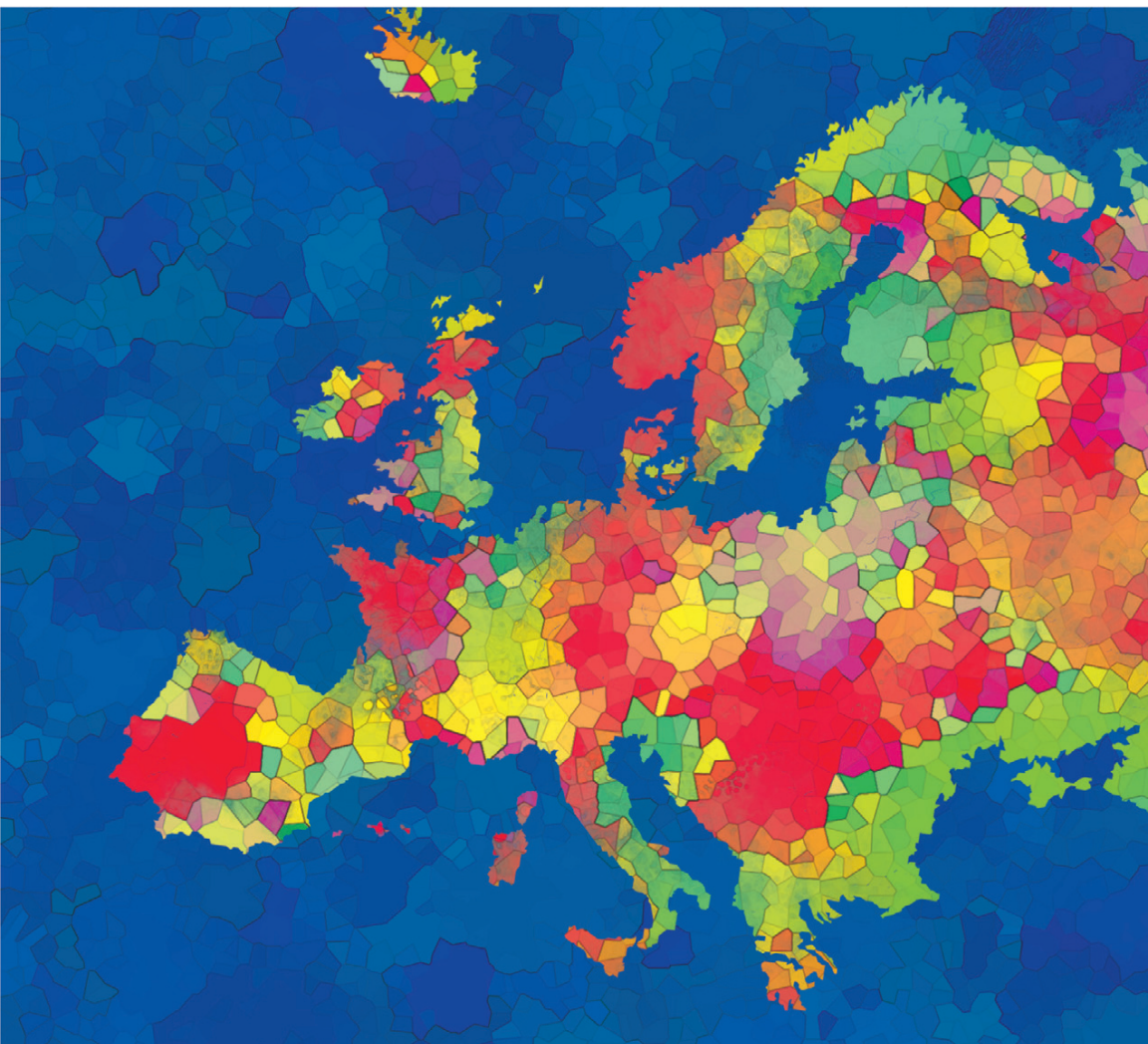# TRANSREGIONAL EUROPE



## WILLIAM OUTHWAITE

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# Transregional Europe

BY

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# About the Author

**William Outhwaite**, Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, UK, taught at the universities of Sussex, in the School of European Studies, and Newcastle, where he is Emeritus Professor of Sociology. His interests include the philosophy of the social sciences (especially realism), social theory (especially critical theory), political sociology and the sociology of knowledge.

