Making news: newspapers and the institutionalisation of new regions

TESG, Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie,
DOI:10.1111/tesg.12209 (2016)

Bouke van Gorp & Kees Terlouw

Regions have gained importance over the last decades. Old regions have picked up momentum while novel forms of municipal co-operation and multi-level governance have generated new regions. This paper examines the extent to which some new regions in the Netherlands have become familiar to the population, based on evidence from an analysis of newspaper articles. The study focused on the reports about several old and new regions within the borders of the traditional region of Noord-Brabant, a Dutch province with a well-established identity. In the dynamic constellation of Noord-Brabant, news reports hinted at the institutionalisation of some of the new regions that have become meaningful places outside the administrative context in which they were originally created. The institutionalisation of some new regions did not result in a de-institutionalisation of older regions in the same area but in a more complex layering of the identities of these regions with respect to each other.

Key words: regional identity, new regions, institutionalisation, content analysis, newspapers, Netherlands, Noord-Brabant

Introduction
A region is a social construct that takes shape through processes of institutionalisation. News media and journalists are part of the discursive practises involved in this process (Paasi 2010 & 2013; MacLeod 1998). They play an important role in the “process through which regions become significant to both their inhabitants and to those living outside them” (Zimmerbauer 2011, 246). Their news reports about the region, their use of the name of the region and their ‘placing’ of events in the region help anchor these regions in local consciousness.

Anssi Paasi (1986?, 2012, 1991, 2002) uses four distinct but interrelated aspects or ‘shapes’ to analyse the institutionalisation of regions; the territorial, the symbolic, the institutional and the functional. The territorial shape is the most tangible aspect. It includes territorial borders and the political struggles through which these were constructed over time. Physical characteristics, such as landscape, patterns of land use, infrastructure, settlement patterns and heritage sites, are also part of this shape. The symbolic shape is constituted by stereotypes based on for instance the territorial form or the characteristics of the population living within these boundaries. The region’s name is an important part of the symbolic shape. The selection and promotion of aspects of this shape to construct spatial identity discourses is not fixed, but linked to the development of the other shapes. The institutional shape enshrines forms of spatial identity over generations especially through the educational system and the mass media. This is linked to political organisation and administration which organises and regulates the territory. Finally, the functional shape refers to the established
role in larger spatial systems. This refers not only the position of a space in the hierarchical territorial organisation of for instance the nation-state or international relations, but also to other types of relations with other areas, based on for instance migration or trade. Regions differ in the form and degree to which they institutionalise over time (Zimmerbauer & Paasi 2013).

This article focusses on the role of news reports in the institutionalisation of regions. Our aim in this article is to show what important clues news reports can provide us regarding the ongoing processes of institutionalisation. News reports on regions are not only part of the media representations that are an important part of the institutional shape of regions. News reports on regions also show whether journalists and editors think the region is meaningful and well-known for their readers. Close reading of news reports tells us how news media shape and reflect knowledge and attitudes about the region; they reflect the institutionalisation of regions in the public consciousness.

Other studies of media representations of regions tend to focus on spatial biases in news reporting (Walmsley 1980, 1982), or single regions, like Northern Sweden (Eriksson 2008), the Norwegian mountain region (Frisvoll & Rye 2009) or the Ruhr area (Joly 2003). Few have compared regions (Simon 2004; Simon et al 2010). The current processes of rescaling have however led to complex and dynamic situations that need to be taken in account when researching the institutionalisation of a region. Recently created regions might partly overlap with vibrant existing regions, deinstitutionalising regions or regions that hardly developed any symbolic or institutional shape. For those stakeholders involved, this complex layered system offers both opportunities and challenges when they try to create and represent an identity for this new region. Focussing the research on one of such dynamic layered constellations of old and new regions within one Dutch province will shed light on how newspapers support (or complicate) the institutionalisation of regions. By selecting five regions within the same province comparison between these regions is possible as these regions find themselves in the same political administrative context.

This article starts with the rise of new regions and its consequences for regional identities. Then it focuses on the role journalists and editors of newspapers play in these processes of institutionalisation and layering of regions. This is followed by details of our case study area: the Dutch province Noord-Brabant and the methodology.

The multiplication of new regions and regional identity
Following an era in which regions seemed to be discarded both politically and academically, the region as a concept has witnessed a revival in the last decades. Many relate the revival of regions to processes of globalisation which in turn lead to administrative rescaling. The increasing exposure to (global) competition and the changing role of the nation-state pose challenges to local administrations who try to cope with these challenges by cooperation in new regions (Brenner 1999, 200, 2003; 2004; Keating, 2008; Syssner 2009; Cowell 2010; Hooghe & Marks, 2003; Rodriguez-Pose & Sandall 2008; Jessop 2000). As a result, some old regions have gained new importance, where simultaneously a wide array of new regions emerged out of new forms of municipal cooperation and multi-level governance. This is frequently characterized as new regionalism (Keating 1997, Kitson et al. 2004, Paasi 2013). Jones and MacLeod (2004) characterize these former traditional regions as spaces of regionalism, and the latter new regions as regional spaces. Thus not only the role of well-established and institutionalized historical regions like Bayern, Catalonia and Flanders increased, but also new regions were created based on cooperation between local administrations to better cope with the pressures and possibilities of increased global competition.

