, where individuals and groups may hold multiple, variably salient social identities that are activated in particular contexts. Collective identities and the communicative spaces provided by public spheres are thus intimately linked. The more strongly and more unanimously individuals and groups identify with an imagined community, the more likely it is for such loyalty to become a resource in region building.

Collective identity and public sphere are central to a polycentric perspective of new environmental regionalism and sustainable development, where polycentric refers to a principle of organization around several centers. This perspective builds on analyses of European integration that address the prospects of a European collective identity and public sphere. The possibility of a European identity has often been denied on the grounds that Europe lacks a common language that might comprise a political community. Approaching the question from the perspective of Europeanization, Risse and others agree that a “uniform and shared European identity above and beyond the various national identities” cannot be observed. Instead, they propose that the Europeanization of identities refers to the incorporation of references to Europe and the EU into national and other identity constructions. These multiple points of incorporation constitute a polycentric constellation in

38 See, for instance Ostrom 2009.
39 Checkel 2001; Checkel and Katzenstein 2009; and Risse 2010.
40 Grimm 1995; and Scharpf 1999.
41 Risse 2010, 5.
42 Risse 2010, 9.
which multiple European identities emerge. By analogy, a European public sphere instead emerges from the Europeanization of national public spheres.\textsuperscript{43} In order for transboundary communication to occur, Risse argues, actors in the different constituent public spheres need to share a “common meaning structure,” be aware of each other and recognize each other as legitimate participants in debate, and address the same issues at the same time.\textsuperscript{44}

Collective identification with a transboundary environmental or other functional region can emerge through the incorporation of pertinent issues into (subnational and) national identities and communicative venues: “regionness” exists if policy debates in constituent members are regionalized, where regionalization is understood in analogy to Europeanization. At the national or subnational level, the precise contours of a given policy issue may vary depending on a range of factors, including the contextual history of the issue, the constellation of contestants, and the shape of institutions for debate. These contours may also vary across functional domains. For instance, Alpine countries may all witness public debate about large-predator conservation due to the spontaneous migration and/or settlement of bears or wolves, but identification with and responses to conservation may vary considerably.

As in the heterarchic perspective, individuals and groups may identify with an ecoregion on environmental grounds, yet the litmus test for “regionness” is lowered because it manifests through the incorporation of ecoregional themes in domestic collective identity and public spheres. Furthermore, the negotiation of tradeoffs between environmental, economic, and social dimensions of sustainable development is likely more formalized than in transboundary contexts. The reason for this is that most states have established special mechanisms for this purpose (e.g. interagency coordination, sustainability assessments) during the past two decades. This ultimately means that the embeddedness of new environmental regionalist initiatives in a larger sustainability context depends on the degree to which (regionalized) policy integration is part of a shared, transboundary meaning structure.

The heterarchic and polycentric perspectives differ in three respects. First, while the coherence of a sustainable development region manifests by way of separate but affiliated sub-regional public spheres and identities in the polycentric conception, regional coherence has a more directly transboundary character in the heterarchic perspective, where each overlapping circle itself extends beyond individual political jurisdictions. Hence, region building in the heterarchic variant more closely aligns with the transboundary logic promoted by new environmental regionalism than in the polycentric variant. Second, cross-sectoral coordination, as warranted by the notion of sustainable development, is more easily pursued under the polycentric variant because it can proceed through more stable and formalized national channels and instruments of interagency cooperation and communication. Transboundary cooperation, by contrast, initially faces the more pressing issue of establishing a normative and institutional infrastructure, which may only later serve as a foundation for policy integration. In the heterarchic view, cross-sectoral integration is an emergent property of the intersection of overlapping functional fields and thus more dependent on the art and

\textsuperscript{43} Risse 2010.
\textsuperscript{44} Eder and Kantner 2000; and Kantner 2004, cited in Risse 2010.
craft of region-building agents. And third, as a result, the two conceptions generate different
types of challenges and opportunities for regionalizing agents. As I will argue below, such
agents are best thought of as bricoleurs, who make do with symbolic and material resources at
hand. They have to rely at once on the flexibility afforded by the relatively open context of
transboundary cooperation and the type of stability of practice and expectations that are found
in (sub)national policy domains. Whereas flexibility is more pronounced in the heterarchic
perspective, stability appears more prominent in the polycentric view. By contrast, the
institutional context for negotiating the balancing of environmental, economic, and social
sustainability dimensions remains more formalized in the current state setup than in
transnational spaces.

