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## Regions, Networks and Fluidity in the Finnish Nation-State

Jouni Häkli

In this article I apply the topological conception of space to the building of the Finnish nation-state. I approach the process from the vantage point of the unconformable, yet related spatial types of regions, networks and fluids. An understanding of the Finnish identity as an ever-changing and contradictory field of core narratives and meanings, and as an international accomplishment, helps avoiding the 'territorial trap' (world seen exclusively in terms of nation-state territories) as well as the 'teleological trap' (endpoint taken as explanation of the historical trajectory leading to state formation) in the analysis of the history of the Finnish nation-state.

**Keywords:** actor-network theory; topological space; region; network; fluid space; territory; national identity; nation-state; history; Sweden; Finland

### Introduction

The rapid development of information and communication technologies during the past decades have influenced the processes through which nations and nation-states are constructed (Morley & Robins, 1995). The circulation speed and the amount of available information have risen exponentially and have reached global dimensions. This has created new possibilities for aspiring nations to promote their identities, political goals and visibility, while new multi-ethnic, diasporic, or hybrid identities are emerging, reflecting the ever more complex circuits of global economic and political organisation (for example, Cheah, 1998; Meyer & Geschiere, 2003). Yet, the fundamentals of building nation-states have arguably changed little, for 'imagined' national communities (Anderson, 1991) all over the world continue to inhabit territories they perceive as their home countries. Nations are evidently and stubbornly with us, showing no signs of a quick withdrawal.

Nations' persistence as social institutions has been accounted for by studying how they are rooted in space, concretely and mythically. Not only physical territoriality, but also geographical imaginations and the spatial constitution of social relations are crucial aspects in nation building (Nogué, 1991; Hooson, 1994; Paasi, 1996; Herb & Kaplan, 1999). Less attention has been paid to the conceptions of space pertaining to the analysis of geography and nation building. Hence, the relationships between different spatial types, or *spatialities*, constitutive of nation building and state formation remain largely unscrutinised.

In order to contribute to this line of research I will examine how 'regions', 'networks' and 'fluids' as outlined by philosopher Annemarie Mol and sociologist John Law (1994) intermingle in the case of Finland. With my case study I will argue that we need multiple approaches to space to assess the role that geographical space and social spatiality play in the construction of nation-states. Most social, cultural, economic and political practices in Finland (and elsewhere) are informed by *modern cartographic reason* – a look at the world as regions and

territories, which leans on the conception of social processes taking place upon Euclidean, three-dimensional, continuous space (Olsson, 1991). In this view the world is divided into a system of mutually exclusive spatial entities, the nation-states.

Scholars critical of this 'territorial trap' (Agnew, 1994) conceptualise the contemporary world more in terms of flows and connectivity (for example, Massey, 1993; Thrift, 1996; Amin, 2004). The critique has challenged the conception of nation-state as a taken-for-granted geographical entity and, instead, has worked to show how it is precisely the unquestioned nature of territorial imagination that functions as a significant seat of social power (Olsson, 1991; Harvey, 2000; Pickles, 2003).

The Finnish case study will serve to show that the idea of territorial space is not defunct or redundant, but, rather, a continuously relevant form of social spatiality complementary to networked and fluid spaces (Law, 2002). The Finnish nation-state's territorial space, in a very tangible and bounded sense, has no clear alternatives when it comes to the organisation of the state's juridical and administrative powers. Many aspects of globalisation challenge the country's territorial sovereignty, but it is still one of the leading principles upon which international relations are based (Murphy, 1996).

Hence, while it certainly is important to break away from territorial imagery as the dominant conception of space, the Finnish case will show that it is still useful to analyse how national territories are produced and how this production is related to other kinds of spatialities pertinent to nation building and national identities, such as topological networks. This exercise is particularly useful because the construction of the Finnish nation-state can not be understood properly if its implication in the Swedish state formation is overlooked. This is why the following analysis will weigh on the period of Finland's belonging to the Kingdom of Sweden (before 1809), instead of the period of Russian rule (from 1809 onwards) when Finland was already a distinct political-territorial entity.

When seen in terms of multiple interlinked spatialities, the malleability of the Finnish nation-state is not in contradiction with the demonstrable territorial fixity of the state, that is, the stability of its territorial boundaries in Euclidean space. Rather we may better appreciate the different socio-spatial logics according to which various interdependent processes of nation building and state formation unfold. This is where John Law's (2002) conception of regions, networks, and fluids becomes applicable.