In England, Regional Development Agencies, the much smaller city-regions, and the many bottom-up regional economic development partnerships created a patchwork of overlapping new regions (Deas & Giordano 2003). According to De Peuter et al (2011) there are over 150 new regions in Flanders. In Germany “a growing number of ‘alternative’ policy specific ‘regions of convenience’, together with their ‘new’, issue specific regional stakeholders, have emerged outside the formal straightjacket.” (Herrschell 2005, 62). A complicated layering of hundredths of disjointed new regions
has emerged in the Netherlands over the last two decades (De Vries & Evers, 2008; Teisman, 2007). These new regions might be based on the amalgamation of adjacent territories, but are just as often networks, linking sometimes non-contiguous local administrations across different scales with non-administrative partners, such as business (organisations) and other organisations of stakeholders. In the case study we will focus on one illustrative example of the new, layered situation in the Netherlands where within the established province of Noord-Brabant several partly overlapping new regions have emerged over the last years.

Today’s new regions are often short-lived, they partially overlap in space with other regions, and lack clear spatial borders. Despite that, developing some sort of regional identity is considered crucial for the legitimation of the policy choices of such new regions and the mobilisation of support for these policies (Bell & York 2010; Cox, 1999; Paasi 2012; Harrison, 2010). Such new regions do not develop the thick identities often found in traditional regions - identities based on a shared culture and heritage of a regional community, which were established during a long process of regional institutionalisation (Terlouw & Van Gorp 2014). The identities of new regions are often much ‘thinner’ and forward-looking than the ‘thick’ backward-looking identities of traditional regions. These ‘thin regional identities’ revolve around one specific issue or project in the region and are “more network based, fluid and future oriented” (Terlouw 2009, 462). However, in the process of creating identities for new regions, stakeholders will often link up with identity discourses of the more established regions to which they are spatially linked (Terlouw & Van Gorp 2014).

Newspapers and regional identity
Communication is essential for regions and regional identities (Simon 2004:30). As Paasi (2013: 1208) puts it: “Rather than as an empirical entity defined in terms of its inherent qualities or as the product of the identification of its inhabitants, regional identity is understood [...] as a social construct that is produced and reproduced in discourse.” Journalists and editors of newspapers are important agents in the institutionalisation of regions through their selective reproduction and creation of narratives on old and new regions (Frisvoll & Rye 2009).

Mass media shape popular perception of spaces and places – at least to some extent (Devereux 2014, Croteau & Hoynes 2014; Walmsley 1980, 1982). “The news media encompasses a discursive practice that contributes to what we see in the world and how we see it” (Eriksson 2008; 370). This is as much the case for faraway places as for newly created regions – not necessarily distant in space but unfamiliar to the inhabitants as they were constructed by ‘distant’ bureaucracies. Although local inhabitants do not passively take in all the news media content, media representations are important and “have real material consequences” (Eriksson 2008; 369) as they will affect perception and behaviour. Perceptions of places are based on direct, personal experiences with them or on indirect, second hand experiences, the so-called “mediated experience; experience through science, education, media and other reality-validating domains” (Van Ginneken, 1998; 200, Adams 2009). Newspapers select what they think is news- or noteworthy for their readers (Van Ginneken 1998). When they publish articles about events or plans relating to a new region, it implies that journalists regard this region as something that matters to their readers. Journalists also need to take into account the existing knowledge and opinions of their audience. If they feel that the region is well known and meaningful, they will simply use its name (Frisvoll & Rye 2009). However, if journalists feel that their readers are not familiar with the region, they are more likely to explain its location or meaning in their news reports. If and how newspaper articles mention the name of a region thus reflects the ongoing institutionalisation of this region.

Case study: Layered regions in the province of Noord-Brabant
We analyse the news reports about five regions within the well-established Dutch province of Noord-Brabant – which is commonly referred to as just ‘Brabant’. The identity and identification with Brabant is strong among administrators, inhabitants and the Dutch population in general (Bijsterveld
The rural, catholic and anti-modern representations of Brabant, resonating with feelings of otherness from Holland, are part of a collective memory or popular image of the province, even though the meaning of this identity evolved over time. Any new or old region within this province will have to position itself to this existing traditional Brabant identity.

The selected five regions, of different age and origin, overlap in the centre of Noord-Brabant (see figure 1). BrabantStad was established in 2001 by the province and the five biggest cities Breda, Tilburg, Eindhoven, Helmond and Den Bosch. It is a cooperation whose aims echo prevailing discourses about regions: united as BrabantStad these cities would stand strong against other regions, would attract foreign investment and refrain from internal competition (BrabantStad 2010). BrabantStad is the most prominent region on the website of the province. A second aim of this cooperation is coloured by national politics: together these cities and the province team up in the battle for national funds from the Dutch central government and the European Union. BrabantStad thus boasts that its actions resulted in 1 billion Euro of extra public investments in its urban infrastructure in 2013 (BrabantStad 2014). BrabantStad also prepared a bid for the European Capital of Culture as part of its strategy to strengthen the bonds between these cities and their surroundings and to present a common identity to its inhabitants and the outside world (2018 Brabant 2010).

