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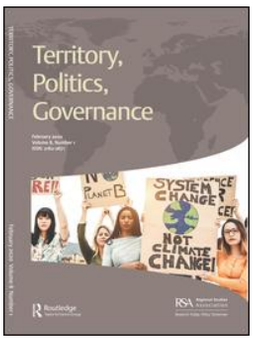

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Governing 'places that don't matter': agonistic spatial planning practices in Finnish peripheral regions

Hanna Mattila [a], Eva Purkarthofer [b] and Alois Humer [c]

ABSTRACT

Economic geographer Andrés Rodríguez-Pose argued recently that declining peripheries are increasingly becoming 'places that don't matter' in the formation or implementation of national or European Union (EU) regional policies. In turn, this might result in a triumph of populist anti-establishment movements in peripheries, posing a threat to well-being in both the prospering and the declining regions. We argue that 'places that don't matter' also exist in Finland, a country that has a long tradition of regional policy and equalizing welfare schemes. Our focus is on administration rather than politics, however. We look at the Finnish peripheral regions of Kainuu and Lapland, discussing the practices of spatial planners, who influence and implement EU and national regional policies in these regions. We ask how strategic spatial planning in Kainuu and Lapland is affected by the revengeful and antagonistic attitudes towards the 'elites' who, allegedly, are not directing a sufficient amount of attention to the peripheries. We look at the planning practices and institutional settings within which they work from the perspective of agonistic planning theory, asking whether and how spatial planners can turn the antagonistic and potentially revengeful attitudes into productive forces that could positively affect spatial development in these regions.

KEYWORDS

agonistic planning; Kainuu; Lapland; spatial planning; periphery; regional planning; regional policy; Finland

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INTRODUCTION

Economic geographer Andrés Rodríguez-Pose argued recently (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018) that there are signs of declining regions – being often also geographically peripheral regions – increasingly becoming secondary to centres of growth in the formation or implementation of national or European Union (EU) regional policies. He made a reference to discourses typical (but not limited) to the UK context, where the argument has often been that instead of supporting the

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declining regions financially, these regions could be best helped by facilitating the migration of people from declining regions to more affluent regions – for instance, by supporting the production of affordable housing in those regions where job markets thrive (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). This discourse is related to the broader, longstanding debate concerning EU Cohesion and Regional Policy, the objective of which is, first, to reduce disparities between regions and, second, to support the competitiveness of regions, countries and the whole EU (e.g., Faludi, 2007). The question has often been whether these two objectives are compatible when the policy gets to be implemented, or is it rather that the competitiveness goal tends to get the upper hand at the expense of cohesion and the future of the declining regions (Mancha-Navarro & Garrido-Yserte, 2008; see also Faludi, 2007; Sharp, 1998; Vanolo, 2010; Waterhout, 2008).

Rodríguez-Pose (2018) argues that the current tendency is to prioritize the goal of promoting competitiveness – in practice, to focus on agglomeration economies and centres of growth – and that this is eventually harmful for both the prosperous and the declining regions. If the declining regions are treated as 'places that don't matter', we might need to be prepared for the 'revenge of places that don't matter' (pp. 2–3). This revenge has been surfacing already in some countries as a substantive gain of political movements that aim to shake the foundations of the existing political and administrative systems, rather than providing constructive elements for redesigning these systems. For Rodríguez-Pose (2018, p. 3), the Brexit vote is a prime example of such revenge-motivated, antagonistic and non-constructive voting behaviour.

In this paper we examine how the discourse on the 'places that don't matter' resonates with the political–administrative climate in the Finnish declining peripheries. We do not investigate the antagonistic voting behaviour, however, a topic that has been studied extensively recently (Dijkstra et al., 2019), but our focus is on a less discussed theme: the ways in which the antagonistic attitudes typical to the current political climate in peripheries are reflected in the work of regional-level administrative officials who influence, interpret and implement regional policies of the EU and the nation-state in the context of spatial planning. By 'spatial planning', we refer to the (ideally) integrated 'coordination of the spatial impacts of sector policy and decisions' (Nadin, 2006, p. 18). In the context of Finnish regions, we understand spatial planning as the cross-sectoral, multi-scalar work that regional councils carry out through their statutory responsibilities in regional land-use planning and regional development, including the preparation and coordination of the EU Structural Funds programmes (Purkarthofer & Mattila, 2018; see also Luukkonen, 2011, p. 259; Sjöblom, 2010). The focus of this paper lies in spatial planning practices in the two most peripheral regions of Finland: Lapland in northern Finland and Kainuu in north-eastern Finland. These regions have been struggling for decades with problems of peripheral regions, including loss of population and jobs, brain drain, and the high costs for service provision.

In Kainuu and Lapland, there is a long tradition of having antagonistic attitudes towards the governing 'elites', who are typically thought not to sufficiently support development in these regions, even though in popular discussions it often goes unspecified who these elites are and whether they represent, for instance, the EU level or national level governance. In this study, we focus on the dilemma that spatial planners in the regions of Lapland and Kainuu face in their daily work. On the one hand, they know that their actions need to represent the interests and attitudes of the general population in their regions so that people perceive their work as legitimate. On the other, they are obliged to network and cooperate constructively with public and private actors at various spatial scales extending beyond their own region, networking activities having even been argued to form the very essence of the spatial development work in Finnish regions (Sotarauta, 2010).

This article brings a novel perspective on the discourse concerning the revengeful attitudes in peripheries by using the theories of agonistic politics and planning (e.g., Hillier, 2003; Pløger, 2004, 2018) as a framework for analysing spatial planning vis-à-vis antagonisms, that is, conflictual relations characterized by hostility between the actors. The agonistic theories of planning

focus on antagonisms and conflicts instead of consensus-building. This is a fundamental difference to the theories of networked and collaborative governance that have influenced the EU's ideals concerning regional governance, and consequently, also the design of Finnish regional governance structures in the 1990s in anticipation of the EU accession. However, despite emphasizing antagonisms, the agonistic theory supposes that antagonisms could and should be tamed into 'agonism', that is, respectful and productive encounters between adversaries (Mouffe, 2013; see also Hillier, 2003; Pløger, 2004; Purcell, 2009). We examine whether and how the agonistic taming of antagonisms plays a part in the practices of spatial planners in Lapland and Kainuu, especially when they work in collaboration with the central government and the EU.