Professor Outhwaite is now working mainly on contemporary Europe. He is the author of *Understanding Social Life: The Method Called Verstehen* (1975, 2nd edn. 1986), *Concept Formation in Social Science* (1983), *New Philosophies of Social Science: Realism, Hermeneutics and Critical Theory* (1987), *Jürgen Habermas: A Critical Introduction* (1994), *The Future of Society* (2006), *European Society* (2008), *Critical Theory and Contemporary Europe* (2012), *Social Theory* (2015), *Europe since 1989: Transitions and Transformations* (2016), *Contemporary Europe* (2017) and (with Larry Ray) *Social Theory and Postcommunism* (2005). He edited *The Habermas Reader* (1996), *Brexit: Sociological Responses* (2017), (with Tom Bottomore) *The Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Social Thought* (1993, 2nd edn. 2004), (with Luke Martell) *The Sociology of Politics* (1998), and (with Stephen P. Turner) the *Sage Handbook of Social Science Methodology* (2007) and *Sage Handbook of Political Sociology* (2018) and (with Luca Corchia and Stefan Müller-Doohm) *Habermas global: Wirkungsgeschichte eines Werks* (2019).

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# Preface

This book continues a line of argument developed in my *European Society* (2008), *Europe Since 1989* (2016) and *Contemporary Europe* (2017). It aims to integrate work such as 'new regionalist' approaches in human geography and planning with related scholarship in history and the other social sciences. At the time of writing, the future of the UK and its relationship with the European Union (EU) still remains open, but it is possible to make two remarks here. First, there is no obstacle in principle to non-member states participating in EU programmes of the kind discussed here. Second, however, when the UK does secede, on whatever terms, it will probably cease to appear in many of the statistical sources on which writers on contemporary Europe have increasingly relied.[1] This is a further source of regret amidst a much broader tragedy. The EU will survive (and hopefully thrive) without the UK, though it is hard to see any future for the UK or whatever remains of it after its probable dissolution.

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[1]For an early example of this exclusion, see the Commission proposal for Cohesion Policy in the 2021–2027 budget period: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/panorama/pdf/mag65/mag65_en.pdf. The ESPON reports and maps referred to substantially in this book include only the European Economic Area and Switzerland.

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# Acknowledgements

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# Chapter 1

# Introduction

This book examines how far we are beginning to think of Europe in terms of broad regional concepts familiar in the US: East/West/South/Midwest etc. The focus will be both on popular perceptions and on European Union (EU) macro-regional planning in the Baltic, Danube, Adriatic and other regions. Europe itself has passed from being a 'core region' of the world, in the imperial age ending in the mid-twentieth century, a 'divided region' in the Cold War period, to a (more-or-less) 'unified region' in the present century (Schimmelfennig, 2016: 180). The degree and extent of unification can of course be disputed; my concern here is rather to look at ways in which the European cake is sliced. My aim is to bridge the gap between essayistic discussions of regional stereotypes in the popular imagination such as the 'lazy south' or the 'wild east' and detailed accounts of the EU's controversial and contested attempts to develop planning strategies at a transnational level to address common environmental and other problems in member states, subnational regions and the states and regions adjacent to the EU. The focus, in other words, is on what have been called 'mental maps' (Gould & White, 1974), located in the minds both of European planners and of ordinary Europeans and visitors from abroad.[1] In a particularly upbeat edited volume published in 1994 and reissued in 2013, Ashworth and Larkham (2013) wrote of the need for 'a reformulation of the mental map of Europeans to encompass a new place-identity at the continental scale.'