To allow for some comparison of the ongoing processes of institutionalisation we included two other urban regions: Brabantse Stedenrij and Waalboss (figure 1). Brabantse Stedenrij is a planning concept preceding BrabantStad which includes all the major urban nodes in Brabant lined up in a row from west to east. Although originating in the late twentieth century and succeeded by the much more substantial BrabantStad the Brabantse Stedenrij is still used, perhaps because of its strong spatial imagery. The third region we selected is Waalboss, which started as a planning concept also inspired by discourses of the competiveness of urban networks and of the importance of transportation corridors. The region consists of the municipalities of Waalwijk, Den Bosch and Oss, hence the name Waalboss, located along the A59 highway. The region was first mentioned in the 2002 in a spatial planning document of the province Noord-Brabant.

BrabantStad’s rural counterpart is Het Groene Woud, an area roughly between the cities of Tilburg, Eindhoven and Den Bosch and demarcated by their connecting highways. BrabantStad increasingly regards Het Groene Woud as its recreational ‘green heart’. Het Groene Woud was appointed National Landscape in the national planning document Nota Ruimte (2004). National landscapes were designated to maintain and possibly strengthen the basic qualities of their distinct landscape, although no strict protective policies were implemented. Het Groene Woud is rooted in older policies and local efforts to restructure the intensive farming in this area (Janssen et al 2007; Renes 2011). Het Groene Woud therefore aims to strengthen the local rural economy and simultaneously keep the area open, green and thus attractive for recreation. This new region Het Groene Woud partially coincides with De Meierij, a traditional rural region in Brabant which no longer has an official administrative function but does serve as a concept for local cooperation. The Meierij is moreover important in the traditional representations of Brabant based on peasant farming on sandy soils, rural society and Roman Catholic life (Van Oudheusden 1996a, b, Janssen 2005). We selected De Meierij as well to see how newer and older regions co-exist in news reports.

Our case study thus consists of five spatially overlapping regions: one traditional rural region and one recent rural region, both of which are in line with the traditional Brabant identity, and three urban regions, networks of cities of which one is spatially continuous (Waalboss). These urban regions have to find ways to position themselves in respect to the traditional, non-urban, anti-modern Brabant identity. The recent regions were created at various government levels in different spatial planning documents.

include figure 1 map of Brabant about here
Methodology

This paper is based on an analysis of newspaper articles about the case study regions BrabantStad, Brabantse Stedenrij, Waalboss, Het Groene Woud, and De Meierij, which were published between 2003 and 2012 in Dutch national and Brabant’s regional newspapers. As institutionalisation is a dynamic process - regions might come and go-, we analysed news reports published over a longer period of time. Assuming that regional identities are constructed in ways similar to how national identities are constructed, the existence of regional newspapers might be important in the construction and reproduction of regions (Keating 1997). National newspapers are incorporated in the analysis to see whether the newly established regions are communicated outside their immediate surroundings and gain national importance.

We analysed the news reports of three large national newspapers: De Telegraaf, De Volkskrant and NRC. The Telegraaf is the largest (paid) newspaper of the Netherlands with a circulation of 600,000. The newspaper can be classified as a populist newspaper within the Dutch market. Both the Volkskrant and the NRC are generally seen as quality newspapers, with a much smaller circulation (260,000 and 210,000). The editorial offices of these three national newspapers are located in the Randstad – and thus outside Brabant. Three regional newspapers in Brabant were also analysed. BN/De Stem focuses on the western part of the province (circulation approximately 115,000), Brabants Dagblad targets the central and north-eastern part of the province (circulation about 130,000) and Eindhovens Dagblad is read in the area surrounding Eindhoven (circulation approximately 110,000). These three newspapers are part of the same media concern, de Wegener Nieuwsmedia Group, and as a result might share news articles.

We used the Lexis Nexis digital archives1 to search and access the newspaper articles. Due to the fragmentary presence of regional newspaper articles in Lexis Nexis before 2003, we analysed the period 2003-2012. This decade covers the period just after or during which three of our case study regions were created: BrabantStad in 2001, Waalboss in 2002 and Het Groene Woud in 2004. The news reports were analysed in several ways (see table 1). In her research on the production and reproduction of regional identities in the Netherlands, Simon (2004; see also Simon et al 2010) showed the relevance of analysing the use of the name of regions when studying the changing importance of regions. The more often a region is mentioned, the more manifest the region will be in society (Simon 2004). We thus started with a quantitative content analysis counting the articles that mention the name of the region. We did so by using the name of the region as the query in the Lexis Nexis digital archives. As we analyse news reports from 2003-2012 any trends in the frequency with which names are used can be detected.

