MAKING NEWS: NEWSPAPERS AND THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF NEW REGIONS

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ABSTRACT

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 institutionalisation (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, p. 246). Their reports about the region, their use of its name, and their 'placing' of events within it help anchor a region in local consciousness.

Paasi (1991, 2002) used four distinct but interrelated 'shapes' to analyse the institutionalisation of regions: the territorial; the symbolic; the institutional and the func-tional. The most tangible one is territorial shape. It includes a region's borders and the political struggles through which these were constructed over time. The territorial shape also consists of physical characteristics such as landscape, patterns of land use, infrastructure, settlement patterns and heritage sites. The symbolic shape is constituted by stereotypes. These may be based on the territorial aspect or the characteristics of the population living within these boundaries. The region's name is an important part of the symbolic shape. The selection of symbolic aspects to construct spatial identity discourses is not fixed but linked to choices made in 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 aspect is linked to the political organisation and administration which organises and regulates the territory. Finally, the functional shape refers to the established role in larger spatial systems. This aspect refers not only to the position of a space in the hierarchical territorial organisation of the nation-state or international relations, but also to other types of relations with other areas, based for instance on migration or trade. Regions differ in the form and degree to which they institutionalise over time (Zimmerbauer & Paasi 2013).

This paper focuses on the role that news reports play in the institutionalisation of regions. The objective of the study was on the one hand to identify whether news reports can provide clues to help understand ongoing processes of institutionalisation, and on the other hand to find and interpret evidence of the ongoing processes of (de)institutionalisation in the case study area. News reports, like other media representations, are an important part of the institutional shape of regions. Reports on regions demonstrate that journalists and editors think the region is both meaningful and familiar to their readers. Upon close reading, one discovers how the media can generate knowledge about the region; news reports reflect the institutionalisation of regions in the public consciousness.

Earlier analyses of media representations of regions have focused on spatial biases in news reporting (Walmsley 1980, 1982), or on the reproduction of single regions such as 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). Present-day processes of rescaling have led to complex and dynamic situations that need to be taken into account when researching the institutionalisation of a region. Recently created regions might partly overlap with vibrant existing ones, deinstitutionalising regions or regions that have hardly developed any symbolic or institutional shape. This complex, layered system presents stakeholders with both opportunities and challenges when they try to create and represent an identity for a new region.

This research focused on one such dynamic layered constellation of old and new regions within one Dutch province. The aim was to shed light on how newspapers support (or complicate) the institutionalisation of regions. Comparison between the five selected regions is feasible, as they are embedded in the same political-administrative context.

This paper starts with some background on the rise of new regions and the consequences of their emergence for regional identities. Then it turns to the role that journalists and editors of newspapers play in these processes of institutionalisation. This overview is followed by an introduction to our case study area, the Dutch province of Noord-Brabant, and a description of the research methodology.

THE PROLIFERATION OF REGIONS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF REGIONAL IDENTITY

Following an era in which the relevance of regions seemed to be dismissed, both politically and academically, the concept of the region has been revived over the last decades. The importance of some historical regions like Bavaria, Catalonia and Flanders has increased, while simultaneously new regions are being formed. Many scholars have related the revival of regions to processes of globalisation, which in turn leads to administrative rescaling. The increasing exposure to global competition and the changing role of the nation-state pose challenges to local administrations. They try to cope through forms of co-operation under the umbrella of new regions (Keating 1997; Brenner 1999, 2000, 2003, 2004; Jessop 2000; Hooghe & Marks, 2003; Rodríguez-Pose & Sandall 2008; Syssner 2009; Cowell 2010). As a result, some old regions have gained importance, and numerous regions have emerged out of new forms of municipal co-operation and multi-level governance. This trend has been characterised as the 'new regionalism' (Keating 1997; Kitson *et al.* 2004; Paasi 2013). Jones and MacLeod (2004) described traditional regions as spaces

of regionalism and emergent regions as regional spaces.

In England, regional development agencies, the much smaller city-regions, and the many bottom-up regional economic development partnerships have created a patchwork of overlapping new regions (Deas & Giordano 2003). According to De Peuter *et al.* (2011), Flanders had over 150 new regions. 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, p. 62). And in the Netherlands, a complicated layering of hundreds of disjoint new regions has arisen over the last two decades (Teisman 2007; De Vries & Evers 2008). The emergence of these regions might be based on the amalgamation of adjacent territories. But just as often they are outgrowths of networks, linking non-contiguous local administrations across different scales with non-administrative partners such as business entities and other stakeholders. In this study, we illustrate this dynamic by focusing on one example of the new layered situation in the Netherlands, where several partly overlapping new regions have emerged within the established province of Noord-Brabant.