### **The spatialities of regions, networks and fluids**

The search for an alternative conception of space for analysing the world of networks and flows has often turned to 'actor-network theory' as developed by John Law (1986), philosopher Bruno Latour (1987), sociologist Michel Callon (1991), and others. Actor-network theory represents an attempt to assess the ways in which social and material entities are drawn together into complex networks that constitute the social world, the latter seen in constant state of becoming rather than as a static presence (Thrift, 1996; Hetherington, 1997; Latham, 2002).<sup>1</sup> From the present point of view the key argument is that all social processes take place somewhere, depend on material artefacts, and are both influenced by, and

constitutive of, different kinds of space (Mol & Law, 1994). The last aspect captures the idea of *topological* space (Murdoch, 1997).

Topology is originally a branch of mathematics that studies the rules of coordinating objects in a variety of coordinate systems, or spatial types. Philosopher Michel Serres and Bruno Latour (1995) illustrate topological space with a metaphor of a handkerchief that first is spread out for ironing (Murdoch, 1997). On the surface of that (Euclidean) space a point can be marked and distances between that and other locations determined. Thus, various relations and hierarchies between locations and activities can be assessed. Then Serres and Latour (1995) ask us to take the same handkerchief and crumple it, by pocketing it. Two distant points suddenly are close, even superimposed. Furthermore, if we tear the handkerchief in certain places, two points that were close can become very distant. This science of nearness and rifts is called *topology*, in distinction to the metrical geometry of the spread-out handkerchief (Murdoch, 1997, p. 360).

From the vantage point of the Finnish nation-state building, the crumpled handkerchief metaphor points readily at two significant issues. First, what constitutes the Finnish nation-state cannot be reduced to the 'flat-ironed' metric space of the state's territory. On the contrary, some aspects of Finland can usefully be thought of as discontinuous and immeasurable. Second, time should be seen as the flip side of space so that it is the space-time of Finland that is crumpled, not its territory in 'standstill'. Consequently, *nearness* in topological space of Finland is not defined by metric distances, but, rather, by the temporal sequences and intensities of the relations in question. For example, in the contemporary Finnish nation-state topological nearness between elements that make up the system of taxation exists in the form of disciplined repetition and orderliness that characterise the state's administrative praxis.

Seen in topological terms the Finnish nation-state does not exist as a single spatial type. Rather it 'performs several *kinds of space* in which different operations take place' (Mol & Law, 1994, p. 643 emphasis in original). These spatial types include 'regions', 'networks' and 'fluids' – spaces that are unconformable, yet related. It may be assumed that different aspects of the Finnish nation-state building depend on, and enact, different spatialities, so that some processes constitute and are constituted by regional spaces, some unfold in network spaces, and some exist through fluid spaces.

The state territory would seem to be the quintessential regional space of the Finnish nation-state. Mol and Law (1994, p. 643) define *regions* in simple terms as 'bounded clusters of objects' in Euclidean space. Hence, in regional space 'inside' is separated from the 'outside' by a territorial boundary. This is the common everyday conception of space lying at the root of geographer John Agnew's (1994) 'territorial trap'. In *network* space the Finnish nation-state is an organisation and an apparatus. Networks are bundles of related elements that are closely linked with each other. In network space distance is not metrical, but defined by the intensity and stability of the relation between the elements (Mol & Law, 1994, p. 643). Hence, in network space what is 'outside' the state apparatus is defined by a discontinuous boundary separating between disconnected and connected elements – a boundary that cannot be mapped onto Euclidean space.

Of the three spatialities discussed by Mol and Law (1994) *fluid* space is perhaps the most difficult to grasp. In fluid spaces relations between elements

change, but nevertheless retain a degree of continuity in the sense of homeomorphism. This means that in fluid space an object may transform without breaking or losing its identity. For example, a cube may deform into a sphere while retaining its identity as a finite shape with a continuous surface (Law, 2002, p. 94). Consequently, as distinct from network space, fluid objects have no privileged structure of relations. Moreover, in distinction from Euclidean regional space, no particular boundary around an object is privileged. Instead, for objects to exist in fluid space mobile boundaries are needed to establish when the objects' continuity is disrupted, that is, to separate between 'inside' and 'outside' (Law, 2002, pp. 99–100).

What perhaps best characterises the nature of fluid objects in the context of the Finnish nation-state is the flexibility of human identifications, that is, the practical sensibility embodied in multiple forms, inhabiting human bodies, capable of travelling to different places, and transforming through interaction with others. In the process identities may absorb new elements and other elements evaporate; they are propagated across different scales, spatial and temporal. Moreover, national identification is the ongoing negotiation of the meanings of Finnishness taking place in myriad social practices in the form of discourses and narratives of homeland, original culture, shared history, and destiny (Häkli, 1999). The resulting 'Finnish identity' forms an ever-changing, yet enduring resource for the Finnish nation-state, gluing the population flexibly together into an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1991).