To move beyond a mere measurement of the popularity of a region, we continued with a qualitative content analysis on a selection of the over 7,000 articles using one of our five regions names. We took six half year samples, resulting in little over 2,000 articles (see table 1). By sampling half year periods we eliminated a possibly strong influence of short span issue-attention cycles, whereas recurring themes and trends over the years would reveal themselves.

The first step of the qualitative analysis of the newspaper reports focused on who used the name of the region in the article. Mostly elites such as policy makers, planners or chambers of commerce are, as Frisvoll and Rye (2009, 179) state “more active than most people in the production of new regions and their identity narratives”. Checking who uses the name of the region indicates whether the region is an elitist concept or whether it used by the wider public.

Secondly, we analysed whether journalists explained the character and location of the region in the article, assuming that the more familiar the region is as a spatial entity for the readers the less explanation is asked for.

As a third step in our qualitative analysis we examined how journalists framed the selected regions: as places, as localities where things occur, as organisations that do things, or as projects? Frisvoll and Rye (2009) found in their analysis that journalists increasingly located events in the newly established Mountain region instead of using the local (place) names, which indicated a greater consciousness of the region amongst both journalists and the readers. In our analysis we make a distinction between the region as a space and the region as a place.
The fourth element of the qualitative analysis is the topic of the newspaper article. To what extent did reported topics or events indicate the specific character or identity of the region? Finally, any additional clues in the articles about the institutionalisation of the region, such as the reports of the creation of a Groene Woud walking network, were recorded as well. This paper is thus based on an extensive content analysis of newspapers. Determining to what degree newspapers will be able to influence how people think or feel about a particular region and thus identify with it, is not in the scope for this study.

Results
The quantitative analysis showed that the national newspapers did not often refer to the five regions in Brabant. BrabantStad and Het Groene Woud did receive some attention (less than 50 articles in 10 years time), while Waalboss was never mentioned. In the half year sample this resulted in only a handful of articles. We therefore excluded the national newspapers from further qualitative analysis. Whatever meaning the five regions have to the editors or readership of regional newspapers, they seem have little consequence for the readers of the national newspaper. There is hardly any awareness of these regions outside Brabant.

Urban Brabant: Brabantse Stedenrij, BrabantStad and Waalboss
Regional newspapers (BN/De Stem, Brabants Dagblad and Eindhovens Dagblad) contribute to familiarising their readers in Brabant with the three urban regions as they publish news reports about them. The number of news reports however differs (see figure 2). BrabantStad is mentioned most often of the three regions (see figure 2c). Eindhoven’s Dagblad seems less ‘involved’ in BrabantStad than BN/De Stem and Brabants Dagblad. As figure 2b demonstrates, Waalboss had a peak in its popularity in 2005, and has a more localised awareness: all articles in the sample but one appeared in Brabants Dagblad. Of the three new urban regions Brabantse Stedenrij has the lowest popularity, only some articles in 10 years (see figure 2a). The name is usually followed by some explanation which is not surprising considering the infrequent use of the name.

Waalboss seems to exemplify a weak and very thin regional identity: news reports focused on one issue: the development of a business park (see table 2). News reports used the name Waalboss mostly to refer to a specific location which is under development, and that development is contested. The plans for the business park were an integral part of the planning document that introduced the Waalboss regions. Since 2004 the newspapers have reported about local resistance to this new business park and from 2009 onwards this debate dominates the new reports. In the news reports the name of the region has come to equal the much smaller business park which has triggered a lot of critique by local politicians and other stakeholders such as Milieudefensie (environmental NGO). Because of the focus on these local debates over the development of a business park, readers might become aware of the region mostly as a troublesome area or a problem ridden cooperation between local administrations.

BrabantStad also seems to develop a thin but more developed and complicated regional identity. The newspapers mainly reported about ongoing projects and issues. In contrast to Waalboss, news reports about BrabantStad were not revolving around one single issue. Over time three issues have
been important. In 2004 and 2006 the major issue was infrastructure and public transport. BrabantStad focussed on improvements in its accessibility and had hoped for substantial investments by the national government. Yet, it received relatively little money from The Hague, re-awakening old feelings of being neglected by the national government. In 2008, BrabantStad as an institution made the headlines: articles reported about the disputes between the cities (mostly about a shopping mall that was to be built in the north of Tilburg) and as a result 14 articles explicitly question the usefulness of cooperating within BrabantStad. A third topic that was reported regularly are BrabantStad’s intentions to host big events. Local politicians and other stakeholders have voiced plans to host the Floriade, the Olympics and the European Capital of Culture. These bids can be seen as deliberate attempts by BrabantStad ‘to place itself on the map’ (Hospers 2011). The first reports of the bid for the European Capital of Culture were found in the sample from 2006, but from 2008 onwards such reports formed the majority of the articles in the sample either because they described BrabantStad as candidate and organiser, or because these articles described the project itself, which was officially named ‘BrabantStad Culturele Hoofdstad’.