Today's new regions are often short-lived, they partially overlap in space with other regions, and they lack clear spatial borders. Nonetheless, developing some sort of regional identity is crucial for the legitimation of policy choices of such new regions and the mobilisation of support for these policies (Cox 1999; Bell & York 2010; Harrison 2010; Paasi 2013). New regions do not develop the thick identities that are 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). Instead, the identities of new regions tend to be much 'thinner' and more 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, p. 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 connected (Terlouw & Van Gorp 2014).

NEWSPAPERS AND REGIONAL IDENTITY

Communication is essential to the construction of regions and regional identities (Simon 2004). As Paasi (2013, p. 1208) put 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).

The mass media can shape popular perception of spaces and places – at least to some extent (Walmsley 1980, 1982; Croteau & Hoynes 2014; Devereux 2014). "The news media encompasses a discursive practice that contributes to what we see in the world and how we see it" (Eriksson 2008, p. 370). This applies as much to faraway places as to 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 content, media representations are important and "have real material consequences" (Eriksson 2008, p. 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, p. 200; Adams 2009).

Newspapers select what they think is news or noteworthy for their readers (Van Ginneken 1998). The decision to publish articles about events or plans relating to a new region 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 relevance. If and how newspaper articles mention the name of a region thus reflects its ongoing institutionalisation.

CASE STUDY: LAYERED REGIONS IN THE PROVINCE OF NOORD-BRABANT

For the present study, we analysed news reports about five regions within the Dutch province of Noord-Brabant – in common parlance, just 'Brabant'. The identity of and identification with Brabant is strong among administrators, inhabitants and the Dutch population at large (Bijsterveld 2014). The rural, Catholic and anti-modern representations of Brabant, resonating with feelings of otherness from the country's historical powerhouse to the west, called Holland, are part of a collective memory or popular image of the province, even though the meaning of this identity has evolved over time (Van Oudheusden 1996b). Any new or old region within this province will have to position itself with respect to the traditional Brabant identity.

The five selected 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 its five biggest cities: Breda, Tilburg, Eindhoven, Helmond and Den Bosch. The stated aims of this co-operation 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 (Brabant-Stad 2010). BrabantStad is the most prominent region featured on the website of the province. This initiative is framed by national politics: by banding together, these cities and the province could 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 (Brabant-Stad 2014). BrabantStad also prepared a bid for the European Capital of Culture as part of its strategy to strengthen the bonds between the constituent cities and their surroundings and to present a common identity to its inhabitants and the outside world (2018 Brabant 2010).

Two other urban regions, Brabantse Stedenrij and Waalboss, were included in the study to allow for comparison of the ongoing institutionalisation and the role of news media in the process (Figure 1). A planning concept preceding the establishment of BrabantStad, namely the Brabantse Stedenrij, 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 concept of BrabantStad, the Brabantse Stedenrij is still in use, perhaps because of its strong spatial imagery. The third region is Waalboss. Initially, this was a planning concept inspired by discourses of the competiveness of urban networks and 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 2002 in a spatial planning document of the province Noord-Brabant.

BrabantStad's rural counterpart is Het Groene Woud, an area surrounded by 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'. The national planning document *Nota Ruimte* (2004) bestowed upon it the status of National Landscape. As such, it could maintain and possibly strengthen its distinctive qualities although no strict protective policies were implemented. Het Groene Woud is rooted in older policies and local efforts to restructure intensive farming in this area (Janssen *et al.* 2007; Renes 2011). The new region was expected to strengthen the local rural economy and simultaneously
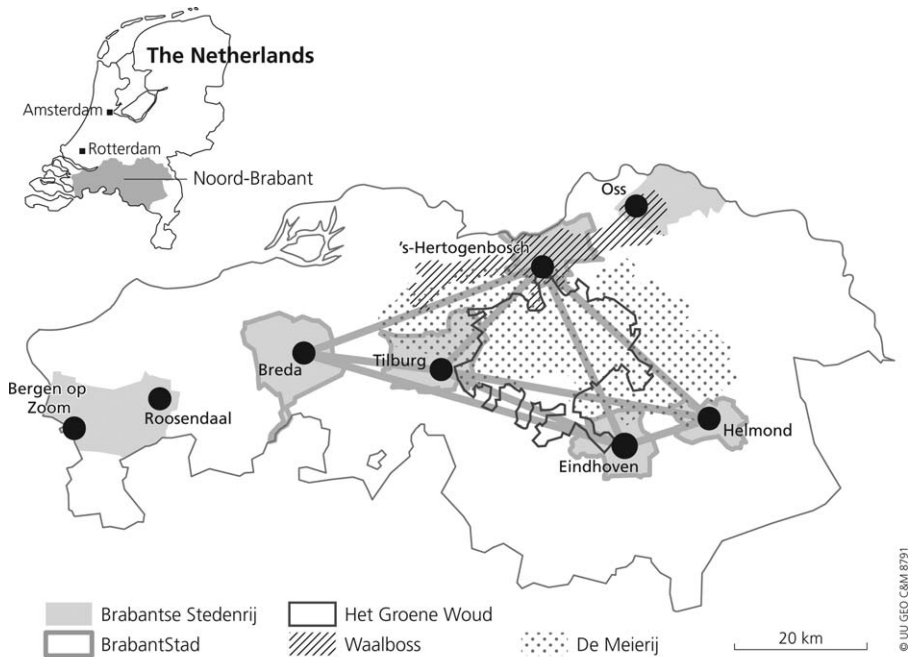
Figure 1. *Map of Noord-Brabant.*

