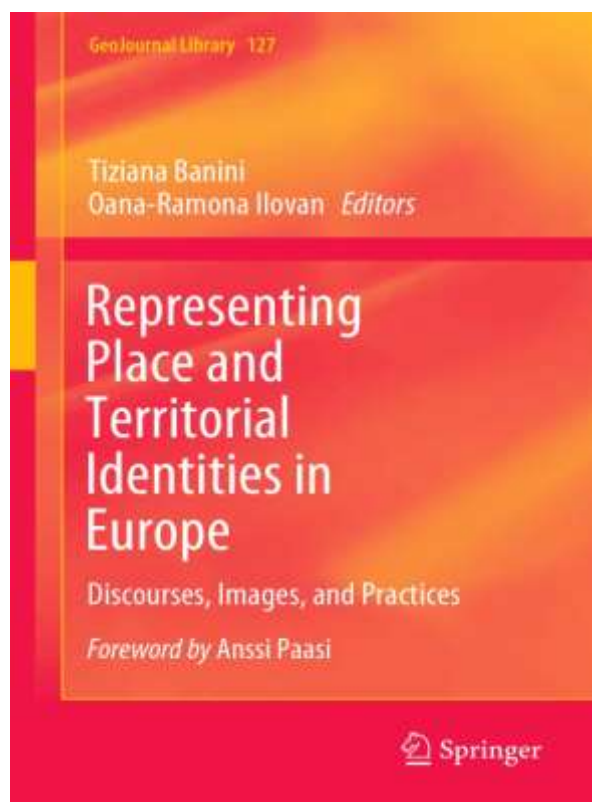


## BOOK REVIEW

### REPRESENTING PLACE AND TERRITORIAL IDENTITIES IN EUROPE. Discourses, Images and Practices

TIZIANA BANINI, OANA-RAMONA ILOVAN  
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Although territorial and identity-related issues are frequent topics for the entire European space, territorial and urban planning, regional-continental identity, increasing spatial cohesion, developing competitiveness, and standard representation of internal migrations within the discursive methodology of this current volume, the dynamics of socio-territorial belonging is valued as an identity argument and criterion of a joint spatial system seen as a challenge rather than an intersection of geographic topics. This challenge emerges from the main research objective of the editors, namely, to generate innovative, cognitive and meta-cognitive territorial architectures ('spatial consciousness') up to a real-life collective memory ('sense of place') equivalent of the place identity (re-territorial modeling and re-bordering processes at different local and regional levels).

Interdisciplinary bridging place-identity discourses with territorial images and social practices, the current volume tackles a critical approach focusing on Europe and its internal cultural borders as well as the key role of capitalizing on territorial identity.

In supporting the above mentioned key concepts, the contributors encourage a broader understanding of these unifying challenges and try to decode a new 'explanatory gap', closely connected with the one that dissociates both the identity-related factors (cultural) and the territorial

ones (deconstructing places) according to place theory. For this both scholarly and new cutting edge research provide a strong emphasis on theoretical and empirical studies particularly concerning the relations of border and territoriality which necessarily appeared to link not just mental ('identity') and physical ('territory') phenomena, but conceptual analyses of heritage theory and integrated landscape within the theory of place (i.e. group identities, spatial consciousness, cyberspace, cultural territories) on one side, and the advances in representational geography (i.e. territorialization, cultural stereotypes, etc.) and experimental territorial studies (i.e. interviews, monuments, eco museums, cultural and environmental heritage, photo essay, sentiment analysis, participatory photographs and collages, etc.) on the other.

The book begins with a foreword by Anssi Paasi, a human geographer from the University of Oulu, Finland with a high expertise in conceptual and empirical work related to nationalism, territoriality, borders, the production of space and the theory and practice of the region.

This Springer edited collection covers sixteen case study chapters structured in four extended interconnected sections (I. *Constructing Identities: Re-Building Place-Based Relations*; II. *Representations of Nations and Cities: Ever-Changing Territorial Identities*; III. *Negotiating Identities and Belonging: State Borders and Internal Migrations*, IV. *Challenges and Stereotypes: Representing Rural Areas*) which set the stage for subsequent experimental and theoretical research in Territorial Studies. One of the most striking meta-features of this highly engaged volume is that it launches a profound scholarly analysis of all the relevant issues mentioned above. The authors display in depth and with clarity what is at stake in the current territorial development debates on the nature of these relations as

an exceptional contribution to territorial studies, as an interdisciplinary effort to our understanding as readers. To reach these goals, multi-disciplinary interactions were performed. The variety of perspectives the place could be approached from is evident (geography, ecology, social sciences, psychology, philosophy, literature, cultural/border studies, computer science, etc.) and is well exhibited in the debates of the present volume. The volume is marked by cutting-edge debates in these research fields, largely, although not exclusively, stemming from innovative recent work on place theory.

This synthesis turns on a considerable development of the concept of *connecting places* "incorporated in written texts, visual materials and social practices, and which are detectable through textual analysis, visual analysis and direct surveys" as a new paradigm, so as to include many, if not all, of the factors of conscious reasoning neglected from a narrower version of the European territorial paradigm, which stresses unconscious or non-reflective *place attachment* patterns and foregrounds these as the causes of religious 'beliefs' or 'spiritual enrichment' as a form of "profound insights in the various everyday life territorial identities".

The basic philosophy of this volume stands in the identification of needs for specific territorial support to human actions and place manifestations and cultural practices (i.e. rural representations as narratives of village space, idyllic representations of rural spaces and its impoverishment mechanisms) or core-periphery deficits (i.e. the 'sense of place as spatial control'). A special interest is given to the urban renewal phenomena linked with a more extensive vision of using sustainable, participatory approaches to explain more and more detailed features of particular cases (i.e. self-representations in people's attachment to places, the "touristification" and the gentrification process in the inner city of Palermo; or local music identity

within the Romanian urban landscape, eco-museums for landscape education and inhabitants' territorial identity; respectively hegemonic representations of place identity within the Romanian context, idyllic representations of poverty in French rural areas, Transylvanian bordering practices of space representations; the ideological representations of civil architecture and industrial production of the Romanian territorial value together with the industrial heritage and cultural landscape; self-representations of territorial identities in Romania and in the Republic of Moldova, migrating women's self-representations of places; or Polish rural representations of village space. The recent efforts to incorporate all these findings from social sciences ('imagined communities') into territorial theorizing ('settled communities'), or, alternatively seen, to change extraterritoriality by subsuming its aspects under the *cultural turn*, must be understood as the latest expressions of the dynamic and productive challenge between the urge to share other disciplinary approaches or to draw a boundary around the social – constructivist perspective as such, which is nowadays considered to be decisive. As readers, at the end of such an analysis, we might find that one of the distinguishing features of today's approach of place theory in action is precisely the impossibility to entirely separate these factors that contribute to determining a complex and continuously changing reality from a theoretical perspective. Discussing the mutual exchange between physical places and 'hyper-places' within the globalization process, one must acknowledge the difficulty and the challenge of such studies. The authors investigated – often in a social-constructivist manner – the participatory processes, clearly expressing their fundamental hypotheses. Taken as a whole, this volume, given its entire trend to focus on relevant issues of *place* and *identity*, should be seen as a constructive attempt to integrate different works into a new paradigm that harnesses interpretive approaches to an explanatory project. These and other debates need to be noticed by readers, so that they can further acknowledge them and make up their own minds as they go along.