Thus, our research questions are as follows:

- How do antagonisms between centres and peripheries influence the work of regional-level spatial planners in Lapland and Kainuu, especially when networking and negotiating with the central government and the EU?
- How can their practices be analysed in the terms of planning theory, especially through the theories of agonistic politics and planning?
- How are the practices of spatial planners influenced by the governance structures and institutional settings in Finland? Can these structures – designed mainly for consensus-building – accommodate disagreements and facilitate the taming of antagonisms?

Our analysis of spatial planning practices in the regions of Lapland and Kainuu builds on interviews with regional key actors working in the field of spatial planning. The interviews are contextualized by document data. We interviewed actors who have extensive experience in their field, covering the different periods of Finnish regional policy. Until a few decades ago, Finnish policy strongly emphasized that all places matter, that the whole country should be kept populated, and that regional disparities should be minimized. However, after the severe economic recession in the early 1990s, the policy changed fundamentally to react to new challenges of globalizing economy and structural changes in the Finnish economy (Tervo, 2005). Furthermore, the changes in regional policy have resulted from Finland's EU accession in 1995 (Jauhiainen, 2008), although an unanswered question remains as to what form Finnish regional policy would have taken – especially in relation to peripheries – had Finland not become a member of the EU.

PERIPHERIES IN FINNISH REGIONAL POLICY: FROM WELFARE-STATIST IDEAS TO EUROPEAN UNION POLICIES

Regional development has been discussed in Finland since the early 1950s. Post the Second World War, the geopolitical position of Finland provided an argument for keeping the whole country populated (Jauhiainen, 2008). Agriculture was strongly supported, and northern and eastern Finland received special attention from the central government. This was at least partly due to the fear of political unrest and spread of communism in the peripheries. Had the disparity in welfare between peripheries and the rest of Finland grown significantly, the result might have been a revolt of regions such as Kainuu and Lapland (Moisio, 2006; Remahl, 2008, p. 60). Finland remained an agriculturally dominated country much longer than other countries in Western Europe, partly because of the measures taken to support agriculture and partly because of other reasons such as the lack of investment capital to speed up industrialization (Hakkarainen, 2008, p. 5).

Nonetheless, efforts were made to facilitate industrialization throughout the country and to support small industrial centres across the country. Urho Kekkonen, Finland's president from 1956 to 1982 and the influential leader of early Finnish regional policy, came from the Centre Party (originally *Maalaisliitto*, 'Agrarian League'), a party that has traditionally promoted the

interests of rural areas in Finland. Kekkonen himself was particularly interested in the natural resources of Lapland. He supported the establishment of state-owned industry in Lapland to assure that the resources are fully used (Hakkarainen, 2008; Jauhiainen, 2008; Kinnunen, 2018; Tervo, 2003). The nature and structure of Finnish industry post the Second World War was in line with the goals related to geographically balanced development. Especially wood processing industry and related entrepreneurial activities, the cornerstones of Finnish industrialization, boosted the development of a great number of towns throughout the country (Eskelinen, 2001, p. 17).

Officially, regional development policies have been enacted in Finland starting from the 1960s, when the policy of industrialization was complemented with welfare policies aiming to ensure the availability of basic welfare services throughout the country (Tervo, 2003). There were no notable gaps in the economic development of the Finnish regions, and the distribution of welfare was relatively even across the country between 1950 and 1990 (Tervo, 2003), even though the general trend has been that northern and eastern Finland have been losing population and southern and western Finland gaining population throughout the 20th century (Aro, 2007). The decentralization of the Finnish university network contributed to the balanced development, even though the location of universities was never part of official regional policy (Tervo, 2005, p. 276).

The turning point for both regional development and regional policy in Finland was in the mid-1990s when Finland was recovering from a severe economic recession that took place in the early 1990s. Although the recovery was quick, the structural changes in the economy were fundamental. The decreasing role of manufacturing industries and the growing importance of information- and technology-based industries led to some regions recovering rapidly, whereas others had difficulties in recovering at all (Tervo, 2005). In the new economic situation, it was mainly city-regions with universities that could attract people and thrive (Pulkkinen, 1998).

The post-recession regional policy in Finland was also influenced by Finland's accession to the EU in 1995. Regions had become a major object of attention for the EU in the early 1990s due to the central economic role of regions in the face of globalization and increasing inter-spatial competition (Brenner, 2003; Keating, 1997). The EU actively promoted the narrative of 'Europe of the regions', even if it was never clearly stated how this narrative relates to other scales of governance, especially to nation-states (Elias, 2008; Keating, 2008; MacLeod, 1999).

When Finland joined the EU, Finnish regional policy was adjusted to meet the objectives and operating modes of EU Cohesion and Regional Policy. The core narrative of EU Cohesion and Regional Policy has been described as 'compensating least favoured regions and member states for disadvantages suffered from the widening and deepening of the EU' (Faludi, 2007, p. 568). However, the policy also emphasizes the objective of supporting competitiveness and growth (Waterhout, 2008). Although these two objectives have sometimes been seen as difficult to reconcile, the Lisbon strategy, which outlined the goals for development of the EU after 2000, justified the objective of cohesion by referring to the positive implications that equity between countries and regions would have on competitiveness and growth (Faludi, 2007, p. 568).

Between 1995 and 2006, the Finnish peripheral regions benefitted from a considerable amount of resources from the EU Cohesion and Regional Policy funds, as well as from a higher co-financing percentage of these funds. After 2007, however, the EU enlargement to the south and east as well as general changes in the eligibility criteria classified the Finnish peripheries as more developed regions, leading to a reduction in the allocation of funds to these regions. While the operational programmes made at the national level still reserved a major share of Finland's allocated funds for the peripheral regions after 2007, the focus on knowledge-intensive objectives such as strengthening research, development and innovation, posed a challenge for peripheries due to a lack of actors who would be able to make use of the allocated funds. Nonetheless, the Finnish peripheries benefit at least from the European Territorial Cooperation objective and the specific allocation of resources for outermost and sparsely populated regions.