As a result of the focus on projects and issues, BrabantStad is mostly presented as an organisation or a cooperation between cities. It is an agent – BrabantStad ‘does things’ such as lobbying for investments in infrastructure in The Hague or competing against other cities for the title European Capital of Culture.

The readers are expected to have gained some familiarity with BrabantStad over time. The number of explanations decrease over time (see table 3) The explanations that were provided are brief: “the five biggest cities of Brabant”, “the cooperation of the five large cities in Brabant”, or simply the names of the five cities. Not all explanations were neutral; in an article on the 8th of September of 2006 Brabants Dagblad called it a “pretentious cooperation”. In approximately a third of the articles BrabantStad was referred to as an area: it is called an agglomeration, it is compared to the Randstad, and its accessibility and roads are discussed.

The name BrabantStad has not just gained familiarity amongst the readers. Professionals have become increasingly aware of the region (see table 3). The name is used by politicians of the five cities involved, but also by provincial and national politicians, and by politicians of neighbouring municipalities that look with jealousy at the investments made in BrabantStad.

Insert table 3

Rural Brabant: Meierij and Het Groene Woud

The Meierij was included in the analysis as it is a traditional region with a thick identity that may be deinstitutionalising as it has not longer an official political or administrative function. The analysis of news reports however indicated that Meierij is still a meaningful region. Regional newspapers, and especially Brabants Dagblad, use the name Meijerij or Meierij (both ways of spelling occur) quite often. This region was mentioned in over 4,000 articles in the selected decade and little over 1,000 times in the sample of regional newspaper articles. Within the sample, half of the articles popped up because they reported about institutions that have Meierij in their name (figure 3a). A plethora of local institutions made the headlines: a housing cooperation in Den Bosch (De Kleine Meierij), a regional public library (Bibliotheek de Meierij), local historical and heritage associations (Heemkundekring De Kleine Meierij, Stichting tot behoud van het Trekpaard in de Meierij, Stichting Industrieel Erfgoed Meierij), an orchestra for senior citizens (Seniorenorkest De Meierij), a musical company (Muziektheater gezelschap De Meierij), a song festival (Liedertafelfestival de Meierij), a slowfood association (Slowfood Kempen-Meierij), etcetera. These organisations are located within the region. Their use of the name Meierij and the fact that many of these organisation deal with heritage and culture indicate that the Meierij is indeed a traditional region with a thick identity.
Even when the articles reporting about institutions with Meierij names are excluded, there is still a large number of news reports that refers to the Meierij. In these articles the Meierij was mostly used as a ‘region out there’ (see table 4). The newspapers mentioned a local soccer derby36, or the launch of a book on local history17, and discussed the results of national elections for each of the municipalities in the Meierij18. These reports about the elections followed a typical format for reporting about the Meierij that journalists used on several occasions: journalist described a certain phenomenon that is discernible in the Meierij and then discussed the development for a number of villages in the region19.

From the variety of topics discussed in news reports about the Meierij (from soccer matches to recreational bike tours and nature walks, and from local politics to heritage conservation) we can conclude that the Meierij is a region with a thick identity. Some topics re-occurred: leisure and tourism20, history and heritage21, landscape reconstruction and rural development22, and finally municipal cooperation and amalgamation23. These topics indicate that Meierij has not just a backward-looking identity focussed on history and heritage but is also deemed important in future developments and challenges. The variety of topics reported about in connection to Meierij coincides with broad range of local stakeholders that use the name Meierij (see table 4).

**Insert Figure 3a and b popularity of Meierij and Het Groene Woud about here**

Between January 2003 and December 2012, over 1,600 articles used the words Groene Woud, 499 of which are part of our sample (figure 3b). Articles that used the name Het Groene Woud did not always refer to the region we study. Groene Woud is the name of streets in Oudenbosch and Breda and a neighbourhood in Tilburg that all predate the National Landscape. A few articles in the sample referred to those places. Moreover, Groene Woud is also the name of a number of restaurants and cafés in Brabant, some of which are actually located in the region24. One of these establishments is a regular meeting place for (guided) walking tours and was thus mentioned frequently in the agenda of upcoming events.