Region Building for Sustainable Development in the European Alps

The European Alps offer an intriguing illustration of the heterarchic and polycentric
perspectives. Extending over 1,000 kilometers from the south of France to Austria and
Slovenia in the East, the mountain range covers all or part of eight countries. Insofar as
mountain regions are products of social relations, however, they come to life through the
agents that produce and reproduce these regions.45 Since the Alps have been the locus of
collective mobilization for several decades over multiple policy domains, a closer look can
provide useful insights into the implications of these two perspectives for the relationship
between new environmental regionalism and sustainable development.

The aim here is not to “test” the validity of the two perspectives for their usefulness to
understanding region building in the Alps. Rather, it is to show how the heterarchic and
polycentric perspectives make different features visible, namely the transboundary character
of functional domains and the regional aggregation of (sub)national identities and public
spheres, and to explore what these features imply for a sympathetic critique of new
environmental regionalism. In short, new environmental regionalism’s role in sustainable
development turns on the interstices that link different functional domains. Whereas a
heterarchic view allows for transboundary interstices and links, a polycentric view more
closely follows national lines. Hence, while a transboundary space for sustainable
development becomes a possibility in the heterarchic view, that possibility is more
complicated in the polycentric perspective.

Alpine Heterarchy

From a heterarchic perspective, the first feature to note is the existence of competing
definitions and delineations of the European Alps. The most formalized geographical
delineation is found in the annex of the official text of the Alpine Convention, which defines
coverage at the level of municipalities. A less formalized but nevertheless influential
delineation evolved under the auspices of INTERREG IIIB support for transboundary

45 Balsiger 2009; and Debarbieux and Rudaz 2010.
cooperation, which launched the Alpine Space Programme in 2000. In comparison to the Alpine Convention, however, the area covered under the Alpine Space Programme is much larger and includes metropolitan centers such as Turin, Milan, and Munich beyond the mountain range. Finally, current efforts to implement the EU’s territorial cohesion objective, which have already produced “macro-regional strategies” for the Baltic Sea Region and the Danube River Basin, have fostered a movement in support of an Alpine macro-region. Owing to dissatisfaction with progress in implementing the Alpine Convention, most signatory countries, local/ regional authorities, and several transnational organizations have favored creating such an entity. At the same time, questions have been raised about the future role of the Convention should a macro-region be created; a working group under the Alpine Conference has been established to formulate a position to be discussed at the Twelfth Alpine Conference in September 2012. In the case of the Alpine Space Programme, informal coordination with the Alpine Convention was facilitated because significant funding for “Alpine” projects flowed through INTERREG. A similar arrangement may be found with an Alpine macro-region, especially since the limits of macro-regions need not be precisely defined. According to a European Commission position paper “the physical boundaries [of a macro-region] may vary according to the relevance of the policy area in question. Indeed functional regions may well overlap.” Thus, although initial definitions of the European Alps competed in spatial terms, the recent move towards a macro-regional approach highlights the growing emphasis on open, overlapping, functional spaces.

The second point to note from a heterarchic perspective is that although sustainable development is a proclaimed guiding principle of the Alpine Convention, Alpine Space Programme, and possible Alpine macro-region, it is an ecoregional view that has most consistently lent international policy attention to the range. Below the surface, however, an ecoregional definition of the Alps is itself the product of overlapping ecological spatialities. While the ecological dynamics linking mountain ranges with river and lake basins beyond the Alps represent the most striking case, other examples can be found with respect to the natural range or migration patterns of particular animal and plant species, or airsheds that shape pollution patterns. Activities corresponding to many of these spatialities have been subject to