REGIONAL GOVERNANCE AND SPATIAL PLANNING IN FINLAND AFTER EUROPEAN UNION ACCESSION

In addition to the need to incorporate the objectives of EU Cohesion and Regional Policy, Finland's EU membership required strengthening the regional level of governance to comply with the procedural aspects related to EU Cohesion and Regional Policy. Finland, like other Nordic countries, is a unitary state, characterized by powerful local governments and a strong central state (Sjöblom, 2010). To establish a regional level in this setting, 19 regional councils were formed, which were given the institutional form of joint municipal authorities. There are no regional elections, notwithstanding the autonomous Åland Islands, thus the regional councils consist of representatives from the member municipalities. Their statutory responsibilities are regional land-use planning and regional development, including the coordination of the programmes associated with EU Cohesion and Regional Policy (e.g., Luukkonen, 2011, p. 259; Sjöblom, 2010). We consider all these responsibilities relevant for spatial planning, assuming that there is at least some level of integration between these activities, as coordination and cooperation are integral to the implementation of EU Cohesion and Regional Policy (Purkarthofer & Mattila, 2018).

The EU Cohesion and Regional Policy expects integrative cooperation to take place not only inside organs such as regional councils but also at the interorganizational level. In Finland, the most notable institutional partner for regional councils is the central state. Especially, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment has a significant role in shaping the ways in which EU development policies are organized and implemented. In addition, the state responsibilities at the regional level have been subsumed in Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment in 2010. The jurisdictions of most of the 15 centres correspond with those of the regional councils, and the organizations cooperate regarding various aspects of spatial planning (e.g., Nordberg, 2014).

In addition, the EU Cohesion and Regional Policy requires networking with other public and private stakeholders. In the Finnish Act on Regional Development (7/2014, Section 17), this requirement has been institutionalized, for instance, by mandating the regions to establish regional management committees for coordinating the 'measures with an effect on the development of the region and the implementation of Structural Fund programmes'. The committees must include representatives of parties that are significant for the development of the region, such as labour market and trade organizations, environmental organizations and organizations promoting gender equality. In the case of the Lapland Region, also the involvement of the Sámi Parliament (the representative body of indigenous Sámi people) is legally mandated.

The EU Cohesion and Regional Policy requirements concerning networked governance, institutionalized in the Finnish Act on Regional Development (7/2014), do not concern land-use planning as such. However, the Land Use and Building Act of Finland (132/1999) also sets requirements for both local and regional authorities as regards the use of collaborative methods in land-use planning. In addition to these legally mandated networks, regional councils coordinate and participate in numerous other governance networks (e.g., Nordberg, 2014; Sotarauta, 2010).

NETWORK GOVERNANCE AND CONSENSUS-BUILDING IN THE FACE OF AGONISTIC CRITICISM

In the 1990s, the EU was not the only institution promoting network governance. Network governance had already made its breakthrough across the scales and sectors of public governance covering not only cross-sectoral and trans-scalar networks but also networks between the public and

private sectors. Traditional formal governments were increasingly often complemented with flexible and temporary governance arrangements with a varying degree of formality.

In the field of political science, network governance has been characterized as governance through policy networks, which in turn have been defined as 'sets of formal and informal institutional linkages between governmental and other actors structured around shared interests in public policymaking and implementation' (Rhodes, 2007, p. 1244). As such, policy networks were not a new phenomenon. However, the novelty was that their existence was now seen predominately as a positive feature in decision-making. For many scholars, the increasingly complex, fragmented and multilayered society implied that 'efficient governance requires negotiated interaction between a plurality of organizations and groups from state, market and civil society' (Sørensen & Torfving, 2005, p. 196).

Horizontal governance networks were argued to have several advantages over traditional, hierarchical governments, including the ability to identify problems and outline promising solutions more proactively than traditional governments. Also, according to many scholars, governance networks provide an efficient means for gathering relevant information and for processes of consensus formation. Furthermore, in including stakeholders in consensus-oriented deliberation, they are also argued to increase the commitment of the stakeholders in the policies formulated, thus facilitating the implementation of policies (e.g., Healey, 1997, 1998; Sørensen & Torfving, 2005).

In the field of spatial planning, the discourse on governance networks has revolved around consensus-building, in particular. Following Habermas's theory of communicative action, planning theorists argue that stakeholders involved in governance networks do not necessarily have 'fixed interests', but their interests may evolve and converge as the stakeholders engage in deliberative processes (Healey, 1997, 1998). However, the theories of network governance and consensus-building soon diverged from the Habermasian theory, where the concept of consensus refers to an agreement based on reasons or arguments that all parties involved find convincing. Planning theorists promoted not only Habermasian consensus orientation but also consensus-building based on bargaining and compromises, where the reasons for the acceptance of the proposed solutions may vary between the parties (Mattila, 2020).

Network governance has been criticized for various reasons. Most importantly, it has been argued that consensus-building has not been inclusive in practice (e.g., Flyvbjerg, 1998; Hillier, 2003; Purcell, 2008). Governance networks and consensus-building have been associated with neoliberalization of planning, and they have been argued to affirm the power of influential economic actors and other elites in planning (Purcell, 2008, 2009). Governance networks and consensus-building have been claimed to become the modus operandi of planning in the 'post-political' world, where political parties no longer offer real alternatives, and people do not have ways to influence decision-making (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2012). In the field of spatial planning, neoliberalization has been associated with the political consensus over the pro-growth agenda and its implementation through the rolling back of the state and its welfarist spatial policies, the growing trust in market mechanism, and the intensified competition between localities (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). Even though neoliberal policies have been discussed especially in the US and UK contexts, it has been argued that also the Finnish welfarist and decentralizing spatial policies have increasingly been transformed to emphasize economic effectiveness, and consequently, to promote centralization – and that all major political parties have given their consent to this development (Moisio, 2008). This, in turn, is expected to lead to political tensions and polarization in the Finnish political climate in a longer range (Moisio, 2008), which would be a new phenomenon in Finland where the political climate has been traditionally consensus oriented and hostile to radical, centrifugal forces (Saukkonen, 2012, p. 34).