The analysis of newspaper articles indicated that since the establishment of the National Landscape, Groene Woud has also become a name for institutions located in Het Groene Woud. Some companies have adopted the name such as the regional branch of a cooperative bank (Rabobank Groene Woud Zuid) or Alzheimer counselling (Alzheimercentre Regio Het Groene Woud)25. Several local organisations related to the National Landscape have also been set up, such as streekkoöperatie Het Groene Woud (a regional cooperation of producers and sellers of regional products and recreational businesses), the Groene Woud Bank, and a regional festival Het Groene Woud. These regional associations and their projects, such as certification of regional produce or a special bank account, generate news and thereby further familiarise inhabitants with the region. The regional festival, for example, generated quite some publicity (10 articles in 2006, 15 in 2008 and even 17 in 2009, but only 2 and 3 in 2010 and 2012) and in some of these announcements or reports of the festival the goals and characteristics of Het Groene Woud were explained as well. Although part of the news reports thus informed readers about projects initiated in Het Groene Woud (projects that might have been initiated by or the result of the status of National Landscape), the identity that follows from the news reports is not equally thin as that of BrabantStad. Perhaps because Het Groene Woud was not referred solely to as organiser of the projects but as location where these projects take place. There are several further clues for the growing awareness of Het Groene Woud as a region. Firstly, journalists reported about Het Groene Woud as a ‘region out there’: “the fifth stage of the Ladies Tour will cross national landscape Het Groene Woud”36 or “Estate Velder is located in national landscape Het Groene Woud”37. Journalists wrote about (motor)bike tours28, a network of walking trails29, investments by the province in the area30, the cultivation of a forgotten type of grain31 and about special Groene Woud cows32. These topics seem to concur with the aims of the regional
cooperation Het Groene Woud. Moreover, such reports support the creation of an image of an attractive region, ideal for walking trips or cycling tours in rural and natural settings.

Secondly, the need to explain the region decreases over the years (see table 5). Many of these ‘explanations’ were no more than mentioning the status of the area: National Landscape or variations to that concept (see table 5). Other explanations referred to the location of the area: Het Groene Woud was described as the green heart in between the cities Tilburg, Den Bosch and Eindhoven, the diamond shaped area between Eindhoven, Tilburg, Den Bosch and Veghel or the triangle Oisterwijk – Sint Oedenrode – Best. One article gave a detailed and layered description, locating Het Groene Woud in the Meierij between Den Bosch, Veghel, Oirschot and Oisterwijk.

Thirdly, Eindhovens Dagblad seemed to get more interested in Het Groene Woud from 2010 onwards. Part of the readers of Eindhovens Dagblad live in Het Groene Woud, but up till 2010 they heard less about it than the readers of Brabants Dagblad. Either stakeholders in the surrounding of Eindhoven have become more aware of Het Groene Woud or the newspaper came to see Het Groene Woud increasingly as a meaningful region for its readers.

A final indication of the growing familiarity of the region is the fact that the name Het Groene Woud is used by a plethora people and organisations (see table 5). Some of the articles about upcoming events in the area, such as nature tours or lectures, appeared to be copied from press releases. This indicates that either these organisations used the name and the newspaper simply copied it, or that the newspaper decided to locate the event in Het Groene Woud.

**Regional newspapers and the institutionalisation of regions**

The content analysis of news reports in the three regional newspapers has given us insights in the institutionalisation of the selected five regions. We have found that the amount of attention given by newspapers to the regions varies, both in time, between the three newspapers and between the regions. This might lead to different levels of awareness of the regions. However, close reading of the news reports offered more detailed insight in the different institutionalisation of these five regions.

The Meierij, firstly, is not merely a remnant of a traditional region, it is vibrant. It is still a meaningful region to the journalists even though it lacks an official administrative status. The Brabants Dagblad even adopted Meierij as the name of one of its local editions. Interestingly, reports on this region regularly deal with culture and heritage or with cultural organisations that are named after the region, confirming our assumption that this region has a thick identity.

Secondly, there was little evidence of institutionalisation of the region Brabantse Stedenrij. The newspapers used the name Brabantse Stedenrij rarely, and when they use it they feel the need to explain it. Interestingly enough, Brabantse Stedenrij does seem to mean something to some stakeholders. In two articles we find some kind of ‘exclusion’: Oss, Veghel and Uden are said to be outside this Brabantse Stedenrij.

Waalboss, thirdly, is more locally known: the region is only mentioned in Brabants Dagblad. Moreover, it has become a one-issue region when we look at the news reports. News reports about Waalboss are dominated by discussions of the business park. The focus of Brabants Dagblad on these debates might hinder the meaningful connection of the public with the region Waalboss. Whereas few people would identify with a business park, they certainly would not if the development of this park causes nothing but conflicts in the municipalities that are involved.

Finally, of the more recently created regions Het Groene Woud en BrabantStad are institutionalising most strongly, but still in different degrees and guises. The content analysis revealed that both regions are developing several of Paasi’s shapes. Even though BrabantStad is a network of cities, and not a contiguous area, it is developing some territorial shape. Some articles mention sub-regions of BrabantStad. Eindhovens Dagblad reported about agreements on mobility in the ‘Zuidoostvleugel’ (south-eastern wing) of BrabantStad. Another clue about the territorial shape of BrabantStad comes from antagonists. The regional newspapers reported about some opposition towards BrabantStad, especially by those cities in Brabant that do not belong to BrabantStad. Bergen op
The institutionalisation of Het Groene Woud is evident from the awareness of Het Groene Woud not only by the regional newspapers but also by several stakeholders. This awareness is reinforced by the forming of the region's symbol. The newspapers thus pick up on the different initiatives in Het Groene Woud and with their reports only partial. inland entrepreneurs and organisations (related to the aims of the National Landscape) were created.

