RESCALING REGIONAL IDENTITIES: 
COMMUNICATING THICK AND THIN REGIONAL IDENTITIES

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Dr. Kees Terlouw
Assistant professor Human Geography
terlouw@geo.uu.nl
Urban and Regional research centre, Department of Human Geography & Planning, Utrecht University, Netherlands

ABSTRACT

Novel forms of regional identities emerge in response to global competitive pressures and challenges to the nation-state. Regions have to react and position their identity in relation to the rescaling of statehood. Especially the growing autonomy of regional administrations makes support from local stakeholders more important. Communicating a specific regional identity is one of the instruments regional administrations use for mobilising support. However, at the same time old, traditional regional identities become more fluid. Regional identity traditionally focuses on shared past and specific social and cultural characteristics. Especially globalisation and individualisation undermine this traditional thick regional identity. Regional administrations have to adjust their communicated regional identity. By communicating the image of a future oriented region which can face the challenges of global competition they increasingly use a thin regional identity. This paper analyses different case studies from the Netherlands and Germany.

1 Introduction: regional identity and the rescaling of statehood

The growing importance of regional identity is frequently linked to globalisation and the decline of the nation-state. However, the same processes which make regional identity more important also undermine the traditional or thick forms of regional identity. Regional administrations therefore need to communicate more fluid and thinner regional identity to mobilise support. This paper starts by discussing the three related academic discourses which relate regions with globalisation. The shift from thick to thin regional identity is subsequently discussed. These concepts are then used to analyse the communicated regional identity of some German and Dutch administrative regions.

Three related academic discourses relate regions with globalisation. The first focuses on regional identity, the second on the economic role of regions and the third on the changing political relation between regions and the state. Regional identities were traditionally seen as pre-modern phenomena. These relics from the past would gradually disappear with the development of the modern nation-state. The resurgence of regionalism since the 1960s were initially ignored or regarded as fringe phenomena, especially while these regional movements initially focussed on cultural and language rights. Later, these regionalisms were reinterpreted as the reaction of Flemish, Basques, Catalans, Scots and Northern Italians to the failure of nation-states to regulate globalisation. On the one hand, their nation-state could not protect them from the negative consequences of globalisation. On the other hand, it hindered them in profiting from globalisation. Individuals therefore identify less with the far away and dis-functioning nation-state and more with their regional community (Keating 1998; Bauman 2001; Delanty and Rumford 2005; Savage et al. 2005; Paasi 2003).

Economic discourses also relate regions with globalisation. They focus on explaining the economic growth of regions like Silicon Valley, Baden-Württemberg and northern Italy. Their economic development is regionally rooted. These discourses stress the importance of cultural and social backgrounds to economic growth. One point frequently made is that regions are better frameworks for communication and cooperation than nation-states.
Companies can better adapt to and learn from the changing global conditions in a regional context, than in the large heterogeneous and rigid nation-state (Keating 1998; 2001; MacLeod and Jones 2001; Rodriguez-Pose and Sandall 2008).

A third related political discourse also links globalisation with regionalism. Globalisation undermines the nation-states and gives more room to cities and regions. But not all regions profit from this rescaling of statehood. The most competitive regions profit, while many peripheral regions decline. Globalisation, the rescaling of statehood and regional polarisation go hand in hand.