With the risk of simplifying I assert that what characterises Finland as a regional space is *measurability*, whereas as a network space it is *accountability*, and as fluid space, *flexibility* (cf. Koch, 2004, p. 9). While these three spatial types cannot be reduced to each other, they cannot be performed independently either. Thus, regions are made by network means, and networks are indispensable precisely because of their capacity to effect on Euclidean regional space (Law, 2002, p. 97). The Finnish nation-state as a Euclidean territory is real enough, but not in any simple or given manner. It, too, is a *performance*, the result of bundled social practices held together in stable associations in the networks of the state apparatus. This network space, linking social actors in, and through, their activities, is absolutely necessary for the construction of territorial space (Häkli, 1994).

Moreover, the processes of national identification that give rise to, and occupy, fluid space intersect with network spaces. Networks are crucial for achieving and coordinating large-scale effects, such as the territorial functioning of the Finnish nation-state. However, they may also depend on effects that can only come about through the flexibility of fluid processes, such as actors' identification with Finland as an imagined community. Put simply, one may hypothesise that Finland as a *territorial* state is the result of national *networks* held together partly by flexible, yet continuous *fluid* national identity. Like other objects, the Finnish nation-state 'arises out of an intersection of homeomorphisms enacted in several topological systems' (Law, 2002, p. 101).

### **Statistics make networks make territory: the rise of 'Finland' within Sweden**

The topological conception of space has several consequences in the analysis of

what the Finnish nation-state is and how it works. What matters in the constitution of state territory is proximity of space-time within *networks* rather than proximity in geometrical space (Mol & Law, 1994). Hence, it is possible to study state building through processes taking place both 'inside' and 'outside' the Finnish territory. Therefore one can also understand how different geographical scales are involved in state building, that is, how micro- and macro-level processes are interrelated. An all-encompassing analysis of the constitution of the Finnish nation-state is well beyond the scope of one article, but I seek to illustrate the offerings of regional, network, and fluid spaces, and their interlinkages to our understanding of the building of the Finnish nation-state. Empirically the focus is on aspects with which I am most familiar through my previous work (Häkli 1999, 2002).

In approaching the building of the Finnish nation-state as the co-evolution of regional, network and fluid spaces, it is useful to begin with the idea of nation-state as a regional space. In topological terms state territories are *performances* in Euclidean space, that is, they are constructed and upheld through distance-conquering and space-controlling networks. Therefore it is appropriate to look into the formation of the Finnish state territory through the lens of network space.

In the Finnish context efforts to state building paralleled the rise of new institutional communication and control technologies in the seventeenth-century Kingdom of Sweden (Widmalm, 1990; Häkli, 1998). Territorial mapping, statistical data production, and administrative organisation served to establish controlling and commanding networks that progressively consolidated the Swedish state. As 'Finland' was an integral part of the Swedish state until 1809, these command and control networks were instrumental also for building the Finnish state apparatus (Figure 1).

In order to succeed the practices of data production and mapping required both human and non-human actors in stable networks. Resources of reliability and stability were put to use wherever they could be found. For example, the production of first population statistics in the eighteenth-century Kingdom of Sweden was fully dependent on the Swedish Lutheran Church's hierarchic and well-educated organisation that covered the Kingdom's entire territory. The church was the only organisation with the capacity to carry out such a territorially exhaustive and complex project, because it was the pioneer of a disciplined bureaucracy (Liedman, 1989). According to the rigid instructions given, the local clergy first assembled the data and delivered it to their rural dean. The dean aggregated the parish level data and forwarded it to the bishop, who aggregated the data on the level of the diocese. This information was then sent to the state district governor, who created a regional summary and forwarded it to Stockholm, the Kingdom's capital city, where national tables were composed (Luther, 1993).

The census is an illustrative example of how micro and macro scales intertwine when a network of actors is set up involving both human and non-human elements. To make sure that the data provided a comprehensive view of the population, particular attention was paid to the *form* with which the data was to be collected. This was designed to be uniform, unambiguous, and easy to fill in so that errors due to misinterpretation could be minimised. All the forms, a supply for 25 years, were *printed* in one printing house in *standard* size and on *standard paper* (Hjelt, 1900). To use Latour's terminology, this is how a small-scale

network of printing technology was 'translated' into a part of an emerging technology of large-scale surveillance, which again fed into the construction of state territory as a regional space. Here the form printed and used as an *immutable mobile* was crucial, because it linked various actors into a network and functioned to both compress space-time to create new proximities and to secure the network's stability. By standardising the data collection and regulating its vast organisation with detailed, centrally governed instructions of how to proceed, the census network emerged as a sizeable machinery that started to function well despite some initial problems with missing and erroneous data (Liedman, 1989).



**Figure 1.** The regional spaces of the Kingdom of Sweden (1200-1809), the Grand Duchy of Finland (1809-1917) and the Republic of Finland (since 1917).