Following the news reports, the institutionalisation of BrabantStad should be more pronounced. The symbolic shape of the region is colloured by both the large number of articles about the region and the many topics connected to the region. News reports also demonstrated the onset of an institutional shape – organisations have renamed themselves and new Groene Woud organisations (related to the aims of the National Landscape) were created such as the Groene Woud cooperation, festival and bank account. The newspapers reported about the organisations, clearly expecting these developments to be of interest to their readers.

Even though the exact borders of the National Landscapes were not drawn by Nota Ruimte in 2004 and had to be decided on by the province later on, the region very soon became a place where events were located by journalists. By 2010 the territorial shape was further strengthened: newspapers report about the unveiling of a number of ANWB road signs of Het Groene Woud placed along the main motorways in the area and about a municipality taking liberties with the borders: only parts of Sint-Michielsgestel belong to Het Groene Woud. Nevertheless, the municipality uses the same (Groene Woud) signs for all walking trails in the municipality.

News papers thus pick up on the different initiatives in Het Groene Woud and with their reports about these developments reinforce the forming of the different shapes of the region. The increasing awareness of Het Groene Woud may be what has tempted several actors to try to lay claim to Het Groene Woud. City marketing Boxtel called “Boxtel, sparkling centre of Het Groene Woud”, a cooperation of local entrepreneurs invented the slogan “Liempde, hospitable heart of Het Groene Woud”. Het Groene Woud is even claimed by outsiders – policy makers in Den Bosch and Eindhoven. All these news reports hint at the growing awareness of Het Groene Woud not only by the newspapers but also by several stakeholders.

One last ‘proof’ of the ongoing institutionalisation of Het Groene Woud is that fact that Het Groene Woud has become an argument to allow or prohibit certain developments. A watermill that could be rebuilt in Liempde is presented, by one of the persons involved in this plan, as a possible asset to Het Groene Woud.
Groene Woud. Plans for the redevelopment of the area the Vleut in Best included a repositioning of the local zoo to one specialised in animals that live or used to live in Het Groene Woud. On the other hand, protesting neighbours claimed that a company did not fit in Het Groene Woud. Such claims imply that Het Groene Woud is developing a thick regional identity, an identity that can be used to determine what does or does not belong in the area.

Discussion and Conclusion
This paper focussed on how newspapers report on older and more recently created regions within the borders of the traditional region of Noord-Brabant, a Dutch province with a well-established identity and organisation. This paper tracked the institutionalisation of these five regions through an analysis of newspaper reports over the last decade. We found that in this dynamic, layered formation of Noord-Brabant, some new regions institutionalise and even become meaningful places outside the administrative context in which they were created, while other regions remain ephemeral. This institutionalisation of some new regions did not so much result in a de-institutionalisation of older regions in the same area, but in a more complex layering of the identities of these regions towards each other. News reports about regions can help to make readers more aware of the region and its relation with other regions. It is through representations, for example by news media, that regions gain meaning. The comparison of five regions within one political administrative context demonstrated that there are marked differences in how often and how newspapers report about regions. It also indicated that partly overlapping regions (both in time and space) can coexist in spatial consciousness. In these dynamic layered situations, Het Groene Woud did not replace the Meierij, although they partly overlap in space. Both regions have a place in news reports, and in some reports they are even connected.

The differences between the news reports on the five regions are interesting. Both BrabantStad and Het Groene Woud were frequently reported about in the regional newspapers. However, it seems as if the role of the news media in the institutionalisation process is rather different. BrabantStad is more often connected to conflict or doubts about its use or the relevance of its projects. Het Groene Woud on the other hand is filled with reports about touristic developments and innovations, cultural landscapes and local cooperations. There seems to be a more positive vibe, maybe the journalists are less critical about the need for these developments. Het Groene Woud moreover can be connected more easily to the existing Brabant images. BrabantStad, on the other hand, seems to be more difficult to explain and links up less easily with existing images of Brabant. This may be related to the branding of both regions. The website of BrabantStad does choose the Brabant colours (red and white) but otherwise seems not strongly directed to the inhabitants. Topics on the homepage are: the art of cooperation, increasing attractiveness, improving accessibility and strengthen the competitive power. The pictures show projects and politicians. The website of Het Groene Woud on the other hand displays ordinary people performing all sorts of leisure activities and beautiful pictures of nature.

Because we chose five spatially overlapping regions within one province we could make a valid comparison between the three regional newspapers. This comparison proved valuable as it gave insights the analysis of a single regional newspaper could not have given. Parts of Het Groene Woud are located near Eindhoven, and therefore part of the readers of Eindhovens Dagblad actually live in Het Groene Woud. But Eindhovens Dagblad initially paid less attention to Het Groene Woud than Brabants Dagblad did. From 2010 onwards Eindhovens Dagblad reports more frequently about Het Groene Woud. The content analysis cannot be used to decipher this agenda setting process: did stakeholders in the area get more involved in Het Groene Woud and create more news about Het Groene Woud, or did Eindhovens Dagblad come to see Het Groene Woud as a meaningful region for its readers thus picking up more news about the area?