The increased global competitive pressures eroded since the 1970s the centrally controlled nation-state based on the equal distribution of welfare to all its citizens. Neo-liberal solutions were introduced to deregulate the economy and improve the competitiveness of companies on the world market. Decentralisation of political power was one instrument used to face the challenges of globalisation. The transfer of social and economic responsibilities reduced the financial burdens of the central state. The regional level was also assumed to be better suited to provide tailor made conditions for individual firms to compete on the world market. Policies shifted from helping underdeveloped agricultural regions to investing in successful high-tech regions. Many tried to emulate the success of regions like Silicon Valley. New forms of relations between the different levels of government emerge. Not only the hierarchical administrative relations change through decentralisation and European Integration, but also new cooperative relations of governance emerge with non-state actors. The combination of changing vertical relation and emergence of new horizontal linkages creates new forms of statehood. The regional level has become more important in shaping the living conditions of its population and the business climate for its companies. However, this growing importance of regions does not go hand in hand with a matching relocation of resources from the central to the regional level. Regions have to compete with each other for resources (Keating 1998; Brenner 2004; MacLeod 2001). One way to legitimize their claims on resources is to communicate a specific regional identity. This competition takes place in many fields. Regions compete with each other for attention and resources from the central state. Regions compete with similar regions at the same administrative level, but also with regions at different scales. In addition they have to compete with new types of regions. New forms of regional and urban cooperation tend to be more based on networks than on a distinct territory and link frequently regions at different scales. They also focus more on specific tasks than on the coordination of all activities in a given territory. As these new forms of regions partly overlap and are more changeable over time the competition between regions becomes even more intense. But not only administrative competition has become more important, regions also compete for private resources. There is a shift from managerialism to entrepreneurialism in urban and regional governance (Harvey 2001). Regions increasingly try to attract private investments. These can be companies, but also new residents or tourists. Initially regions suffering economic restructuring tried to improve their declining economy by attracting new investments (Brenner 2004). Now also prospering regions focus on attracting new investors. Regions not only compete for outside resources, but concentrate more and more on the mobilisation of resident resources. Regional stakeholders like companies and the local population are mobilised to improve the regional economy and liveability (Rodriguez-Pose and Sandall 2008; MacLeod and Jones 2001; van Houtum and Lagendijk 2000; Porter and Wallis 2002). The communicated regional identities are thus not only used in the external competition between regions, but also for the internal mobilisation within a region. The support from the local population becomes more important for the effective functioning of regional administrations. The next section discusses how the same processes which give more importance to regions also undermine their traditional regional identity.

2 From thick to thin identity

Globalisation dramatically extends the reach of social networks. Together with the individualisation of society this transforms social networks and identity. 'We replace the few depth relationships with a mass of thin and shallow contacts.’ (Bauman 2004:69). The small local networks in which individuals were bound together with multiple bonds of for instance kinship, friendship, work, church and mutual care disappear. Individuals still form networks with these ties, but these ties become more separated from each other. Individuals increasingly choose with whom they have what kind of relation. The bonds in these individual
centred social networks are weaker and more changeable. These individual networks are larger than the traditional networks and the overlap between these individual networks decreases. The stable collective network is broken up into many changeable individual networks. Individual choice, rather than collective conventions and spatial proximity now determine social networks (Blooland 2003; Bauman 2004; 2001). Liquefaction takes place of social frameworks and institutions. Collective identity is replaced by a chosen, fluid and temporary individual identity. ‘In the brave new world of fleeting chances and frail securities, the old-style stiff and non-negotiable identities simply won’t do.’ (Bauman 2004:27).

Discussing and communicating identities becomes more important when in the current phase of liquid modernity identities are undermined. Identities are sometimes temporarily fixed, but are lighter than tradition identities and can be changed more easily (Bauman 2004:13-46). Especially conflicts can temporarily strengthen communities. Shared identities are usually mobilised when interdependencies cause problems, like for instance economic restructuring (Amin and Thrift 2002:30; Savage et al. 2005:56; Donaldson 2006). Despite the decline in the localised nature of social networks, residents are still in many ways interdependent.

Living together in space makes them interdependent for their quality of life (Blooland 2003:78-79). Proximity, propinquity (Amin and Thrift 2002), or throwntogetherness (Massey 2005), are at the basis of many temporary spatial identifications. Shared interests in specific place and at a specific moment can create a new but transitory regional identity. These compete or build on older more traditional regional identities. Although these new regional identities differ from traditional regional identities, they sometimes overlap and reinforce each other. The case of the Bollenstreek discussed at the end of this paper illustrates this.

Thin and thick are frequently used metaphors in the analysis of these changing social relations. Anton Zijderveld (2000) uses them to analyse the changing role of institutions and networks. ‘Today thick, greedy and closed institutions, conditioned by a heavy handed, often religiously and magically tabooed, coercive tradition, have been superseded by thinner, more voluntary, more open, and looser institutions which in the behaviour of people are often alternated or temporarily suspended by flexible networks.’ (Zijderveld 2000:128). The distinction between thick and thin identity is also frequently made. Thick identity is more based on a shared culture and community relations. Thin identity is more related to a specific problem and requires less direct involvement with other individuals. Thick identities have a normative aspect, while thin identities are more practical and utilitarian (Shelby 2005; Hinman 2003). Thick identities are more fixed and rooted in culture and history, while thin identities are more fluid and based on dialogue (Delanty and Rumford 2005:68-86). Regions have to adapt their communicated regional identity to this change from thick to thin identities.