From the beginning the Swedish state's interests in statistics reflected a push toward increasingly territorialized and informed government. The aim was to gather information 'of the kingdom as a whole, but also of each province in particular, so as to learn whether their standard of living has risen or fallen between the Diets' (Hjelt, 1900, p. 7; my translation). This activity turned out to be so important that in the beginning of 1749 an institution called *Tabellverket* (Tables Office) was established in Stockholm with the task of making statistical surveys of the Kingdom and its parts. The permanent statistical institution was the first of its kind and its inception marked the beginning of the world's longest

continuous population statistics (Liedman, 1989).

Statistics are so important for state building for the simple reason that the governmental observation of the state territory and population is impossible without such 'visualising devices' as statistics and maps. Before the age of statistical survey, the Swedish government had scarce knowledge of its subjects, as well as numerous other features of the Kingdom (Johannisson, 1988). The production of statistics thus greatly enhanced the Swedish state's governmental capacity and, with its territorially dispersed organisation, concrete involvement in the construction of the state's territorial-administrative structures. Statistical data was also instrumental in visualising the population as one entity defined by the state territory, thus paving the way for the idea of a unified nation inhabiting the modern nation-state (Häkli, 2002).

But how was 'Finland' influenced by these developments as it did not even exist yet as a political-territorial entity? The changing geopolitical context certainly influenced the manner in which networks of institutional control emerged. Under the Swedish rule, until 1809, Finland was merely a collection of 'eastern provinces' without a self-standing political-territorial status. Most decision making and practices of surveillance were centralised in Stockholm, the Kingdom's capital. However, Sweden's defeat by Russia in the War of Finland in 1808–1809 changed the circumstances so that Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy in the Russian empire (Jutikkala & Pirinen, 1996). Hence, in 1809 Finland was established as a state territory to be performed by network means, first as a Grand Duchy of Russia and, after separation from Russia in 1917, as an independent nation-state, the Republic of Finland (Figure 1).

Separation from Sweden did not mean abrupt break in some important state institutions, such as the practice of law and courts, and statistical and cartographic survey. In this sense the legacy of the Swedish rule actually set up the functioning of the Finnish state apparatus as autonomous Grand Duchy of Russia. Hence, while it makes sense to locate these networks in geographical terms (inside or outside the emerging or established Finnish territory), it should be borne in mind that in network space social and material actors fundamental to the network's functioning may reside anywhere. This is so, because the actors' proximity in topological space–time that matters, not proximity in continuous Euclidean space. Hence, from the suggested perspective it matters less whether the centre of accounting and surveillance was imperial Stockholm (circa 1200–1809), the Czar's St. Petersburg (1809–1917), or Helsinki (Finland's capital city since 1812). More essential is to see that the networks of mapping, surveillance and communication were successful in manipulating geographical distance and turning it into proximity in topological network space. This built and consolidated state power and institutional configurations that could later be enacted for 'Finnish purposes'. They provided the effective means for building the Finnish state territory as a regional space.

### **Mapping networks in Sweden and Finland**

Another large-scale network of actors took shape around the growing demand for cartographic areal representations in the Kingdom of Sweden from the early seventeenth century onward. Maps were increasingly being used for the state's

administrative and military purposes (taxation of land, economic observation and military reconnaissance), because they enabled efficient control of resources. Maps also made possible the planning of economic policies and military operations based on a systematic relationship between the two-dimensional space of the map surface and the Euclidean space of the represented objects .