The case-study reaffirmed the claims that Simon (2004) and Simon et al (2010) made regarding the usefulness of analysing the frequency of the use of name in media representations if one wants to
gain an understanding of the institutionalisation of the region. However by moving beyond a mere quantitative analysis of the popularity of the names, we have gained a deeper understanding of the role of media in institutionalisation. The regional newspapers proved to be a valuable source – in the ways they write about regions and thus construct knowledge of the region. The clues the regional newspapers offer about the ongoing institutionalisation of BrabantStad and Het Groene Woud correspond to findings from other analysis (Terlouw & Van Gorp 2014).

It turned out to be possible to discern between thin and thick identities – as news reports about some regions focussed very much on one issue and other regions produced more divers news reports. Whereas Terlouw (2009) describes thick identities as backward looking and thin identities as more project oriented, we found that the identity of more institutionalised regions use both types of identities. For instance reports about the Meierij focused on the future as well.

Geographical proximity is an important factor in the creation of news – as was reaffirmed in our analysis. The Randstad based national newspapers report incidentally about regions in Brabant. Some people within Brabant undoubtedly would interpret this as yet another strain of the marginalisation of Brabant by Holland. However, even in the regional newspapers proximity is an issue. Readers of BN/De Stem in the West of Brabant live outside Het Groene Woud and the Meierij and thus read far less about these regions that the readers of Brabants Dagblad. Waalboss is only reported about in Brabants Dagblad. Regional newspapers in the Netherlands thus seem to have a very local focus regarding regional news – especially when one considers that that each of the regional newspapers has several editions for sub regions within their area. This local focus of the regional newspapers made them very suited for our content analysis of the institutionalising of regions on the level between province and municipality. It is at this local level of the news reports that these new regions first gain some meaning.

References


*Regional Studies* 38(9), p.991-999.


1 Lexis Nexis provides a digital archive of newspaper articles for educational institutions. The database includes most Dutch national and regional newspapers and a number of international newspapers as well. The databases includes full articles (but without pictures) from all sections of the newspapers: from headlines to sports, culture and travel, and even contains opinion pieces and letters by readers. The archives were accessed through the University Utrecht Library subscription to Nexis Lexis.

2 Brabants Dagblad 24 July 2009
5 See for example Eindhovens Dagblad 19 September 2008
6 See for example Brabants Dagblad 5 June 2004
7 See for example Brabants Dagblad 4 September 2008
8 See for example: BN/De Stem 22 September 2006 & 31 August 2012, Brabants Dagblad 18 June 2008 and 15 October 2009,
9 See for example Brabants Dagblad 30 September 2006 & BN/ De Stem 18 October 2006
10 BN/De Stem 8 July 2004
11 Brabants Dagblad 16 September 2008
13 Brabants Dagblad 18 September 2006
14 Eindhovens Dagblad 17 September 2008
16 Brabants Dagblad 6 September 2009
17 Brabants Dagblad 6 October 2009
18 Brabants Dagblad 13 & 14 September 2012
22 See for example BN/De Stem 21 August 2008, Eindhovens Dagblad 7 July 2008 & Brabants Dagblad 24 September 2010
23 See for example Eindhovens Dagblad 12 May & 31 August 2012, Brabants Dagblad 22 & 29 September 2012
24 Allegedly, the region was named after one of these bars where one of the first meetings of the initiators took place here.
25 See for example Brabants Dagblad 23 & 24 September 2008
26 Brabants Dagblad 20 Augustus 2008
27 Brabants Dagblad 16 September 2010
29 See for example Brabants Dagblad 24 July 2009
30 See for example Eindhovens Dagblad26 October 2010
See for example Brabants Dagblad 9 May 2008
See for example Eindhovens Dagblad 7 May 2008 & Brabants Dagblad 9 September 2010
See for example Brabants Dagblad 17 September 2008 & 25 June 2009, Eindhovens Dagblad 26 September 2012
Brabants Dagblad 10 October 2006
Brabants Dagblad 7 July 2008
Brabants Dagblad 28 September 2012
See for example Brabants Dagblad 14 October 2004, 10 October 2009 & Eindsdovens Dagblad 3 September 2008
Brabants Dagblad 23 June 2004
Eindhovens Dagblad 7 May & 28 August 2008
See for example Brabants Dagblad 29 May 2008 & 27 April 2010
See for example Brabantas Dagblad 30 August 2008, Eindhovens Dagblad 2 September 2008
Brabants Dagblad 22 July 2010
BN/ De Stem 23 September 2008
See for example Brabants Dagblad 6 Ocotber 2010
Brabants Dagblad 23 & 24 July 2009
Brabants Dagblad 10 July 2008
Brabants Dagblad 1 July 2008
Brabants Dagblad 23 July 2009. Eindhovens Dagblad 17 July 2010
Brabants Dagblad 17 October 2008
Eindhovens Dagblad 18 September 2009
Brabants Dagblad 24 June 2010