> The idea of the nation state was strongly reinforced by nationalist interpretations of the past, and it is no coincidence that the timing of the rise in interest in the conservation of relict artefacts of the built environment in the latter half of the nineteenth century in Europe coincided with the creation of the nation states of Germany, the Balkans and Italy…The shaping of a European place-identity to complement, if not replace, national identities has…never been more urgent or more necessary.

Another main theoretical reference point is the notion of imagined collectivities, introduced by the psychoanalyst and social theorist Cornelius Castoriadis (1975) in *L'institution imaginaire de la société*, in which the representation of a social entity by its members is analysed as a constitutive part of it. The French

term *imaginaire*, earlier presented by Sartre (1940), was taken up in the English-speaking world by the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (2003) in his discussion of individualism and the representation of social relations and 'social space' in modernity[2]; it is also echoed implicitly by Benedict Anderson (1983) in his analysis of nationalism, in which members of a nation imagine a connection with fellow citizens whom they have never met. It was introduced into the study of Europe by Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford (2005), for whom social, political and cultural representations of Europe coexist with, complement and sometimes conflict with national imaginaries, as in the standard survey question which asks whether people identify primarily with their region, their national state or with Europe (See also Biebuyck, 2010; Debarbieux, 2015). To establish the connection with territoriality, which is central to this book, it is enough here, summarising a few hundred years of history, to make the point that, whereas the European states of the middle ages and other contemporary social forms, such as feudalism and the Church, were largely non-territorial, the modern state as it emerges in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is centrally concerned with its territory and its boundaries. Christopher Saxton's atlas of the counties of England and Wales of 1579 is an example (Debarbieux, 2015: 118–9). As we shall see, the EU continues this cartographic drive (Foster, 2015).

The term 'Europeanisation,' meaning the modification of the politics and other aspects of member states in terms of a European framework (see Radaelli, 2018), has increasingly been brought to bear on everyday patterns of thought and action, sometimes called 'horizontal Europeanisation' to distinguish it from the influence of European-level institutions on those of member states and their component regions (Büttner & Mau, 2010; Mau & Verwiebe, 2010: 303–27). A recent example is a study based mainly on Eurobarometer, the European Values Study and the European Quality of Life Survey (Deutschmann, Delhey, Verbalyte, & Aplowski, 2018). The authors focussed on the relation between actions, such as travel, and subjective orientations. They found, not surprisingly, that inhabitants of smaller and richer countries were more transnationally active within the rest of Europe, but also that 'doing Europe' in this way did not correlate with 'feeling [identified with] Europe'; a postcommunist past and/or location in central Europe was a stronger determinant of positive attitudes.

As with other social scientific concepts such as class, there has been considerable debate over whether a scalar concept such as region, and scale itself, should be seen primarily as a discursive product or as a 'real phenomenon'[3] with causal effects. The obvious scalar differences between, say, the city of Paris, the country of France and the EU do not in themselves explain the complex interactions between them or, more precisely, between institutional actors primarily identified with one of these spatial levels. John Agnew (1993: 258) pointed out the danger that 'one can start out using spatial concepts as shorthand for complex sociological processes but slip easily into *substituting* the spatial concepts for the more complex argument.' This 'spatial fetishism', as Andrew Sayer (1985) described it, is more seriously dangerous in the analysis of nationalism and national identity, where it may replicate and reinforce national mythologies. As Rogers Brubaker (1996: 16) suggested, 'We should not ask "What is a nation?" but rather: how is

nationhood as a political and cultural form institutionalized within and among states?'[4]

In the case of the EU, member states are divided for statistical and planning purposes into three levels of regions in the NUTS classification (Nomenclature des Unités Statistiques Territoriales).[5] At the highest level (NUTS 1), Sweden, for example, has three, Finland just one, and Germany the sixteen federal states (Bundesländer). The UK is divided into 12 (Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and 8 English regions, including London). This immediately points up the difference between substantive entities such as the three peripheral nations of the UK, which may well end up leaving it, and the English planning regions which lost their administrative functions in 2011 and have little importance except as constituencies for European Parliament elections.[6]