keep the area open, green and thus attractive for recreation. 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 co-operation. The Meierij is important in traditional representations of Brabant that accentuate peasant farming on sandy soils, rural society and Roman Catholic life (Van Oudheusden 1996a, 1996b; Bijsterveld 2000; Janssen 2005). De Meierij was included in this study to see how newer and older regions co-exist in news reports.

The case study thus consists of five spatially overlapping regions: one traditional rural region and one recent rural region, both of which align with the traditional Brabant identity; and three urban regions, networks of cities of which one is spatially contiguous (Waalboss). These urban regions have to

find ways to position themselves with respect to the traditional, non-urban, anti-modern Brabant identity.

METHODOLOGY

This research is based on an analysis of articles about BrabantStad, Brabantse Stedenrij, Waalboss, Het Groene Woud, and De Meierij which were published in Dutch national and Brabant's regional newspapers. The underlying idea was that an analysis of regional newspapers might shed light on the construction and reproduction of regions (Keating 1997). Analysing national newspapers, on the other hand, would most likely reveal whether information on the newly established regions is communicated outside their immediate surroundings, whereby they could draw national attention.

Table 1. *Methodology for content analysis.*

Step 1	Quantitative analysis of news reports, 2003–2012	How many articles used the name of the region?
		How did the frequency develop over time?
Step 2	Qualitative analysis of sample (26 April–26 October of the years 2004, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012)	Who used the name of the region?
		Was the region explained, and if so how?
		How was the name used: to identify a location, organisation, project, or otherwise?
		Which topics were recurrent in the reports?
		Was there other evidence of institutionalisation?

As institutionalisation is a dynamic process – regions might come and go – the analysis spanned the period between 2003 and 2012.

News coverage was analysed in three large national newspapers: *De Telegraaf, De Volkskrant* and *NRC. De Telegraaf* is the country's largest (paid) newspaper, with a circulation of 600,000. It can be classified as a populist newspaper[1] within the Dutch market. Both the *Volkskrant* and the *NRC*, which are generally seen as quality newspapers, have a much smaller circulation (260,000 and 210,000, respectively). The editorial offices of these three national newspapers are located in the Randstad (Holland) – and thus outside Brabant. Three regional newspapers in Brabant were also analysed The Western part of the province is covered by the *BN/De Stem* (circulation approximately 115,000). The *Brabants Dagblad* (circulation about 130,000) targets the central and north-eastern part of the province. And people in the area surrounding Eindhoven read the *Eindhovens Dagblad* (circulation approximately 110,000). These three regional papers are part of the same media concern, De Wegener Nieuwsmedia Group, and as a result might share news articles.

The Lexis Nexis digital archives[2] were used to search and access the material. Due to the fragmentary presence of regional newspaper articles in Lexis Nexis before 2003, the analysis is limited to the period 2003–2012. This decade covers the time when three of our case-study regions were created.

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 by name, the more manifest it will be in society (Simon 2004). Thus, our research started with a quantitative content analysis. Articles that mentioned the name of the region were counted by using the name of the region as the query term when searching the Lexis Nexis digital archives. The long time frame of the analysis allowed us to identify trends in the frequency with which names of regions were used.

Moving beyond mere measurement of a region's popularity, the next step was to perform a qualitative content analysis on a selection of the over 7,000 articles using the name of one of the five regions. Six half-year samples were drawn, resulting in a set of a little over 2,000 articles (see Table 1). Sampling half-year periods eliminated a possibly strong influence of short-span issue-attention cycles but revealed recurring themes and trends over the years.