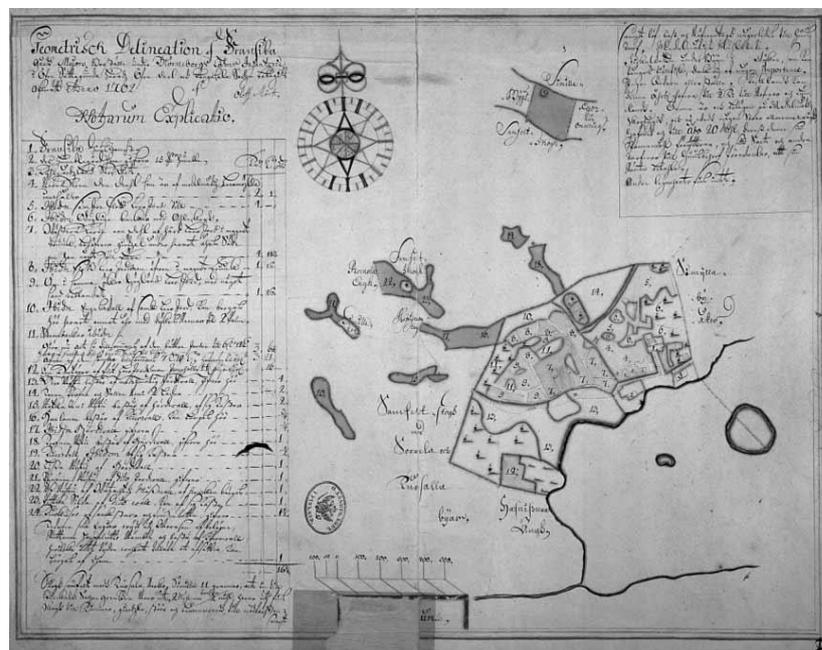
Maps thus represented a social and technological innovation that provided strategic advantage also for the military and economic control of the Kingdom's eastern borderland, Finland. This was deemed necessary because Russia's geopolitical power was growing in the seventeenth century and this threatened Swedish interests in the Baltic sphere . Moreover, the rise of mercantilism as the leading economic policy doctrine in Europe turned the Swedish government's interests to the control and maximal utilization of the natural and human resources within the state territory. Economic policy making, land survey and military reconnaissance caused a great demand for maps. This demand was met by institutionalising land survey and by establishing surveyors' offices in major towns. Anders Bure was appointed the first Director General of the land survey by King Gustavus Adolphus II in 1628. By the mid-eighteenth century the Land Survey Institution had grown into a territorially extensive organisation of some two hundred surveyors and almost as many assistants (Widmalm, 1990, p. 68). The first land surveyor began his work in what today is Finland in 1633 (see Kosonen, this volume).

The territorial spaces of Sweden, and Finland as part of it, were thus constructed by means of networks. In terms of topological space the mapping projects involved a stable network of state officials in charge, educated personnel with measuring skills, sophisticated technologies of cartography and measurement, the application of axiomatic mathematic rules, and equipment for measuring distance and determining location. The stability of the network was achieved by adhering to the rules of projection and the rigour of measurement, as well as with administrative decrees that regulated the process. Moreover, the material fixity of mapping instruments played an important role in stabilising the network and securing what Latour (1986) has termed 'optical consistency'. The term refers to the consistent relation between maps and the objects they represent, achieved through the tools, techniques and rules that govern cartographic representation. An important effect of optical consistency is that it opens up a view back from maps to the world they portray and thus encourages policies first to be designed on paper and then implemented concretely. Optical consistency is therefore a crucial link between network space and regional space, because it enables the governmental application of cartographic information in territorial control (Figure 2).

This governmental motive figured strongly in several mapping projects launched by the Swedish state in the eighteenth century. The mercantilist doctrine laid special emphasis on trade, migration, population growth, and economic improvement, and led the state to seek new knowledge as the basis of economic policy making (Widmalm, 1990). An especially significant project was the programme for more efficient agricultural production, one covering the entire territory of the Kingdom of Sweden, including the eastern provinces (Finland). The goal of this *storskifte* (Great Partition) was to rationalise rural land-ownership so that the number of individual land parcels would be minimised in favour of

large clusters. As a result the peasantry was expected to cultivate the land more effectively, grow in number, and thus stay in the country (Kain & Baigent, 1992). The project's eager protagonist Jacob Faggot, Director General of the Land Survey Institution in 1747–1777, considered *storskifte* one of the state's most important tools for directing economic development, because it would intensify the use of the country's most significant economic resources – land and labour (Widmalm 1990).

The land reform was really an occasion for cartographically aided physical planning on a state-wide scale, including the eastern provinces (Finland) where the reform began in 1757. Maps played a pivotal role in *storskifte*, either as tools for the assessment and redistribution of the available land, or as an official record of the procedure. The maps, functioning as *immutable mobiles*, were archived for later use and reference, and an extensive land register was gradually compiled. In this sense the reform, and its nineteenth-century Finnish modification *uusjako* (New Partition, 1848), acted as a driving force for the emerging networks that institutionalised territorial knowledge centred first in Stockholm, Sweden, and, after 1812, in Helsinki, Finland. The reform crystallises the interrelated nature of network space, the consolidation of state apparatus, and the territorialisation of government (see Revel, 1991; Häkli, 2002). The project produced territorial projections of the society, including its 'Finnish' parts. The project also contributed to the consolidation of the centralised administrative structures of the state because uniform and disciplined organisations were required in order to carry out large-scale mapping (Hacking, 1991).



**Figure 2.** A cadastral map from an eighteenth-century land register kept in Stockholm, Sweden. The map was drawn by land surveyor Olof Mört in 1702. The map shows the village of Ranssila in the province of Häme (Tavast) in Finland. (Courtesy of the Finnish virtual university: <http://www.virtuaaliyliopisto.fi/palvelut/maakirjakartat>)

Whereas mapping of the imperial territory was constituted by, and

constitutive of, network space, the practices, rules, actors and objects involved in producing these maps cannot themselves be mapped onto Euclidean space. The two spatialities are unconformable, yet they are related, because network space is absolutely necessary in the performance of regional space. The latter does not exist without the former – nation-state territories, as socially meaningful regional spaces, are produced by means of networks.