Along with the wave of criticism accusing consensus-oriented, networked governance of promoting neoliberalism and post-politicization, planning scholars have been increasingly interested

in agonistic theories of politics and planning, which aim at fighting neoliberalization through repoliticization of planning and governance. These theories question not only the practical results of networked governance and consensus-building but also the philosophical foundations of the concept of consensus. Unlike the consensus-oriented theories, agonistic theories prioritize conflicts and disagreements, directing attention, in particular, to such disputes that seem to go beyond rational resolution and evoke emotional and passionate responses. This being the case, agonistic theory resonates with the current political realities where populist, anti-establishment political movements tap into the antagonistic, anti-elite attitudes and feelings existing in the areas 'left behind' (cf. Dijkstra et al., 2019; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018).

In the field of planning theory, today the most used agonistic theory is Chantal Mouffe's 'agonistic pluralism', a theory partly developed in collaboration with Ernesto Laclau (e.g., Hillier, 2003; Pløger, 2004, 2018; Purcell, 2009). Mouffean agonist pluralism purports to provide a constructive alternative to right-wing populism, while drawing from the very same polarizations as do the populist movements in politics (Mouffe, 2018). Mouffe builds on the controversial legacy of the 'Crown Jurist of the Third Reich' Carl Schmitt (e.g., Minkkinen, 2019). From Schmitt (1976, pp. 26–27), Mouffe adopts the conviction that 'the political' is always about friend–enemy dichotomy. For populist movements, this dichotomy is focal, and it often takes the form of 'the people' versus the governing 'elites'. While condemning the agendas of right-wing populist movements, Mouffe (2018) argues that this 'friend–enemy' or 'us–them' identification should be recognized and mobilized in all political communication. As regards the nature of 'us' or 'the people', she does not identify the need to form collectives with shared identities. 'Us' is rather 'a discursive construction resulting from a "chain of equivalence" between heterogenous demands' (p. 80; see also Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Laclau, 2005).

Building on the 'friend–enemy' dichotomy, Mouffe argues that antagonisms are constitutive to 'the political' in society and cannot be erased by means of communication such as the consensus-oriented theories of deliberative democracy suggest. Where she departs the company of Schmitt, is in her accounts concerning the ways in which antagonisms should be handled (Roskamm, 2015). She contends that antagonisms should be recognized and tamed into agonistic pluralism, where enemies become adversaries (Mouffe, 2013, p. 7). Adversaries, then, can legitimately disagree, but their values and views are respected. This perspective makes Mouffe's theory useful for planners, who turn the taming or domesticating of antagonisms into a practical goal of planning (Hillier, 2003; Pløger, 2004; Purcell, 2009).

A debated question related to agonistic planning is whether the agonistically oriented theorists are able to provide any concrete examples that could guide planning practice (Bond, 2011), and if the agonistic theory of politics could even, in principle, be applied in the fields of governance and planning, fields not primarily concerned with politics but with administration. It can be asked whether the traditional task of administration to implement political decisions can go together with the goal of questioning consensus and celebrating the productive aspects of disagreement (Mattila, 2020). We argue that agonism should be regarded as relevant for planning and administration under the current conditions, where governance networks have challenged the traditional view that administrative officials are merely implementing political decisions, being themselves 'non-actors' in the realm of politics (Sørensen, 2002). In the case of spatial planning, it has been increasingly acknowledged that there is space for political manoeuvring for all involved actors, including administrative officials (Purkarthofer, 2018), even if efforts have been made to establish an image of spatial planning as a politically neutral, evidence-based endeavour (Luukkonen, 2011).

Even though the concept of taming of antagonisms makes Mouffe's theory relevant in the field of administration, a field that cannot dwell on disagreements but has to deliver solutions, the emphasis on such taming has been criticized for eradicating the radicalism agonistic theory

and turning it into just another theory that facilitates post-political planning (Roskamm, 2015). We will return to this criticism in the final section.

Another topical question regarding the agonistic theory of politics is the role of institutional arrangements in advancing agonistic politics. Agonistic theory has been criticized for focusing on the ethos of political actors while either failing to analyse institutional arrangements or being explicitly anti-institutionalist (Westphal, 2019, p. 190). It is clear that agonistic theory is more oriented to the questioning of existing institutional rules than the creation of new ones. Yet, it ought to be noted that Western democratic institutions have been designed to accommodate contestation and disagreement long before the invention of agonistic theory, starting from the division of legislative, executive and judiciary powers (Dean, 2018). We set out from the premise that all modern institutions of governance can be analysed from the agonistic point of view. This is the case especially with the relatively flexible institutions designed to support networked governance in the context of spatial planning, even if these structures are primarily meant to support consensus-building. Thus, in what follows, we look at the practices of individual spatial planners and also examine how these practices are influenced by their institutional settings.

ANTAGONISTIC AND AGONISTIC ATTITUDES SHAPING SPATIAL PLANNING IN LAPLAND AND KAINUU

This section discusses practices of spatial planning in peripheral regions as examples of antagonistic and agonistic action and how antagonisms characterize the context of planning in the regions of Lapland and Kainuu. While antagonisms undoubtedly exist in all regions, in the peripheral areas addressed in the article, antagonistic attitudes seem to be systematically targeted to 'centres' and 'governing elites' to which – allegedly – peripheries 'don't matter'. At issue are especially the ways in which spatial planners (i.e., professionals working at the intersections of regional land-use planning and regional development) handle the antagonisms when networking and negotiating with representatives of the central government, the EU and other stakeholders, as these activities form an integral part of the work of spatial planners (cf. Sotarauta, 2010). We thus investigate whether and how planners have been able to manage these antagonisms agonistically, turning them into constructive and productive forces.

The study builds on 10 semi-structured interviews with spatial planning professionals working in the regions of Kainuu (five interviews) and Lapland (five interviews). The interviewees are professionals holding leading positions in their organizations who have extensive experience of spatial planning in their regions, extending to the 1990s when the EU began to influence Finnish spatial planning, and whose tasks involve cooperating with actors representing organizations at various scales of governance.