The first part of our qualitative analysis focused on agents: who used the name of

the region in the article? Elites such as policy-makers, planners or chambers of commerce are, as Frisvoll and Rye (2009, p. 179) pointed out, "more active than most people in the production of new regions and their identity narratives". Identifying who used the name indicates whether the region is an elitist concept or common knowledge.

It was assumed that the more familiar to the readership the region is as a spatial entity, the less need there is for explanation. The second part of our qualitative analysis therefore looked for the presence of explanations of the region – specifically, references to its location or function.

Frisvoll and Rye (2009) found 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 readers. Therefore, the third part of our qualitative analysis examined how journalists framed the selected regions: as places, as localities where things occur, as organisations that do things, or as projects? References to regions in terms of projects or organisations hint at thin identities, whereas references to a region as a place or location of events would point to a thick identity. The fourth part of our qualitative analysis concerned the topics of the newspaper articles. To what extent did reported topics or events reveal a 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,[3] were recorded as well.

RESULTS

The quantitative analysis demonstrated 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 over 10 years), whereas no articles mentioned Waalboss. In the half-year sample, the analysis generated only a handful of hits. We therefore excluded the national newspapers from further qualitative analysis. Regardless of the

meaning the five regions may have had to the editors or readership of regional newspapers, they seemed to be of little consequence to the readers of national newspapers. Awareness of these regions was scant outside Brabant.

URBAN BRABANT: BRABANTSE STEDENRIJ, BRABANTSTAD AND WAALBOSS

Regional newspapers (*BN/De Stem*, *Brabants Dagblad* and *Eindhovens Dagblad*) helped familiarise their readers in Brabant with the three urban regions, as they carried reports about these regions. The number of news reports differed by region, however (see Figure 2). BrabantStad was mentioned most often. The *Eindhovens Dagblad* seemed less 'involved' in BrabantStad than the *BN/De Stem* and the *Brabants Dagblad*. As Figure 2b demonstrates, coverage of Waalboss peaked in 2005 and was more localised: all but one article in the sample appeared in the *Brabants Dagblad*. Of the three new urban regions, Brabantse Stedenrij had the least exposure: only 40 articles in 10 years (see Figure 2). The name Brabantse Stedenrij was usually followed by some explanation, which was not surprising considering its infrequent use.

Waalboss seemed to exemplify a weak and very thin regional identity. The reports focused on a single issue: the development of a business park (see Table 2). Articles used the name Waalboss mostly for a specific site where ongoing development was contested. The plans for the business park were an integral part of the planning document that had introduced the Waalboss region. Since 2004, newspapers carried stories on local resistance to this new business park, and from 2009 onwards this debate dominated the news reports. In the articles, the name of the region came to be equated with the much smaller business park, which triggered criticism among local politicians and stakeholders such as Milieudefensie (an environmental NGO). As a result of the focus on the local debate on the development of business park, readers might have become
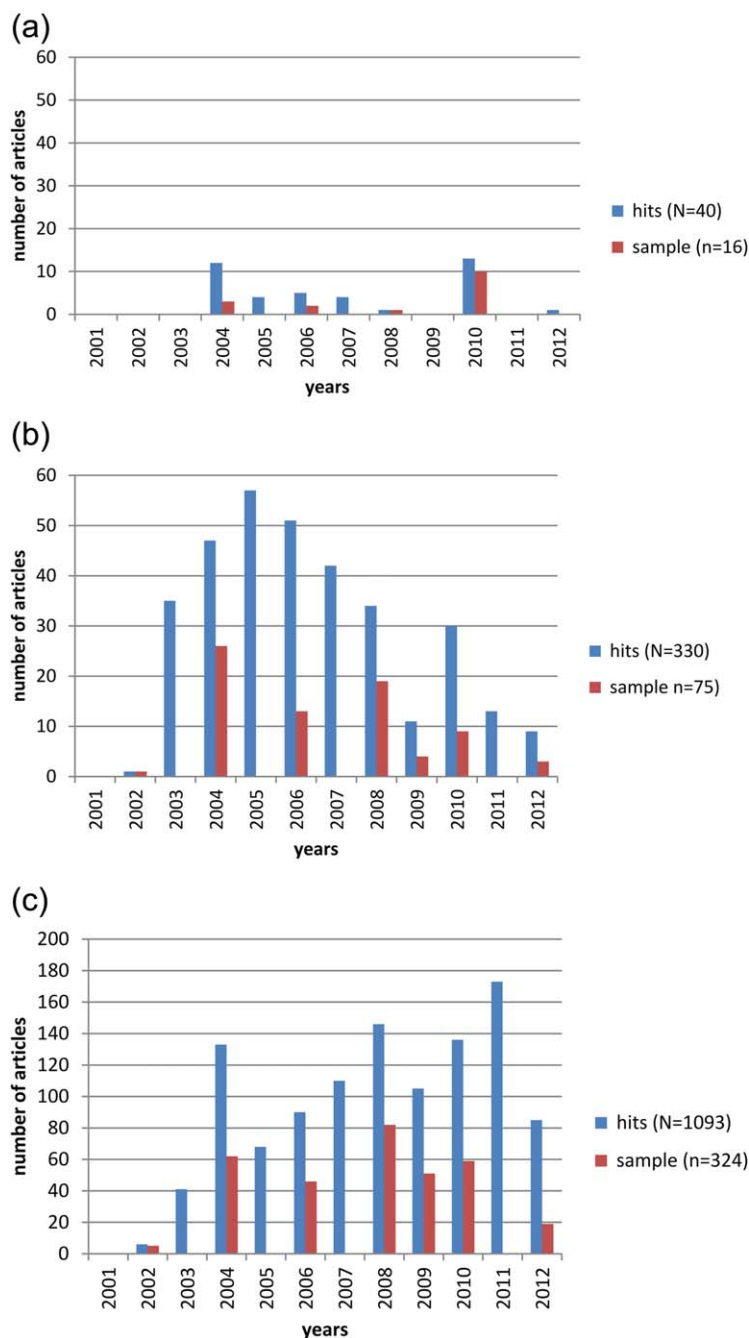
Figure 2. *The popularity of the urban regions in the regional newspapers for (a) Brabantse Stedenrij, (b) Waalboss and (c) BrabantStad. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]*