In all, the above examples illustrate the manner in which the Finnish state formation proceeded as efforts to build territorially exhaustive networks of surveillance and control. Maps were drawn locally, but were soon transported to be analysed and archived in the imperial capital. 'Finland' was literally drawn into existence. This happened first as part of the centralised Swedish state and then, after 1809, as the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland. What resulted was not only governmental organisation that was fundamentally important for the consolidation of state power in Finland, but also a regional space taken for granted as one of the defining characteristics of the modern state: the sovereign territory. This is how 'networks make regions make networks' (Law, 2002, p. 97). The state administration, functioning as a bundle of stable networks, performs the state territory as a juridico-political region in Euclidean space. In regional space the state is defined by cartographic fixity, territorially contained juridical regulation and military control. When military troops are moving, or the territory is mapped, the relevant conception of distance is *metric*.

However, as a set of networks the emerging Finnish state apparatus is not defined by metric distance, but by stability and proximity in time-space. The states, in general, have succeeded in consolidating their power by compressing time-space and thus extending and strengthening their capacity to control territory. As the case of Finland under the Kingdom of Sweden exemplifies, the emerging nation-state as a network object is one with its essential functions: communication, taxation, defence, policing, schooling, planning, distributing, building, etc. In this regard the modern nation-state is a technological endeavour based on stable associations between actors, materials, devices, institutions and regulations, and capable of performing its territory as a regional space.

### **The Finnish nation in/as fluid space**

Until the early nineteenth century there existed few or no nationalist sentiments centred on the Finnish nation, nor was there any concerted effort to build Finnish identity in the popular symbolic realm (Engman, 1995). However, when Sweden ceded Finland to Russia in 1809 the conditions for the Finnish nation building changed dramatically. As an autonomous Grand Duchy of Russia, Finland was first defined unambiguously as a territorial and political entity. During the nineteenth century the nationalistic sentiments grew stronger in Finland as a result of active elite-led nation-building efforts, so that by 1917, when Finland gained independence, it had become a 'nation-state proper' (Häkli, 1999).

Yet, as is the case with all national identities, the content and meaning of Finnishness has changed over time, because the meanings of the nation's core symbols remain contested (Herb & Kaplan, 1999). While boundaries between 'us' and 'them' have routinely been drawn to construct the Finnish identity, these have always been blurred by the fact that different people inhabit different kinds of

social worlds (cf. Morley & Robins, 1995). Moreover, the models for, and influences on, nation building have always travelled so that many aspects of the Finnish nation building actually derive from international sources and tendencies, such as the national-romanticist movement in nineteenth-century Europe. Also population changes caused by international migration have for long challenged the more static patterns of Finnish identity-building (see Hedberg & Kepsu, this volume).

In the face of an understanding of national identities as always transient and in the state of becoming, the question remains, 'How is it possible that such vast collective 'imagined communities' as nations have come about and persist?' The answer, I suggest, lies in the nature of nation as a fluid space object, which is always transforming, yet flexibly enduring. While national identities are social constructs that derive from boundaries between national groups, they are also socially flexible and travel when necessary (Meyer & Geschiere, 2003). Moreover, national identities are not structured in the way networks are. Mol and Law (1994, p. 659) write that

sometimes fluid spaces perform sharp boundaries. But sometimes they do not – though one object gives way to another. So there are mixtures and gradients. And inside these mixtures everything informs everything else.

It is evident that while the Finnish identity has mostly been expressed in a very structured and consistent manner, through core symbols, narratives and a set of propositions about what it means to be a Finn, the actual experience of Finnishness has always varied greatly depending on context (Häkli 2006). This structured flexibility explains, for instance, how national unity could arise above the numerous social, economic, regional, political schisms that existed among the Finns still in the late nineteenth century (Engman, 1995; Häkli, 1999). As the symbolisms attached to the Finnish nation have been subject to differing significations depending on the situation and people involved, it has been possible for very different people to adopt Finnishness as their primary identity. Hence, in the constitution of the Finnish [national?] identity, the state's region may not be the most significant form of spatiality, any more than networks' time-space proximity. While both are implicated in what the nation is, it is the fluid space that the processes of Finnish national identification inhabit and enact.