### 3 Thin and thick regional identity

The growing political importance of regions thus coincides with the undermining of traditional regional identities. Regional administrations have to respond to these challenges. Their power depends less and less on delegated national authority. Support from local stakeholders, including the inhabitants, becomes more important. The communication of a regional identity by the regional authorities is an important, but frequently neglected aspect of this rescaling of statehood. Regional administrations employ different types of regional identity politics.

The regional identity communicated by regional administrations can be very thick or very thin. They range from a traditional culturally based and historically grown broad and stable identity fixed to a given territory, to a more fluid instrumental identity focussing on the awareness to solve specific problems. Between thick and thin regional identities there is a range of hybrid regional identities. The purpose of the rest of this paper is to identify these, to compare the types of regional identities communicated by different regional authorities and to discuss their strengths and weaknesses. The regional identities communicated by the regional administrations are analysed based on documents produced by these administrations. The analyses of the communications of regional administrations are augmented by other publications on the identity of the selected regions. It is beyond the scope of this contribution to systematically analyse the success of these communications towards the stakeholders and local population. We can only make some tentative comments on the relation between the communicated and perceived regional identity.

The regional identities are compared on the aspects identified in table 1 which is based on the discussion in the sections above. Case studies from the Netherlands and Germany were selected to cover the range of regional identities from thick to thin.
Table 1 Aspects of regional identities communicated by regional administrations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASPECT</th>
<th>Ranging from thick:</th>
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<td>Spatial form</td>
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<td>Territorial</td>
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<td>Organisation</td>
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<td>Project</td>
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<td>Participants</td>
<td>General population</td>
<td>Administrators and specific stakeholders</td>
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<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Broad and many</td>
<td>Single</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Culture</td>
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<td>Time</td>
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<td>Scale focus</td>
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4 Stuck in a thick regional identity: Lippe

Our first case-study is Lippe, a region in the north-east of the German federal state of Nordrhein-Westfalen. Lippe has a very strong traditional regional identity. Historic buildings, landscape and the statue of Hermann, the German victor over the Roman legions, dominate the website of the Kreis Lippe (www.lippe.de). Lippe has been an independent German state in almost the same borders from the Middle Ages to the formation of the German state in 1871. It was one of the federal states until the Second World War. It is now an administrative district with a stronger identity and more administrative resources than its neighbours. However, at the end of this section it will become clear that this strong and well established regional identity and regional administration is now threatened by the rescaling of the German state.

Lippe's political success in defending its independence hindered for a long time its economic development. Whereas its neighbours became in the nineteenth century part of Prussia and industrialised, Lippe stagnated (Ellwein 1993:265; Rinne 1993:67-72; Richter 1995:284). This lack of regional development made Lippe into an iconic authentic German region or Heimat. Lippe's regional image and identity was thus linked to the then prevalent German national identity. In 1908 the nationalistic regional elite founded the Lippische Heimatbund to protect the authentic German region Lippe against the threats of modernisation. Especially industrialisation and urbanisation threatened the landscape and the traditional identity of the population. The policy of the Lippische Heimatbund to plant an oak in the birth village of each soldier from Lippe killed in the First World War, exemplifies the link between the German nation and the Heimat Lippe. This conceptual link was further strengthened by the Nazi's. After the Second World War the Lippische Heimatbund did not wither away, but increased its membership to about a tenth of the population. It decoupled the regional identity of Lippe from German national identity. The focus of its publications and its activities shifted to regional history and the protection of landscape and the environment (Stich 1998). This strengthened the inward focus of Lippe's regional identity.

Lippe lost its status as a federal state after the Second World War and was divided into two administrative districts. However, it obtained important concessions from the new federal state of Nordrhein-Westfalen (Ellwein 1997; HL 1999). First of all, Detmold, the old capital of Lippe, became the new administrative centre for the new province Regierungsbezirk Detmold. Secondly, it inherited the properties of the old state of Lippe. This was administered by local politicians through the Landesverband Lippe and used for the benefit of the population of Lippe, by for instance subsidising regional cultural institutions. Its attention has shifted over time from urban cosmopolitan urban culture, like the Landestheater Detmold, to communicating the historically grown rural regional identity to the population. It founded for this purpose in 1971 the Institut für Lippische Landeskunde (HL
1999:194). These activities are financed by the profits from the investments of the Landesverband Lippe in new housing estates and medical facilities in health spas. The administrative and territorial reforms of the 1970s at first threatened Lippe. The planned scaling up of the provinces (Regierungsbezirke) would rob Detmold of its administrative functions. Lippe would also cede many villages to the neighbouring towns of Bielefeld and Herford by the proposed new borders of the districts (Kreise). This external threat further strengthened the already strong regional identity of the population of Lippe. The population could thus be easily mobilised by Lippe's political elite to successfully avert these threats. They even succeeded in bringing the whole traditional territory of Lippe into one new administrative district. This territorial reunification and further institutionalisation of Lippe further strengthened its thick regional identity. This thick regional identity which helped it in the 1970s administrative up scaling of local administration in Germany, now hinders Lippe in the downsizing of authority and responsibilities from the level of the central and federal states to the regional level.