46 Janin Rivolin 2006. INTERREG refers to the EU-funded programs that support regional projects within the EU.
47 Additionally, there are countless subregional, transboundary initiatives fully or partially contained in the Alps. See, for example, Price 1999b.
48 Since 2010, high-level encounters have been promoted by numerous politicians from Alpine regions, increasingly through the Network of Alpine Regions, an interregional platform of discussion and cooperation created in 2010. Additionally, the Alpine Space Programme has created a task force to develop strategic options for a macro-regional strategy for the Alps. On macro regions generally, see Dubois, Hedin, Schmitt, and Sterling 2009, Dühr 2011.
49 The latter include, notably, the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Alpenänder (Arge Alp), a working group of nine subnational entities from Austria, Germany, Italy, and Switzerland that has promoted transboundary cooperation since 1972, and the European Association of Elected Representatives from Mountain Regions (AEM).
50 Church 2010.
51 European Commission 2009, 1.
52 Balsiger 2008; Church 2010; and Schleicher-Tappeser 2006.
53 Janin Rivolin 2006.
54 Bouwma, Jongman, and Butovsky 2002; and Bruderer and Jenni 1990.
varying degrees of institutionalization, which illustrates the functional desegregation of the purported ecoregion.\(^55\) Beyond the environmental realm, the European Alps are crisscrossed by numerous economic and sociocultural functional domains. The Alpine Convention, for instance, is implemented through protocols of key import to non-Alpine territories (e.g. energy, agriculture, forestry) and thus gives rise to noncontiguous functional domains. The Alpine Space Programme includes major extra-Alpine metropolitan areas in order to incorporate spatial planning challenges related to labor mobility, multilocal residential and recreational patterns, and commuter transport systems. From a sustainable development perspective, each of these domains may gain from the environmental agenda underpinning the Alpine ecoregion. Where the domains overlap, the potential for reconciling conflicting environmental, economic, and social goals is likely to be greatest.

Finally, the heterarchic perspective finds expression in the density of mobilization at the level of the European Alps.\(^56\) Since the establishment of CIPRA in the 1950s, numerous organizations and networks of collective actors have sprung to life. Whereas the Alliance in the Alps and the European Association of Elected Representatives from Mountain Regions (AEM) have multisectoral missions, most organizations are functionally aligned. Moreover, their geographical coverage is not always coterminous with the Alps, however defined. The Alliance in the Alps and Alparc (Alpine Network of Protected Areas) more or less follow the spatial limits of the Alpine Convention, but AEM also includes members from the Pyrenees, Carpathian, and Jura mountain ranges. Nevertheless, a bustling calendar of events regularly brings these organizations together, providing opportunities to foster the kinds of interorganizational links between and loyalty to functional domains best approximated by the notion of overlapping circles.

In sum, even a cursory look at the European Alps reveals a heterarchic tapestry of multiple, overlapping functional domains of varying degrees of institutionalization as a generalized Rokkan-Hirschman framework would predict. Since functional spaces in this heterarchic perspective are not only multiple and overlapping but also open, their intersection is equally indeterminate. This is consistent with Painter’s claim that fully institutionalized regions including all dimensions of sociospatial processes hardly ever exist.\(^57\) Due to the fluidity of the functional domains, as well as the institutions and mechanisms that link them, region-building work becomes a complicated challenge. The more that region builders invest in solidifying the external boundaries of “imagined communities”\(^58\)—as is necessary to foster identification, elicit loyalty, and secure continuity—the stronger becomes the tendency for internal structuring to proceed along functional lines.

\(^55\) Prominent examples of institutionalized functional orders include transboundary river basin districts under the EU Water Framework Directive, Sites of Community Interest under the EU Habitats Directive, Special Protection Areas under the EU Birds Directive, and the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe.

\(^56\) Debarbieux 2009; and Del Biaggio 2011.

\(^57\) Painter 2008.

\(^58\) Anderson 1991.
Alpine Polycentricity

Whereas an approach to the European Alps from a heterarchic perspective draws attention to the transboundary character of functional domains, a polycentric perspective highlights the regional aggregation of (sub)national identities and public spheres. The polycentric perspective can be illustrated through the national logic of implementing regional agreements and the federated structure of many regional organizations.