The interviews were conducted and transcribed in Finnish and/or in English by the authors in 2017 and 2018. Key planning and policy documents, especially regional development strategies, regional development programmes and regional land-use plans, were used to contextualize the interviews. The interviews in Kainuu and Lapland are part of a broader project exploring the governance arrangements and practices related to European spatial planning in Finland (reported in Purkarthofer, 2018; Purkarthofer & Mattila, 2018). This enables us to understand the findings from Kainuu and Lapland also in comparison with less peripheral Finnish regions. Figure 1 shows the geographical locations of Kainuu and Lapland and the regional capitals and other municipalities with city status in the two regions. For context, it also shows a few major cities in the rest of Finland.

Lapland and Kainuu: spatial planning and governance context

Lapland is the northernmost and the most sparsely populated region in Finland as well as the EU, with a population of approximately 180,000 people in an area of 100,000 km^2. Kainuu,

Figure 1. Lapland and Kainuu, and the regional capitals and other municipalities with city status in the two regions, viewed in the context of major cities in Finland.

in turn, is located in the north-east of Finland with a population of approximately 75,000 inhabitants living in an area of 21,000 km^2, making Kainuu the second most sparsely populated region in Finland. Both regions have been losing population and jobs for many decades, and as a consequence, many of the local authorities are struggling to fulfil their legal responsibilities, especially in providing services for the remaining population. In both regions, politicians and administrative officials have been looking at the direction of integrative spatial planning practices to find innovative ways in which the EU and national regional policy could be implemented in a way that it would bring people and economic growth to the regions.

Although Kainuu and Lapland share many characteristics, their histories differ in many aspects, for instance, as regards the traditions of regional planning and regional development. As previously mentioned, Lapland caught the attention of the central state already in the 1950s due to its natural resources. Back then, regional development in Lapland was a top-down project led by the central state and aimed at putting the natural resources of Lapland into use for the whole country (Kinnunen, 2018; Mäntylä, 2016). Lapland was also among the first regions in Finland to practice regional planning. Regional planning not only facilitated industrialization but also contributed to improve the living conditions in Lapland, after devastation of infrastructure and buildings in the war (Kinnunen, 2018). While it could be argued that this integrated, forward-looking approach to regional development has benefited Lapland later, the hierarchical and state-led way of development has also been interpreted in terms of colonialism that was unsensitive to the demands and interests of the people living in the region (Kinnunen, 2018).

Similarly, Kainuu has benefitted from an abundance of natural resources and has been a notable site of production, especially the production of tar, for the emerging capitalist economy in northern Finland already in the latter half of the 19th century (Toivanen, 2018). The development of Kainuu has not attracted the attention of the central government in the 20th century in a manner similar to Lapland, though. However, in the early 2000s the Finnish government selected Kainuu as testing ground for a regional self-governance experiment conducted between 2005 and 2012. For the central government, the purpose of this experiment was to obtain knowledge about the implications of an intended reform of the Finnish regional governance system, a project that still remains to be completed (Humer & Granqvist, 2020). For Kainuu, the goals of the experiment were related especially to the enhanced possibilities of service provision, but it also provided an opportunity to create more innovative and integrated modes of spatial planning and development (Purkarthofer & Mattila, 2018). The experiment was also purported to test regional democracy in the Finnish context, resulting in the first regional elections in continental Finland in 2004. Moreover, during the experiment, Kainuu was granted increased autonomy in relation to national regional policy. In practice, the Kainuu region was able to autonomously decide on the use of development funds that were previously channelled through and coordinated by several different ministries.

During the experiment, the regional council shouldered some of the main duties of the municipalities – especially those related to organizing healthcare services and upper secondary education – but the municipalities still had their local autonomy and statutory responsibilities related, for instance, to local land-use planning and development of local livelihoods. Although some have argued that the experiment undermined local autonomy, others have pointed out that most of the municipalities in Kainuu were under such economic distress that they could have hardly avoided municipal mergers without the experiment (Jäntti, 2016, pp. 62–64). This was probably the main reason why the municipalities in Kainuu agreed to participate in the experiment, which was initiated in a top-down manner by the central government. The experiment ended in 2012, but it undoubtedly still affects spatial planning practices in Kainuu today, as our interviews indicate (see also Purkarthofer & Mattila, 2018).

Regional identities in Lapland and Kainuu

In both regions, the interviewees reported strong regional identities – conceived of as both the identification of people with their region and the recognition of the uniqueness of the region – to be a major asset for spatial planning, which both builds on the existing views of regional identities and moulds the conceptions people have of regional identities (Paasi, 2013). While some of the Finnish regions established in 1994 are more or less 'artificial' constructions, Kainuu and Lapland have long histories, a fact which clearly contributes positively to their identities. Adopting Paasi's (2002, p. 140) differentiation between 'ideal identities', which boil down to narratives based on historical fact or fiction, and 'factual identities', which are manifested in action, it can be argued that actors in Lapland wished to see a continuum between these two aspects of the identity of Lapland. Ideal identities are used for marketing purposes and place promotion, but the regional council also actively calls into question the accuracy of the traditional, ideal identities. Some interviewees noted that even though the systematic reflections on the regional identity of Lapland had started from external and sometimes superficial image-building for the purpose of tourism, they had soon deepened into internal identity-building. The image of Lapland, built for marketing purposes, is a positive, forward-looking one, crystallized in slogans such as 'Lapland – above ordinary' or '*Tehemä pois*' ('Let's just simply do it', in Lappish dialect). The interviewed actors in Lapland reported that this image resonates relatively well with the factual identity of Lapland.