The German central state suffered especially since German reunification from increasing budget deficits. To combat the increasing welfare spending it embarked upon a series of health care reforms. One measure was to cut back on the funding of visits to health spas. This created huge financial difficulties for the Landesverband Lippe which is an important stakeholder in health spas. This reduced their capacity to subsidise Lippe's regional cultural. The more recent regional reform initiatives further undermine Lippe. The federal state of Nordrhein-Westfalen will gradually reduce the number and competences of its provinces (Danielzyk and Wood 2004). This already reduces the importance of the administrative centre in Detmold, which in time will disappear altogether. Its competences are eroded by new forms of regional cooperation (see next section). Paradoxically this very well established region with a strong regional identity is not very well equipped to cope with the challenges of the rescaling German state. Its thick regional identity with its territorial and inward historical focus leaves it ill prepared for regional initiatives which are more open, networked, future oriented and focussed on economic competitiveness.

5 Creating a neo-liberal economic identity: OWL

In Bielefeld, a large city bordering Lippe, important regional companies like Bertelsmann and the regional chambers of commerce of Bielefeld and Lippe founded in 1989 an association to promote the region Ostwestfalen-Lippe as a business location. As its complicated name suggests Ostwestfalen-Lippe has no clear established regional identity. First of all Lippe is very different from the rest. The previous section discussed its strong regional identity which distinguishes it from its neighbours. Ostwestfalen-Lippe also wants to communicate a regional identity which is different from the more rural Westfalen as a whole and the neighbouring declining Ruhr area. By stressing its many mid-sized cities with thriving local companies they want to communicate that OWL has a distinct and modern regional identity in Nordrhein-Westfalen. The communicated regional identity is thus based on economic issues, is offensive and future oriented (www.ostwestfalen-lippe.de).

In 1993 the private initiative was transformed into a Public Private Partnership. The regional administrations (Kreise) became equal partners in the newly formed OstWestfalenLippe Marketing GmbH with its offices in Bielefeld. The OstWestfalenLippe Marketing GmbH focuses its communication not on its own population, but on entrepreneurs. The level of regional identification of the population is thus much weaker than in Lippe. Initially it focussed on those outside OWL, now it focuses more on local entrepreneurs. The communicated regional identity shifted from correcting a negative image, to promoting OWL as an innovative and cooperative business community showing the rest of Germany how to improve global competitiveness through networking and deregulation (www.network.info; www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de; www.ostwestfalen-lippe.de; Danielzyk and Wood 2004). Besides many business to business networks there is also an important network focussed on employment. In this Initiative für Beschäftigung OWL local businesses, trade unions and policy makers from different administrative levels cooperate to improve the regional labour market through innovative ideas and training programs. It started in 1999 as an initiative of the Bertelsmann Foundation. This foundation owns the majority of the shares of the huge media conglomerate of Bertelsmann. This third largest media concern in the world has huge international interests in printed and electronic media (RTL). It subsidiary Arvato provides administrative services to companies and governments. In the United Kingdom it has even taken over part of the financial administration and social services of the East Riding municipality (Wernicke and Bultmann 2007:291; www.arvatogov.co.uk). Bertelsmann not
only profits from deregulation, but the Bertelsmann Foundation also actively promotes neolibera
tism. In the opinion of Reinhard Mohn, who founded the Bertelsmann Foundation in 1977, there is too much state involvement in economy and society. He wants the
Bertelsmann Foundation to promote new relations between state, society and its citizens
through decentralisation, networking and competition (Wernicke and Bultmann 2007:295-303). This initiative for employment in OWL is one of the many of such project initiated by the
Bertelsmann Foundation. After three years running it, the Bertelsmann Foundation
transferred in 2002 the management of this employment initiative to their regional partners
and it operates now under the auspices of the OstWestfalenLippe Marketing GmbH. This did
not eliminate the involvement of the Bertelsmann Foundation in the regional networking in
Ostwestfalen-Lippe. Following its own study on the economic potential of OWL published in
2003, which showed the low degree of internationalisation of the regional economy, the
Bertelsmann Foundation initiated a number of projects. It started for instance the Forum.Ost
programme which is part of the EU aided EQUAL II project. This helps especially local
SME’s in OWL to export to Central and Eastern Europe (www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de). The
OstWestfalenLippe Marketing GmbH creates not only new regional spaces outside the
traditional administration through its networking activities. It is also more directly involved in
the rescaling and deregulation of the German state. In 2002 the OstWestfalenLippe
Marketing GmbH took the initiative together with its partners in its many networks to
deregulate the regional economy. Funded by the federal state Nordrhein-Westfalen they
developed specific proposals to simplify economic regulations. In 2004 they were selected
as a model region for the project Innovationsregionen in which the Bertelsmann Foundation
cooperates with the ministry of trade and commerce in Berlin. All levels of government
together with different business interests cooperate in this project of stimulating global
competitiveness by reducing bureaucracy and regulation. This business focussed
administration initiative has created a new regional identity of OWL, which it proudly
communicates to the outside world. Although its populations hardly identifies with OWL, the
self-esteem of the population is somewhat strengthened by the reports in the media on the
relative economic success of the firms in this backwater of Nordrhein-Westfalen. OWL is
now also used as a best practice example in a federal government’s image campaign. Other
German regions are now starting to follow OWL’s example (www.ostwestfalen-lippe.de).
The evolution of the cooperation in OWL increasingly strengthens a thin regional identity,
which is successfully communicated to the outside world. This thin identity could easily
disappear. The wider adoption of administrative innovations spearheaded in OWL and
generating a strong future oriented but thin regional identity could spread this regional
identity so much, that it is no longer attached to the region OWL.