In the Finnish context, the structured flexibility of national identity has been evident in at least three important aspects of nation building. First, much of the intellectual work to create Finnish literary culture was done in the Swedish language despite the fact that the nineteenth-century national-romanticist thought stressed the role of vernacular language as the anchor and source of cultural identity (Engman, 1995). The Swedish-speaking elite was thus involved in the construction of vernacular culture and identity to which it barely had access across the 'language boundary'. Instead, in this work of promoting the 'Finnish cause' the elite network used the old imperial language of the former colonising power, Sweden. An example of homeomorphic transformation in fluid space, the meaning of language as a key symbol of the Finnish identity persisted even though the Swedish language was used as the instrument of this identity-building.

Second, Finnish nationalists reached their political goal in late 1917 with the declaration of independence of the Finnish nation-state. Already by the spring of

1918 the young republic had experienced a traumatic Civil War, with more than 30,000 casualties and a profound division of the country between the supporters of 'Whites' (government) and 'Reds' (revolutionaries). During the fight and its aftermath a Red terror campaign against the conservative right wing was paralleled by White terror against the supporters of the revolutionary movement. Following the victory of the Whites thousands of Reds were detained in internment camps and executed or killed by maltreatment and poor conditions (Alapuro, 1988).

While the Whites celebrated their victory in numerous commemorations, the Reds refused for many years to participate and sometimes were downright excluded. The wounds of the Civil War started to heal only after the Second World War when the massive war effort and, particularly, the external threat caused by the Soviet Union eventually brought the rival political factions closer to one another. Hence, preserved in myriad instances of using and reproducing the Finnish identity in people's everyday life, the national unity survived the traumatic Civil War (Häkli, 1999). This illustrates how remarkably flexible the nation is. In the process of national identification the meanings of core symbols may change so that even political opposites may appropriate them without sacrificing the overarching idea of nation. This, again, captures well the idea of national identity as a homeomorphically changing process of fluid space.

The third example of the structured flexibility of Finnishness is the renegotiation of the Finnish identity after the breakdown of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. The official foreign policy doctrine of Finland during the Cold War had positioned the country as a neutral borderland between the East and the West. The doctrine was seen as an unquestionable truth by most Finns and it was touted in newspaper editorials, governmental speeches and statements, and in discussions among the political elite. The doctrine's hegemonic position influenced also the way in which ordinary Finns saw themselves. The self-understanding of Finns as connected to the East reflected the language of the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance (in Finnish, *YVA-sopimus*) that formed the basis for the relations between Finland and the Soviet Union from 1948 to 1992. The fifth article of the treaty expressed the warm spirit of Finno-Soviet 'cooperation and friendship' that many Finnish individuals and organisations embraced.

However, when the Soviet Union collapsed, a space opened for critically re-thinking the question of who Finns are. On the surface of Finland's official foreign policy discourses the idea of neutrality remained as a leading principle, but in practice Finland was being connected ever more firmly to the Western world, for example, by means of the membership in the European Union and other international organisations. Gradually talk about the West as Finland's 'true' geopolitical group of reference gained ground, first among the elites and then in the popular realm. One of the key issues in this new identity talk was to show that Finland was actually the gateway of the West toward the East rather than a neutral watershed. In other words, after a long period of careful balancing between the interests of the Soviet Union and aspirations to belong to the West, Finns now began to express their identity as an unquestionably Western nation (Harle & Moisiö, 2000; Moisiö, this volume).

A concomitant of the new Western-oriented Finnish identity was growing

self-criticism concerning the Cold War period. The negatively charged term 'Finlandisation' (*Finlandisierung*) was coined by German foreign-policy analysts in the 1950s, but it travelled and was flexibly adopted as part of the Finnish identity talk of the 1990s. Historian Timo Vihavainen (1991) popularised the expression 'a nation on all fours' in his book *Kansakunta rähmälläin*, documenting the years of Finlandisation in terms of excessive deference of Finns to Soviet interests and sensibilities. This shows again how one of the nation's key symbols, in this case its name, can act as an element of fluid space. The fluidity of the Finnish identity transgresses the boundaries between the international and the national, and mingles positive with negative imageries as sources for national signification (cf. Raento & Brunn, this volume). The process of national identification is indeed homeomorphic, allowing a remarkable degree of change and contradiction in the meanings of Finnishness without compromising its durability as the glue that holds the nation together.

In all, the specific narratives and symbols shaping the Finnish identity have never been unambiguous, nor reducible to the direct aspirations of the elite networks who set them in motion. The Finnish identity has been subject to unpredictable transformation, and as arising from different social bases and contexts, it has always contained various contested and contradictory elements. Hence, the narratives of Finnishness are differently appropriated and reproduced, and sometimes contested, depending on who is speaking, in what context and for what reason (cf. Johnston, 1995).