In Kainuu, the most significant reason for the strong regional identity has been regarded to be the shared fear of decline rather than a common vision of the future of the region (MDI, 2014, p. 2), even though the planning and policy documents in all Finnish regions, Kainuu included, generally emphasize future-oriented themes such as learning and innovation (Paasi, 2013). According to our interviews, the prevailing identity in Kainuu seems to be the backward-looking ideal identity based on the narrative of 'Hunger Land', which is, for instance, the theme of the regional anthem of Kainuu (Kainuun liitto, 2020). This narrative makes a reference to the squalor brought about by the challenging conditions of agriculture in the region. The narrative culminates in the 'Great Hunger Years' of 1866–68, when only the income based on tar burning could slightly alleviate the misery in Kainuu. Even though the interviewees did not mention any measures to reflect on the accuracy of this ideal identity from the contemporary perspective, many actors in the region are known for their ironic reflections on the identity based on squalor and poverty. For instance, the municipality of Puolanka in Kainuu is famous for hosting the 'Pessimism Festival', a happening that aims to turn the image of Puolanka as a 'place that doesn't matter' into a brand.

Even though all interviewees considered regional identities to be strong in Kainuu and Lapland, when asked about the identity of the people in the region, especially interviewees in Lapland pointed out that the population of Lapland is quite heterogeneous. Indigenous Sámi people were typically mentioned as an example of the diversity of people in Lapland, though this was not the only example. Despite the heterogeneity, there seemed to be an 'us' in Lapland. This 'us' was often described in comparison with 'them', which was most often used to refer to people in 'the south' or in the capital city Helsinki. This logic corresponds to agonistic theory of political identification within which identities are not shared, but a conception of an 'other' or 'them' from which the 'us' differs is shared (Mouffe, 2018, p. 80). The same logic was visible in the descriptions of the identity of people in Kainuu by the interviewees. The main driver in the formation of 'us' in Kainuu seemed to be a shared fear of 'losing everything'. The 'them' was the central state, which was accused of causing the losses experienced in Kainuu (cf. MDI, 2014, p. 3).

Subregional and regional cooperation in Lapland

The interviewees in Lapland indicated that the Regional Council of Lapland has a long tradition of dealing with differences, which suggests that their planning practices might resonate with agonistic planning. Especially the actors who had worked with the representatives of Sámi people noted that communication and consensus-building can be challenging when there are

fundamental differences in the cultural backgrounds of the stakeholders. Reindeer herding, the traditional source of livelihood for the Sámi people, was mentioned as a challenge for land-use planning since it is not easily compatible with other land uses. Nonetheless, it was noted that other types of land uses, related for example to tourism, are also difficult to combine with economically vital activities such as mining or forestry. Lapland has adopted a model of 'rolling' land-use plans (Mäntysalo et al., 2019), which are updated regularly to facilitate decision-making under such conditions where there is no consensus over the priorities given to different land uses. 'Rolling plans' allow opposing voices to be heard even after the ratification of plans, as the plan is not considered 'final' but continuously updated and improved in an iterative manner. In leaving room for disagreements and contestation, such 'rolling plans' could be seen as instruments for agonistic planning.

The relations between the spatial planners working for the regional council and the representatives of Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment were viewed mainly (though not only) in positive terms in the interviews conducted in Lapland. Especially in the field of land-use planning, interviewees claimed that the small number of actors in the region makes relationships interpersonal rather than interinstitutional. While the regional council actors claimed not always to show a high level of trust in the state and its institutions, they typically trusted the people working for state organizations in their own region.

Furthermore, cooperation between the regional council and the municipalities and between the municipalities themselves was described in positive terms by all interviewees in Lapland. Even though it was noted that the city-regions of Kemi-Tornio and Rovaniemi are competing in some issues, the impression of the interviewees was that municipalities stand relatively united behind regional interests. Spatial planners in Lapland explained this by referring to the goals related to balanced development throughout Lapland and its polycentric structure, as well as to the fact that cooperation is easy when the region is small in population and there are not too many actors:

> when I think about the driving force there, it is the commitment to the even development of Lapland as a whole. But then we also rely on the policy of centers-driven development, and the centers are Rovaniemi and Kemi-Tornio – and, in addition, the centers of tourism. … And I would emphasize the fact that we cooperate a lot. It is easy here, because we are a compact region. Even though the distances are long, population-wise we are compact.

Supra-regional cooperation in Lapland

Supra-regional cooperation in Lapland was described as being less harmonious than subregional cooperation. There were major tensions in the relation between the spatial planners in Lapland and the central government, especially the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment.

> I would say that we have had a very difficult period with the Central Government or state-level administrative organs. It is probably because we are so far away from Helsinki.

> People representing the Central Government tend to forget all about us. When they visit here, they understand [our reality here], but they forget everything the minute they go back.

The work of the central government – or more precisely of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment – in the preparation of EU programmes was heavily criticized for the lack of trust in the regional actors. The following statement highlights that the relation between actors from the ministry and the regional council was antagonistic rather than agonistic, given that the aspect of mutual respect seemed to be missing:

> The steering coming from the Ministry – I think it was just awful. I felt that they don't appreciate our expertise at all. When the programme was under preparation, I had all the time a feeling that they

> were accusing me of something. … I was constantly interrogated and asked to give reasons and justifications for all our measures here. It was really hard.

In criticizing the ministry for disrespecting the views of the regions, the actors in Lapland are not alone. The central government has also been criticized in the research literature for adopting a role of a 'gatekeeper' that uses power over the regions in the implementation of the EU Cohesion Policy (Purkarthofer, 2018) and for suppressing the goals of the regions while withdrawing from responsibility (Eskelinen, 2001).

However, the EU's ideal of multilevel governance does not promote a hierarchical model where the nation-states would need to mediate between the regions and the EU, but it rather supports the direct involvement of regions in the EU level decision-making (Stephenson, 2013). In practice, the involvement of regions takes place through various channels, including regional representation offices in Brussels (Tatham, 2008, 2017). Interviewees in Lapland viewed the presence of the region in Brussels as a significant opportunity.

Furthermore, it was mentioned in the interviews that whenever the regional actors wish to make a concern heard by the Finnish government, it is easier for them to first convince EU representatives. It was also noted that due to the EU's multilevel governance approach, EU policy-making has become more transparent and accessible for regional actors:

> Today, the central government cannot play the EU card anymore. In the past, they always said that it is the EU that requires this and that.