The largely nationalist discussion of 'natural frontiers' is a notorious example of the attempt to naturalise more contingent social divisions between states. Rivers and mountain ranges can unite as well as divide. François Walter (2004: 345) cites a Swiss politician, implicitly making both claims in celebrating the centenary of the incorporation of Geneva into Switzerland in 1914 with the bizarre assertion that the Swiss cantons 'form part of a geological and geographical system whose demands led them to form a single political system.' United by the Alps and divided from Germany and France by the Rhine and the Lake of Geneva, respectively, Switzerland could perhaps claim to be a natural entity, but not very convincingly. In revolutionary France, Danton in 1793 referred a little more plausibly to the boundaries formed by 'the Ocean, the Rhine, the Alps, the Pyrenees', though Walter (2012: 91–2) notes that the hexagonal image did not really become entrenched until after World War II and France's loss of its empire.

Rivers are very frequently used as defining symbols of nationality and national borders, as in the now retired verse of the German national anthem which traces the country's extent 'von der Maas [Meuse] bis an die Memel [now the Lithuanian Neman]'. The Rhine in particular was the object of nationalistic claims ('Deutschlands Strom, aber nicht Deutschlands Grenze' in the title of a work by Arndt, 1813), seen by both France and Germany as a protective barrier against the other (as in *Die Wacht am Rhein*, a poem of 1840),[7] and finally rebadged in the 1950s as a symbol of reconciliation and European unity, marked by the location of the West German capital in Bonn and the otherwise incomprehensible retention of Strasbourg as one of the sites of the European Parliament. Rivers also play an important part in the theorisation of transnational historiography and 'reterritorialization' (Hadler & Middell, 2010; Middell & Naumann, 2010). The Danube, in particular, has been taken to exemplify this process, given the peculiarly shifting patterns of the national states along its course (Pohl, 2010: 126).[8]

The term 'region' has survived, and probably benefited from, the critique of 'methodological nationalism,' the assumption that national states are the principal reference points for social scientific analysis, and the controversies over globalisation.[9] Regions, which come in very different sizes, are intrinsically fuzzy and less prone than 'nations' to accrue an emotional charge (Kramer, 2012, Ch. 13; Middell, 2018).[10] Regions are perhaps best defined negatively as territorial entities

which are not states (Van Langenhove, 2016).[11] The US is a state; North America is a region, as are sub-national regions such as the 'mid-west' or the Florida Everglades. The north of England is a region; Scotland is a state, even if not (or not yet) a sovereign one. As for the real or constructed nature of regions, it seems best to see them as both. To take the Danube as an example, the river itself is a defined physical entity, with at most some controversies about the location of its source. The Danube basin, similarly, is a physical entity, though less precisely defined (Pohl, 2010: 126). The 'Danube region,' by contrast, is an open-ended human construct, though related to the natural object of the river. 'At best one can speak of a large region, which overlaps with other large regions – the Eastern Alps, the Carpathian basin, the Balkan peninsula' (Pohl, 2010: 127).

The relation between physical space and representations was well captured by the geographer Richard Hamilton Williams (1996: 97) in his concept of 'spatial positioning'[12]:

> The capacity to conceptualise or think about one's location or situation within the spatial structure of Europe as a whole is a skill which often needs to be developed…Through such a process, it is sometimes possible to identify opportunities, comparative advantage and possibilities on the basis of which new links and relationships could be developed and strategic policies formulated.