6 Effectively mixing thick and thin regional identity: the Bollenstreek in the Randstad

The Randstad is the string of cities along the rivers and coast rimming the iconic rural Dutch
polder landscape in the West of the Netherlands. After the Second World War Dutch central
planning had special attention for this urbanised core. It was perceived to threaten the unity
of the national territory through an increasing polarisation between the expanding core in the
West and a declining rural periphery in the rest of the Netherlands. The economic stagnation
of the 1970s and 1980s lead to a reinvention of the Randstad and a transformation of its
regional identity. The central government identified the Randstad more and more as the
economic powerhouse of the Netherlands. By further stimulating its regional economic
competitiveness, it would pull the entire Dutch economy out of its economic stagnation. The
meaning of the Randstad has in recent times shifted again. The focus is now on different
forms of regional cooperation networks between provincial and municipal authorities, which
have recently been widened by the inclusion of organised interest groups (Kloosterman
The Bollenstreek, one of the regions within this Randstad, uses its strong regional identity
based on a powerful bulb growing industry to strengthen its position towards other regions
and networks in the Randstad. The Bollenstreek (or Duin- en Bollenstreek) is part of the
coastal region of the Randstad. Its landscape is based on dunes. With the exception of the
ones closest to the sea, these were dug off to provide sand for the expansion of the cities of
the Randstad. The remaining waste lands were re-cultivated at the end of the nineteenth
century. The chalk rich and well drained sandy soils were very suited for flower bulb growing.
The Bollenstreek became the centre for tulip and other bulb production. Although 90% of the
Dutch bulbs are now produced elsewhere, it still houses the main traders, distribution
centres and breeding stations. 80% of world trade in flower bulbs is controlled by the
companies in the Bollenstreek (www.greenportduinenbollenstreek.nl). The Bollenstreek is still at the centre of this large networked agribusiness complex, which also includes flower production and all the related companies which provide specialised services for production and marketing. This gives the Bollenstreek a very hybrid regional identity. It combines the identity of a region with a distinctive landscape of tulips and other flowers, with the identity of the regionally based network of the bulb growing industry. This is also linked to the national level. The tulips produced in the Bollenstreek are an important export product for the Dutch economy. Tulips are also an important Dutch national icon and they are widely used in the communication of Dutch national identity to the outside world (Duineveld 2004; Kamphuis and Volkers 1995; Beenakker 2008). In general, the Bollenstreek as a region has a thick regional identity, while the Bollenstreek as a network has a thin regional identity. These regional identities mutually reinforce each other. A combination of territorial defensive regional identity and an offensive future networked economic regional identity was very effective in the scalar politics of the Bollenstreek discussed below.