The EU was generally described in very positive terms in the interviews. This is undoubtedly related to the fact that EU Cohesion Policy is a major source of funding for regional development in Lapland. However, the actors also identified with the EU in a deeper sense, and thought that this identification is mutual, with the EU showing respect for regional diversity and providing a channel for the expression of the suppressed demands of the peripheral regions across Europe:

> I think that ever since we joined the EU, we in Lapland have strongly felt that we are part of the EU.

> They listen to us there [in the EU], and they have taken into account our views, once we have made our way there and opened the doors there. … I feel that the EU is more interested in Lapland than is the central government.

Subregional and regional cooperation in Kainuu

As already discussed, spatial planning practices in Kainuu are not directly comparable with those in Lapland, given the background of the recent regional self-governance experiment. As regards intermunicipal cooperation in Kainuu, the expectation was that the experiment would help the municipalities to find mutual interests and coordinate their measures to improve economic development in the region. Perhaps paradoxically, the result was that the relations between the municipalities became increasingly tense. These tensions were still recognizable in the interviews conducted five years after the end of the experiment. Interviewees reported the main focus of development measures on the regional capital Kajaani, and sometimes also on the sports and tourism resort Sotkamo, as the main reason behind the tensions. The fact that the regional council with its increased powers during the experiment was located in Kajaani turned Kajaani into a territory of governing elites in the eyes of actors representing other municipalities. Kajaani was perceived in a similar way to Helsinki earlier:

> we started this experiment because we wanted to bring the decision-making powers from Helsinki to Kainuu, but then in the end, the municipalities felt – in a smaller scale – that the decision-making powers were now in Kajaani, and that the central administration in Kajaani makes the decisions and they cannot influence the decisions.

In Kainuu, the actors seemed to be sensitized to identify antagonisms, as well as 'elites' who were allegedly suppressing the interests and identities of the peripheral region. The observed antagonisms did not disappear but only changed their scale during the experiment. The experiment thus did not enable actors in Kainuu to find new ways of addressing the challenges in their region but instead the debate continued to be dominated by conflicts.

The tensions between the municipalities led to the end of the experiment in 2012, even though the central government was eager for its continuation (Finnish Ministry of Finances, 2013). As the experiment followed the consensus principle among municipalities in the region, the vote against the continuation of the experiment from only one municipality ultimately put an end to the arrangement. Yet, the interviewees claimed that the antagonistic attitudes towards the regional capital city and the regional council voiced by this municipality existed tacitly also in other municipalities, rendering the whole atmosphere of discussion and decision-making antagonistic. According to the interviewees, the conflicts and underlying antagonisms between different actors were so firmly established that no arguments could persuade actors to change their positions during the experiment. The interviewees stated that 'reasons were of no help anymore' and 'nothing made sense to them [the representatives of the municipalities] anymore'. Communication between the actors in the region was characterized by passionate responses, which are celebrated by the theorists of agonistic planning, but which are not helpful for regional governance if the antagonisms behind the responses cannot be tamed and respect between the actors is missing.

In the interviews conducted in Kainuu, there was no indication of attempts towards constructive transformation of antagonisms in a manner that agonistic planning theory describes the taming of antagonistic relations between actors. However, some of the interviews suggested that the conflicts between the central city Kajaani and the peripheral municipalities have been slightly alleviated after the experiment, and that the actors have realized that the decline of the region cannot be stopped without cooperation (see also MDI, 2014, p. 2). It seems that traditional consensus-building through knowledge and rational arguments, rather than agonistic recognition of antagonisms, has been helpful in finding a shared regional interest recently. Especially influential has been the new knowledge concerning the significant increase in the quality of health and social services during the experiment, while the rise of service-related costs could be restrained (Jäntti, 2016).

The relationship with the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, representing the central state, was not reported to be as tense as the relationships between the municipalities and the regional council, or between the central city and other municipalities, although some tensions existed. The evaluation report of the self-governance experiment notes that one of the flaws of the experiment was that the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment retained some powers that were supposed to be shifted to the regional council when the experiment started (Jäntti et al., 2010, p. 206). This somewhat undermined the sincerity of the experiment and the autonomy of the region.

Supra-regional cooperation in Kainuu

Like in Lapland, the actors in Kainuu felt that the central government stopped paying attention to the region after Finland joined the EU in 1995:

> The government decisions are the main problem. They always forget that these areas exist. I suppose they remember Lapland, but this Northeastern part of Finland often just goes unnoticed.

> The political leadership in Finland is a general problem for us in Kainuu. It doesn't give attention to rural areas, even with the Centre Party in the government and Sipilä as prime minister.

The interviewees thus seemed to point to the existence of 'post-political condition', where none of the traditionally powerful parties – not even the agrarian Centre Party – recognized the demands coming from the periphery. Actors in Kainuu also showed more positive attitudes towards the EU:

> The EU has been very useful, especially with a view to these tensions with the state level. … the EU support is crucial for us. If the EU support were lost, the Finnish state wouldn't support the region.

According to the interviewees in Kainuu, the EU seemed to provide a channel for the chain of suppressed demands coming from different peripheries in Europe, even though identities between these peripheries vary greatly, as they do also between Lapland and Kainuu.

Nonetheless, in practical terms, the EU was less relevant for the actors in Kainuu compared with Lapland. The interviewees in Kainuu reported that they have severe difficulties in applying for funding from the EU. They identified the lack of a university and the associated know-how and expertise in the region as one main reason for these difficulties. In the past, Kajaani hosted some units of other Finnish universities, which have now withdrawn from Kainuu. Today, the regional council seeks to work with universities in adjacent regions, such as the University of Oulu and University of Lapland, to find academic partners for research and development projects. The lack of higher education facilities and resulting brain drain was also identified as diminishing the number of professionals with expertise in designing and managing development projects that could integrate policy sectors and have positive impacts on regional development.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has discussed the practices of spatial planners in two peripheral regions in northern Finland: Lapland and Kainuu. First, we argued that the recent discourse on antagonistic attitudes in declining 'places that don't matter' is relevant not only for democratic politics and voting behaviour but also for administrative practices, especially practices of spatial planning which move in the interface of administration and politics. Second, we have shown that the agonistic theories of politics and planning can shed a new light on the ways in which administrative officials can or could transform antagonistic and potentially revengeful attitudes into constructive forces. These findings exemplify how agonistic planning might work in practice, thus responding to the criticisms according to which agonistic theory is unable to provide instruments and tools for planning practice.