Macro-regional conceptions are not unique to Europe: we think of Latin America, Polynesia, Australasia and so on.[13] Janet Abu-Lughod (1989) described a thirteenth-century world system made up of intersecting circles: north-west and south Europe, the Mongol empire in Eurasia, the Middle East and Egypt, eastern and western India, and China.[14] Almost all the world's states are members of one or more macro-regional groupings; Powers and Goertz (2011: 2414) found only 15 which were not.[15] It is, however, in Europe, in the territory of, and largely at the initiative of, the EU, that macro-regional planning has been pursued as an explicit goal and with substantial political and administrative underpinning. Transregional coordination of planning policy within and between states and regions is an early aspect of what has become the EU itself, though it is only in the last decade that it has become an explicit and prominent part of the EU's activity.

At the same time, roughly over the EU's 70-year history, and largely independently of deliberate policy initiatives, the map of Europe has been reshaped, with some parts of the south, as earlier in West Germany or the US, developing faster than the previously dominant north. (Sometimes, as in Belgium, the north–south polarities are reversed, with Flanders overtaking old-industrial Wallonia. In England, the division, usually located on a diagonal line between Bristol in the south-west and Grimsby in the north-east, between wealthy south and impoverished north has been dramatically exacerbated, despite pockets of prosperity in Manchester and Leeds and vapid slogans of the emergence of a 'northern powerhouse.')

The stereotypical oppositions of East/West and North/South persist, however, with the impact of the 2008 crisis linking Ireland and Iceland with the south of

Europe in an imaginary southern PIIGS-sty.[16] The Romanian art historian Andrei Pleşu (2017: 4) addressed these tensions, locating his own country and the rest of the Balkans 'between the reforming West, the source of modernity, and conservative Byzantium, contaminated by the Slavic and the Ottoman world…'[17] Tensions between the centre and periphery are also salient, with the north-western core of Europe challenged by more 'remote' regions. At the same time, European integration strengthens the position of regional centres in member states in relation to national capitals, giving them direct access to 'Brussels' in macro-regional planning as well as in other areas of EU policy. The EU has of course been central to much macro-regional planning, with a host of initiatives of which the more visible include the construction or improvement of train lines, long-distance roads, such as the E80 running from Lisbon to Eastern Turkey including a sea crossing of the Adriatic from Pescara to Dubrovnik, or trans-European waterways such as the Rhine–Main–Danube.

The background to the later chapters of this book is the development of what has become the EU's territorial or spatial planning. While these terms are often used interchangeably, as in this book, an important recent overview stresses that '…spatial visions for the European territory…have tended to be replaced by an emphasis on territorial development policies largely designed to support economic development and competitiveness' (Atkinson & Zimmermann, 2018: 157). The EU's development strategy has assumed that these two priorities, competitiveness and what has come to be called cohesion, the balance between prosperity in different parts of Europe, can be harmoniously combined. In practice, however, as well as in theory, they are distinct, as noted by David Evers (2008) in a classic article which discussed two alternative scenarios drawn up the previous year by the EU's ESPON, the European Spatial Planning Observation Network, established in 2002 and now renamed as the European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion.[18]

ESPON produced two scenarios, one oriented to competitiveness and the other to cohesion.[19] Briefly, the first, labelled the Rhine–Rhone scenario, favoured existing areas of development running south-east from London to Bavaria and, in the south, from Northern Italy through southern France and Catalonia. The second, 'Danubian' scenario would have greatly benefited Greece and the former East Germany, as well as a wide range of areas ranging from northern Finland and Sweden (and the north of Scotland) to Sardinia and much of Spain and Portugal.[20] The impact of the latter on income disparities across Europe was, however, not much greater than the competitiveness scenario.