In 1996 the municipalities in the Bollenstreek intensified cooperation to prevent the building of a new city planned by the central government to relieve the urbanisation pressures in this crowded part of the Randstad close to the booming Schiphol airport region and the city of Leiden. As this threatened both the regional identity of the Bollenstreek as a region and as a network this mobilised different regional actors to defend the Bollenstreek against central planning. The position of the municipal politicians was strengthened by the relatively strong regional identity of the population. Their regional identity is based on its rural character in the urbanised Randstad and on the success of its bulb growing industry (Duineveld 2004). Together with the province of Zuid-Holland and organisations of the bulb growing industry, the municipalities agreed upon the Pact van Teylingen to ward off this external urbanisation threat. They wanted instead to preserve the landscape and give room for the bulb growing and trading agribusiness complex to develop. The regional economy and liveability was to be further strengthened by ecological measures, the revitalization of tourism and the building of small new housing estates for the regional population. They thus did not use a purely defensive strategy. This would not fit with the future oriented growth orientation of the bulb growers’ network. It also would have reduced the bargaining position of the Bollenstreek towards the provincial and national administrations, which were committed to the growth oriented regional identity of the Randstad. By not blocking, but reducing and spreading the number of new houses it was possible to reach a compromise, which fitted with both the regional identity of the Bollenstreek and the Randstad (VROM 2007; Teisman 2007).

After averting this treat, the regional cooperation transformed. In 2004 the cooperation network of the municipalities merged with the cooperation network focussing on the neighbouring city of Leiden. Efficiency was an important motivation for the up scaling of this administrative regional cooperation which manages many administrative functions like transport, waste collection, planning, economic policy and social services. However, despite participating in this network focussed on administrative services, the municipalities of the Bollenstreek still cooperate to protect their strategic political interest. They cooperate closely with the foundation Greenport duin- en bollenstreek in which the organisations of the bulb growing industry work together. The six municipalities in the Bollenstreek have in 2009 also set up a ‘Greenport development company’. Greenport is a recently formulated concept in central Dutch planning which in addition to the mainports Schiphol airport and the Rotterdam harbour has identified several regional agribusiness complexes as crucial for the Dutch economy and its global competitiveness. To stimulate the expansion and competitiveness of the bulb growing industry, the central government eases planning regulations, improves the infrastructure and stimulates cooperation between companies in order to innovate the production process. Local actors within the Bollenstreek link up with this planning concept from the central government to further strengthen regional cooperation to improve both the competitiveness of the regional bulb growing industry and the typical landscape of the Bollenstreek (Ecorys 2006; SDB 2001; 2003a; 2003b; WLTO/KAVB 2003; www.duinenbollenstreek.net; www.greenportduinenbollenstreek.nl; www.hollandrijnland.net).

By skillfully aligning thicker territorial and thinner network based regional identities, the Bollenstreek has the manoeuvrability to defend its territory and to link up with higher scale administrations. It aligned with the province to block urbanisation from central government and the neighbouring city of Leiden. It aligned with the central government to develop it as a Greenport. The Greenport concept is also used by the municipalities to strengthen their position and ward of other unwanted developments. The hybrid regional identity of the Bollenstreek is used to improve its political position, which in turn further strengthens its thin regional identity focussing on economic development, networks and the importance of the Bollenstreek for the competitiveness of the Dutch economy.
7 Conclusion

These selected examples of regional identities communicated by regional administrations could be supplemented by many other case-studies. The three cases discussed above exhibit the wide variety of contemporary regional identities. The distinction between the old traditional thick regional identities, with strong historic roots, and the new thin regional identities, which are more network based, fluid and future oriented, was very useful in analysing the case-studies. By using it not as a dichotomy, but as at the ends of a continuum and by unfolding this typology into different aspects, it was a useful tool to compare different regional identities. It showed that specific regional identities change over time and become more thin or thick. The regional identity communicated by the different regional administrations builds on, but is not determined by their historical roots and context. The historical regional identity can be used in many different ways. The discussion of the Bollenstreek and Lippe showed that traditional regional identities can be used to different ends. While in the Bollenstreek thick and thin aspects of regional identity were amalgamated into a single strong hybrid regional identity, Lippe is stuck in its thickening identity, while a new dynamic thin identity emerge at a higher regional scale in OWL. Hybrid regional identities, combining a locally specific mix of thin and thin elements of regional identity and which link up with regional identities at other relevant scales, are the most effective regional identities.

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