A view of region building in the European Alps from a polycentric perspective reveals the nationally cumulative characteristics of collective identities and public spheres surrounding the Alpine Convention. To begin with, while belonging to the Alpine region may find expression in a transboundary collective identity, the content and meaning of such belonging varies considerably across member countries and constituent subregions.60 Localized sense of place, which matters for defining self and community, is shaped by such factors as the share of mountain area in a country’s overall territory (which influences the distribution of political representation in national legislatures),61 the histories of subnational regions in the process of state building (which affects dispositions towards the national center), and the relative importance of particular Alpine themes (which impacts the substantive content of actor constellations). Similarly, although regular meetings of the various organs of the Convention help foster a transboundary public sphere, the domestic organization of convention negotiation, ratification, implementation, and monitoring varies considerably across countries, not only with respect to the responsible ministries and protocol task managers but also the prevailing policy cultures.61 Hence, where Alpine Convention oversight lies with an agency responsible for spatial development (e.g. Switzerland), debate is likely to follow a different logic than in countries where oversight is under a ministry in charge of environmental affairs (most other signatories). This variation has fostered distinct (sub)national public spheres that differently interpret and incorporate what it means to be an Alpine country. Despite these variations, the polycentric perspective has validity, because the guiding principles contained in the Framework Convention— precautionary principle, polluter pays principle, cooperative principle—constitute a common meaning structure. Also, the main actors are aware of each other and recognize each other as legitimate participants in policy debate; and the media activities of transnational organizations, especially before and after high-level meetings, help ensure that issues are addressed at the same time in different national public spheres. Not surprisingly, EU membership provides an added commonality that links the largest signatories’ national identities and public spheres.

A second feature of Alpine region building that is highlighted by a polycentric perspective is the federated structure of many range-wide organizations. The most visible of these, CIPRA, with international headquarters in Liechtenstein, is organized as a classic umbrella organization. It has representations in Austria, Germany, France, Italy, Liechtenstein, Slovenia, Switzerland, and South Tyrol, which in turn have public and nongovernmental

59 Caramani and Mény 2005.
60 This ranges from a modest 3 and 8 percent in Germany and France, respectively, to 62 and 65 percent in Switzerland and Austria, respectively, and 100 percent in Liechtenstein and Monaco.
61 Church 2011.
memberships of as many as twenty-six organizations (Italy), mainly conservation and tourism groups, but in some cases also forestry and hunting associations (Austria, Liechtenstein). While adhering to the organization’s overall mission and contributing to general positions vis-à-vis, for instance, the development of the Alpine Convention, each of these representations maintains an active portfolio of projects, and issues its own policy positions adapted to prevailing subregional priorities and membership constellations.

The European Association of Elected Representatives of Mountain Regions is another example of an organization with a regional mandate and headquarters in Brussels but distinct national nodes. As in the case of CIPRA, the AEM umbrella organization closely monitors and tries to influence EU developments. In particular, AEM collaborates with the EU Committee of the Regions to formulate a position on the evolving territorial cohesion policy of the European Union.\(^{62}\) Because AEM members are elected representatives of (sub)national institutions, however, they pay significant attention to developments at other levels. Due to the variation of political-institutional contexts and policy priorities across AEM countries, mountain themes enter debates in respective public spheres in different ways, mirroring the diverse ways in which European themes are taken up in the public spheres of EU members. Accordingly, the encounter between discourses of new environmental regionalism and sustainable development in the Alps is shaped by these same contexts. This brief overview of selected features of region building in the European Alps is not aimed at testing the relative purchase of the heterarchic and polycentric perspectives. Rather, it seeks to illustrate how both perspectives are useful to capture particular dynamics. They do differ with respect to how sustainable development can be pursued in the new environmental regionalist initiatives. The concluding section below draws out these implications, ties them back to the initial discussion on sustainable development governance at the transboundary level, and identifies a number of areas for future research.

**Conclusion**

This article started out with a sketch of the potential dilemma that new environmental regionalism poses for the larger project of sustainable development. It conceptualized this dilemma in the Rokkan-Hirschman framework, which posits an impact of external boundary making on internal political structuring. This framework generates an understanding of new environmental regionalism as an unavoidable complement of the emergence of economic, sociocultural, and other functional domains. However, contemplating environmental regions that cross state boundaries requires a notion of polity formation that goes beyond the Rokkan-Hirschman framework and includes the institutionalization of transboundary domains. New environmental regionalism then appears as one of many possible manifestations of the general trend towards the “de-nationalization of territorial statehood,” which represents a “re-articulation of different levels of the territorial organization of power within the global system […] reflected empirically in the “hollowing out” of the national state apparatus with old and
new state capacities being reorganized territorially on subnational, national, supranational, and translocal levels.”