The EU's rather halting development of a spatial planning policy[21] is paralleled by the evolution of the conceptual frameworks in which its history has been theorised: from the *integration* of previously (or at least recently) disconnected territories to the *Europeanisation* of decision-making in *multi-level governance*, guided, in theory at least, by the principle of *subsidiarity*, that decisions should be taken at the lowest appropriate level. Briefly, the EU practises the two forms of multi-level governance distinguished by Hooghe and Marks (2001): Type I (the nesting of authorities at different levels, as in a federal system) and Type II, a more informal and *ad hoc* combination of official and unofficial bodies addressing

specific issues.[22] Whereas integration was conceived in relatively technical terms, Europeanisation was a way of conceptualising the convergence of economic, political and legal institutions and practices across (and to some extent beyond) the member states of the EU, as the result of its direct agency or its centripetal influence.[23] This to some extent undercuts the endemic controversies over the *finalité* of the Union and the rival slogans of a confederal 'Europe of nations' (from de Gaulle to the present slogans of the European hard right and parts of the extreme left), a 'Europe of regions' (Ruge, 2003, 2004), an ethnonational 'Europe des ethnies' (Héraud, 1965) and so forth.

Transnational or supranational planning initiatives involving sub-national regions and territories is a way of squaring these circles and demonstrating the advantages of an approach to territorial planning which is both Europe-wide and focussed on functionally defined regions, most often centred around a major geographical feature such as a sea (Baltic, Adriatic-Ionian) a river (Danube) or a mountain range (Alps) – echoing in this respect the discussion of 'bioregions' (Debarbieux, 2015: 258–63). There is a connection with the concept, developed in the early years of this century, of 'territorial impact assessments' (Greiving, Fleischhauer, Tarvainen, Schmidt-Thomé, & Jarva, 2008), which included environmental challenges as an important element.

On the concept of territoriality, see Sassen (2006) and Komlosy (2018). Komlosy (2018: 29; 132) stresses the diversity of the experience of state and territoriality in western, eastern and southern Europe in the early medieval period and subsequently. The contemporary state, she goes on to suggest, presides over an increasingly fragmented society in which it is no longer grounded. It 'retains its authority [in international and transnational frameworks] at the cost of its territorial coverage.' It comes to resemble the colonial state, 'directed from outside and ruling in the interests of a narrow elite' (Komlosy, 2018: 89).

Groenendijk (2013) compared the EU's then incipient transregional planning in the Baltic and Danube regions with the long-established structures of Benelux, the customs union of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg established in 1944 by the exile governments of the three states and preceded in 1921 by a similar agreement between Belgium and Luxemburg. Here, then, the links were political rather than geomorphological; as we shall see, the three Baltic states invoked the example of Benelux in establishing their own transnational networks after regaining their independence in 1991. The Council of the Baltic Sea States was established in 1992 as a Danish–German initiative and now has 11 member states plus the EU, with a large number of observers as far away as the US (Schymik, 2003).

The theoretical counterpart of these and other experiments in regional integration can be found in what is variously called transnational history, 'connected histories', *histoire croisée*,[24] 'new regionalism' (Keating, 1998, 2006),[25] transregionalism (Middell, 2018)[26] and the critique of 'methodological nationalism'.[27] Kenichi Ohmae (1995: 138), in perhaps the most strident critique of methodological nationalism, also criticised the EU: '…just when nation states began to lose their primacy as economic actors, Brussels created a supernation state.' The term 'new regionalism' refers not only to novel methodological approaches such

as constructivism or a focus on discourse, but also increasingly to a focus on transnational rather than subnational regions.[28] The difference is not precise, since transnational regions will typically include, as we shall see, subnational regions of the national states concerned and, ideally, strengthen their contribution to 'multi-level governance'. As Andrew Gamble (2007: 36) wrote:

> Nationalist opponents of European integration…want a return to exclusive national sovereignty, but their critics believe that the rights of self-determination which the nationalists seek can only be achieved by recognizing the fundamental changes in the way in which political, economic and social space is now structured…

> Since the world system began there have always been four types of order present: cosmopolitan, organized around markets; imperial, organized around security; hegemonic, organized around rules; and territorial, organized around legitimcacy and frontiers. Their relative weightings have changed in different periods, but they have always coexisted. What we are witnessing today is a rebalancing of these types of order.