According to the interviews conducted, antagonisms existed mainly between peripheries and the central government. The antagonistic attitudes in peripheries such as Lapland and Kainuu reflect the identity of the peripheral regions building on the juxtaposition between the 'us' and 'them' – people in peripheries versus the governing elites in Helsinki. While actors working with spatial planning in Lapland and Kainuu feel that their regions have become 'places that don't matter' to the Finnish state, the EU seems to provide a channel for the voices of peripheral and declining regions. Through the channels provided by the EU, the actors of different peripheries in Europe seem to manage to form a coalition around their shared interests by differentiation from a shared 'other' without having to share an identity. In terms of agonistic theory, this represents a 'chain of equivalence' in political identification.

Despite the similarities in identification mechanisms and attitudes in Lapland and Kainuu, we observed fundamentally different behaviours and actions in the face of antagonisms and 'us and them' divisions in these regions. In Lapland, the antagonisms were often successfully

tamed by first mobilizing a regional 'us', which was not characterized by a unified identity but rather defined as opposed to the people in southern Finland. Second, the antagonisms were domesticated by turning to the EU level of governance. When the regional actors received recognition and support from the EU level, the actors representing the central government began to devote attention to the particular concerns of Lapland, and consequently the communication between the region and the state-level actors became more respectful and solution oriented.

The process of taming of antagonisms was facilitated by the multilevel governance promoted by the EU. The interviewees stated that the relatively non-hierarchical institutional arrangements associated with EU regional development programmes and projects provided a channel for the demands coming from peripheries, which often remained unrecognized in the hierarchical decision-making at nation-state level. Thus, it is not only the attitudes, ethos and practices of individual actors that matter in the realization of agonistic planning, but also the institutional arrangements. While multilevel and networked governance arrangements create institutional ambiguity and may thus be criticized for making governance non-transparent, they also seem to leave room for contestation and to open doors for alternative views.

Though the interviewees in Kainuu also thought that the EU provides a channel for the alternative voices coming from the peripheries, they stated that the practical requirements concerning regional development projects do not favour declining peripheries. In Kainuu, the obstacle for the full utilization of EU funds was the lack of cultural and educational resources needed for designing regional development projects.

Antagonisms and juxtapositions between centre and peripheries within Finland were observed in both Kainuu and Lapland. The Kainuu case shows, however, that even though the focus was put on antagonisms, just as the agonistic theories of planning and governance suggest, the antagonisms could not be transformed into productive dialogue and actions. Rather, the fact that the actors were sensitized to antagonisms seemed to produce even more antagonisms and 'us–them' divisions. In the Kainuu self-governance experiment, the antagonistic attitudes towards the governing elites in Helsinki were rescaled, and the central city Kajaani – and the regional council located in Kajaani – became the new targets of antagonism. Agonistic theories can thus be criticized as normative theories, given that it cannot be universally assumed that the identification of antagonisms leads to the taming of antagonisms. Thus, the celebration of disagreements and division lines might turn against the general goals of agonistic planning by enforcing polarizations and antagonisms.

The question of scale seems to be a general concern in balancing growth-oriented policy goals and equity aspects in the implementation of EU policy at the regional level. Whereas the actors in Lapland stated that they have managed to combine these goals relatively successfully, in Kainuu the regional-level actors were heavily criticized for supporting potential centres of growth at the expense of peripheries. This reflects a more general problem related to the concept of cohesion: what brings about cohesion in one scale might reduce it in some other scale (Vanolo, 2010, p. 1307). The policy concept of cohesion thus leaves space for antagonistic confrontations, which can potentially be domesticated into productive forces, but this is not always the case.

Nonetheless, it remains an open question whether agonistic ways of practicing planning – defined in the Mouffean terms as taming of antagonisms and concretized in our examples as the transformation of the centre–periphery antagonisms into productive dialogue between these two poles – is a mode of planning that can give a voice to radical alternatives that are not compatible with the neoliberal language of growth promotion (cf. Mouffe, 2013, 2018). The question is whether 'taming' is an appropriate or sufficient means for making room for instance, the indigenous Sámi people's possibilities to voice the values of their culture and way of life in Lapland. Nonetheless, from the point of view of planning, taming or domesticating of antagonisms can be expected to provide an appealing alternative to the explosive forces of antagonism, forces that might otherwise lead to a 'revenge of places that don't matter'. For

planners in peripheries, taming of antagonisms can provide a way to move beyond the dilemma of respecting the attitudes of 'the people' or working constructively with 'the elites' in government and the private sector.

To return to the economic–geographical and politico-geographical discourse on 'places that don't matter', in the case of the Finnish peripheries, there have so far been no signs of a 'revenge of places that don't matter' in the form of anti-EU voting behaviour (Dijkstra et al., 2019). Nonetheless, national governments have received criticism through ballot boxes recently. Especially the Centre Party lost a significant share of votes to Finland's anti-establishment party, the 'Finns party', in Lapland and Kainuu in the parliamentary elections in 2019 (Keskusta, 2019). The Finns party, however, did not even try to raise anti-EU attitudes in their latest campaign, perhaps recognizing that this would not resonate with existing attitudes even in the peripheries of Finland, where, however, the discontent with the central government, and more generally with all traditionally powerful parties that have been claimed to have consensually worked for pro-growth and pro-centralization was palpable (cf. Moisio, 2008).

When the regional-level actors in the peripheries implement regional policies from the EU and national level, they both build on and influence the general political attitudes existing in the regions. The ways in which they try to make their regions 'matter' again through spatial planning, including the ways in which they manage the antagonisms, deserves attention in planning studies, given that the successes and failures at administrative level can be expected to have an effect on the attitudes people have towards the EU or the central government, and on the ways in which they express their level of satisfaction in these institutions in elections.

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