While it is useful to conceptualise Finnishness as a process of fluid space, it does not follow that national identification could be thought of in terms of only one spatiality. The Finnish nation is constituted through the intertwinement of various spatialities: fluid identities are created and upheld by means of territorial imagery derived from the state's regional space, which again is performed with the aid of stable institutional networks. Moreover, the dissemination and internalisation of national symbolisms enact network spaces, such as school education and mass communication (Paasi, 1996). Hence, the nation-state exists through different spatialities simultaneously, none of which can be thought of as underpinning the others.

## Conclusion

Topological analysis draws on theoretical work that has sought new analytical tools for the theorisation of time and space in multiple empirical contexts. Developing the notion of a topological analysis of nation-state formation, I have examined how such an analysis might help in approaching the intersections of seemingly incongruous aspects of state formation and nation building. These developments, following their own temporal scales, partly contradictory logics, and somewhat unexpected outcomes, have still ended up building the world of nation-states as we know it (see Abramson, 1998). I argue that through the suggested approach it is possible to gain a better understanding of the diverse and discontinuous socio-spatial relationships through which the nation is, in fact, made.

I hope to have accomplished two things. First, by looking at the history of the Finnish nation-state building I have shown that we should complement the

Euclidean conception of measurable space with sensitivity to other forms of unconformable but related spatial types, ones defined by accountability and flexibility. However, as the Finnish case clearly shows, Euclidean space is not a defunct or obsolete understanding of social spatiality, for it continues to be highly relevant in some aspects of the constitution of social [soci(et)al?] life. Regional space has evidently been at the core of those social and material practices that reproduce the Finnish state territory. Various territorial practices, such as military border control and the areal delimitation of administrative authority or juridical competence, continue to be based on this measurable and metric form of space.

Yet, it is clear that accepting Euclidean space as a relevant form of spatiality does not justify what geographer Edward Soja (1989, p. 7) has called the illusions of 'opaqueness' and 'transparency', that is, the misconception that geographical analysis can readily see causalities just by looking at concrete space or by thinking through spatial concepts. This is where the topological analysis of nation-state building is particularly compelling: we do not have to presuppose a territorial foundation for the Finnish identity, but, instead, the deterritorial or transterritorial aspects of national identification may come to the fore. An understanding of the Finnish nation-state building as an ever-changing and sometimes self-contradicting field of core narratives and meanings, and as an international accomplishment that first depended on elites who barely knew the Finnish language, opens a way out of the 'territorial trap' (Agnew, 1994). A topological analysis of the Finnish identity challenges the dominant imagination of the geographical world based on cartographic projections of crisp state territories and social processes unfolding neatly within these boundaries.

Second, I have worked to show that the idea of interconnected spatial types of regions, networks, and fluids can usefully be applied to the analysis of the Finnish nation-state building. In topological analysis it is possible to escape not only the 'territorial trap' but also what might be called the 'teleological trap' – the endpoint 'taken as sufficient explanation of the historical trajectory' (Bacchi & Jose, 1994, p. 264). In the mainstream 'nationalistic historiography' of Finland the awareness of Finnish identity is typically postulated into historical contexts where it could not have existed. Moreover, historical events are presented as causal chains leading to the 'predestined occurrence' of Finland gaining independence in 1917. This is the result of using terms that connote future, purpose, or intent without recognising that such apparently future-directed processes are actually underdetermined, that is, conditioned less by future outcomes (the Finnish nation-state) than ongoing actions and experiences (for example, in the Kingdom of Sweden). Sensitivity to the 'teleological trap' helps in avoiding the oversimplification of cause-and-effect relations in the history of the Finnish nation-state building and, instead, highlights its synchronic aspects.

In all, on the basis of the Finnish case study it seems that with the aid of topological conception of space it is possible to trace the complex geographies of nation-state building and to analyse power relations within these regions, networks and fluids in a novel way. Topological analysis has the advantage of allowing the meaningful juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated, dispersed and episodic events and processes that, nevertheless, clearly are part of the history of a particular nation-state. What here remains a tentative discussion on how to begin such analysis should eventually be extended to an in-depth exploration of the

relationships between the nation-state as a territorial region, set of functional networks, and fluid identities – realities unconformable, yet interrelated.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The conception of space in actor-network theory has much in common with the human geography of the past two decades. Both view space as relational, constituted within, and constitutive of, social processes (Murdoch, 1997). Bruno Latour has been criticised, perhaps rightly, for his neglect of contemporary geographical research on social spatiality (Murdoch, 1998, p. 358). Latour's conception of space might suggest that nothing exists outside the network and that network spatiality underpins all other possible spatialities. However, John Law (2002, p. 97) has usefully pointed out that the spatiality of networks is merely one form into which others (such as regional and fluid spatiality) cannot be reduced (see Mol & Law, 1994).