Absent much scholarly work addressing the repercussions of transboundary polity formation on sustainable development in the sense of a process involving the simultaneous and balanced consideration of environmental, economic, and social challenges and opportunities, I propose two alternative perspectives. In the heterarchic view, the territorial dimension of sustainable development emerges at the intersection of various transboundary functional domains, some of which converge around environmental objectives. Due to the constructed and porous nature of functional boundaries, situating sustainable development territorially is almost entirely dependent on regional agents’ constant construction and reconstruction of the domains’ intersection. In the polycentric view, there is a much weaker transboundary element and hence less coherent support for transnational institutionalization; on the other hand, the coordination of economic, environmental, and social goals is more likely to take place at the (sub)national level, where specific institutions and mechanisms have evolved for this very purpose.

From these two perspectives, region building in the European Alps appears in a very different light. Both are useful heuristics to highlight particular dynamics, yet the implications for assessing the relationships between new environmental regionalism and sustainable development are not the same. Two aspects stand out. First, because of its emphasis on “regionalizing” national collective identities and public spheres, the polycentric perspective is more closely aligned with the Rokkan-Hirschman framework than the heterarchic perspective. Negotiating the tradeoffs between sustainability dimensions thus takes place at the national rather than the Alpine level, which is arguably both more effective because requisite national institutions and mechanisms are stronger, and less effective because they easily lose sight of the transboundary impact of policy issues. Despite the role of sustainable development as a vital part of the common meaning structure underlying the Alpine Convention, the polycentric perspective implies the emergence of different national understandings of sustainable development. This is illustrated by the persistent cleavage between countries that give relatively more weight to environmental goals (e.g. Germany) and countries that seek to prioritize socioeconomic development instead (e.g. France). Such cleavages undermine the effectiveness of transboundary instruments such as the Alpine Convention and call for more discerning research into the possibilities of transboundary sustainable development.

Second, and from a more practical perspective, it is much harder to locate and stabilize the heterarchic notion of an intersection of overlapping functional domains than it is to pinpoint the sites of action in a polycentric perspective. Of course, geographers have long warned of replacing the spatial bias of the nation state with that of the region, arguing instead for a more fluid and indeterminate understanding of the products of rescaling. If this warning were taken seriously and a heterarchic perspective nevertheless maintained, researchers’ attention would need to turn to the action that takes place at the interstices of functional domains. There we find what may be called “region-building bricoleurs” in organizations such as CIPRA or AEM, which use “whatever is at hand” rather than searching for specifically adapted

63 Jessop 2004, 64.
resources. Through a continual process of testing, permutation, and substitution, bricoleurs are in constant dialogue with their stock of material and symbolic repertoires, including the usage of territory to challenge the frontiers of public policy, define the eligibility of actors within institutional orders, and politicize or depoliticize regulatory contradictions and ambiguities. As a consequence of this dialogue, bricoleurs become part of their work and thus imbue their oeuvre with a collective identity with which they identify. As the discussion of Alpine region building reveals, bricolage often takes place in regional umbrella organizations, where collective identities are produced for the region as a whole. The fact that these organizations’ projects and pronouncements often transcend the Alpine region moves the empirical tangibility of a becoming and indeterminate region within reach. Yet, research that operationalizes the intersection of overlapping functional domains is largely nonexistent.

Ultimately, the many sustained efforts to construct the European Alps as an environmental region that is also the locus of sustainable development support the argument that regions are products of social relations and continually in a process of becoming. This process draws attention to the multiplicity of stakes, the agents who represent them, and the relative coherence and legitimacy of transboundary domains that functionally cluster such claims. If the heterarchic perspective proves useful in locating sustainable development at the intersection of overlapping functional domains, an additional question concerns what happens when these domains vary in their functional coherence. The evolution of European integration has shown that authority shifts to Brussels have been most pronounced in the economic realm, followed by the environmental and social domains. Even though welfare regionalism is an emerging topic in European studies, it is clear that member states have been much more reluctant to transfer decision-making authority on sensitive social issues. When policy goals underlying transboundary functional domains conflict, those that are less legitimately regulated beyond the nation state may be at a marked disadvantage. Thus, from a heterarchic perspective, there are good reasons why new environmental regionalist initiatives may in fact support sustainable development: they help consolidate environmental concerns at the supranational level, where economic interests traditionally dominate. Legitimate calls for more comparative research in regional environmental governance thus need not focus on multiple regions alone, but may instead analyze multiple functional domains in a single region.

References

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64 Lévi-Strauss 1966, 17. See also Keating (2009, 41), who uses the term “political entrepreneurs.”
65 Carter and Smith 2008.
66 Duymedjian and Ruling 2010.