Peter Katzenstein (2005) offered an influential comparison of European and Asian regionalism in what he called 'a world of (porous) regions'. In a similarly influential article, Björn Hettne and Fredrik Söderbaum (2000: 461) theorised what they called 'regionness' – the degree to which a region functions and is perceived by insiders and outsiders as an entity; they identified different levels of regionness to trace 'the process whereby a geographical area is transformed from a passive object to an active subject capable of articulating the transnational interests of the emerging region.' Like many other analysts, they distinguish between regionalism, the deliberate promotion of one or more regions, and regionalisation, a process which may be substantially unintended, as with the growth of a city like Los Angeles into a broader region, or when a bridge intended primarily for long-distance transport generates or regenerates a region spanning the shores (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2000: 457–8).

Even where national states remain the principal focus of analysis,[29] as in the Open Society Institute's excellent series of the 'European Catch-Up Index,' these are clustered according to various economic, social and political statistical indicators. The most recent summary version has in the lead a cluster including the UK and Ireland, Nordic Europe, Germany and Austria, followed by a second (France, Belgium and Estonia), a third (Spain, Poland, Italy, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, Malta and Cyprus) and a south-eastern bloc divided into three: Hungary, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece, followed by Serbia and Montenegro and, finally, the rest of the former Yugoslavia, Albania and Turkey.[30] A transregional approach has, however, developed in part out of a critique of the limitations of comparing entities (usually national states) seen as bounded and an alternative emphasis on processes of transfer (Espagne, 1994, 2013).[31] As Mathias Middell (2018: introduction) puts it:

> Transregional studies fill the gap left by area studies and their
> examination of regions only as isolated cases by responding to the
> agenda of a historically informed investigation of the reach of
> flows and control mechanisms that go beyond the limits and
> boundaries of single empires, continents, regions, or cultural
> spheres.

A key notion is that of 'assemblages,' replacing clear hierarchical models of
administration in flexible patterns requiring description in topological terms (Allen
& Cochrane, 2010). In such a model, border regions can become actors in their own
right, collaborating with similar regions in adjacent states. A striking example at the
beginning of this century was the purchase in 2001 of the privatised and struggling
English Channel port of Newhaven by the Department of Seine-Maritime.[32]

Half a century earlier, the leading Ukrainian–French geographer Jean
Gottmann (1952: 106–7) had noted the parallel between the eastern seaboard of
the US, from Boston to Washington, and a similar '*façade européenne*' from
Boulogne to Amsterdam which could include Dieppe and Le Havre and even the
Paris region as its 'southern anchor'. Following and modifying the British
geographer Halford Mackinder's concept of the 'pivot' region, Gottman devel-
oped the notion of 'hinge regions' located on the shores of large continents and
linking them to the outside world. In the European case, he wrote:

> Paris n'est-il pas l'ancre méridionale de cette charnière atlantique
> européenne et l'articulation de cette région-charnière avec l'isthme
> d'entre Atlantique et Méditerranée qu'est le territoire français?'
>
> Is Paris not the southern anchor of the Atlantic European hinge
> and the articulation of this hinge region with the isthmus between
> the Atlantic and the Mediterranean formed by the territory of
> France?[33]

Gottmann (1952: 214, 220–1) was also sensitive to the idea of movement and
flow mentioned above, stressing the symbolic or 'iconographic' resistance to
movement and reinforcement of closure or partitioning ('cloisonnement')
expressed in national or regional symbolism.[34]

Along with this conceptual enrichment there was the gradual intensification of
interest in the process of European integration among a wider circle of social
scientists. My main disciplinary base is in sociology, in the broad sense in which it
includes social anthropology and draws on and, ideally, integrates philosophical,
historical, legal, geographical, political and economic themes. Some of the
founders of what has come to be called 'contemporary European studies,' where
the word contemporary indicates an attachment to social science rather than the
humanities, were also closely linked with sociology. Ernst Haas's 1958 book on
*The Uniting of Europe* refers in its subtitle to 'political, social, and economical
forces', and Karl Deutsch's first book, *Nationalism and Social Communication*
(1953) elaborated a social model of political integration through communication