Table 2. *How regional newspapers report about Waalboss – main findings.*

Waalboss in regional newspapers – summary	
How frequent?	*Brabants Dagblad* had 74; *Eindhovens Dagblad* had 1.
Who?	Journalists, local politicians, local stakeholders
Explanation?	Yes; most briefly explained the role (spatial plan, cooperation) or location.
What?	Planning concepts such as urban region, region, plan area, provincial plan, business park, municipal cooperation
Topic?	Development of business park, opposition to plan for business park, opposition to the way it is to be developed.
Other clues?	The name also referred to spatial plans, planning committees, an association of opponents of the business park.

Table 3. *How regional newspapers report about BrabantStad – main findings.*

BrabantStad in regional newspapers – summary	
How frequent?	324 articles; 23% appeared in *ED*, 40% in *BD*, and 37% in *BN/De Stem*
Who?	Journalists and professionals: local, provincial, and national politicians; managers of cultural institutions; entrepreneurs
Explanation?	Brief explanations, declining from 70% in 2004 to 40% in 2010; most articles defined the role or identified members.
What?	Mostly described agents: a cooperation or organisation. One-third of the articles described BrabantStad as a region; one called it a brand.
Topic?	Infrastructure and public transport; cooperation or lack thereof within BrabantStad; BrabantStad as host for mega events
Other clues?	Whether the name is important to institutionalisation. As recently as 2010 journalists used various spellings: Brabant-Stad / Brabant Stad / Brabant-Stad. Exclusion – envy among municipalities that are not part of BrabantStad. Othering – BrabantStad versus Holland. Name was also used in the bid for European Capital of Culture.

aware of the region mostly as a troublesome area or a problem-ridden instance of co-operation between local administrations.

BrabantStad seemed to develop a thin but more pronounced and complicated regional identity. The newspapers mainly reported about ongoing projects and issues. In contrast to Waalboss, news reports about BrabantStad did not revolve around a single issue. Over time three issues came to the fore. In 2004 and 2006 the major one was infrastructure and public transport. BrabantStad planned to improve its accessibility and had hoped for substantial investments by the national government. Yet it received relatively little money, reviving old feelings of being neglected by the 'The Hague'.[4] In 2008, BrabantStad as an institution made the headlines: journalists reported disputes between the cities (mostly about a shopping mall that was to be built in the north of Tilburg[5]). Fourteen articles explicitly questioned the usefulness of co-operating within BrabantStad.[6] A third topic was BrabantStad's intention to host big events. Local politicians and other stakeholders had voiced plans to host the Floriade,[7] the Olympics[8] and the European Capital of Culture.[9] 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 appeared in 2006. From 2008 onwards such reports formed the majority of the articles in the sample. Some described BrabantStad as a candidate and organiser, while others described the project itself, which was officially named 'BrabantStad Culturele Hoofdstad'.

As a result of the focus on projects and issues, BrabantStad was mostly represented as an
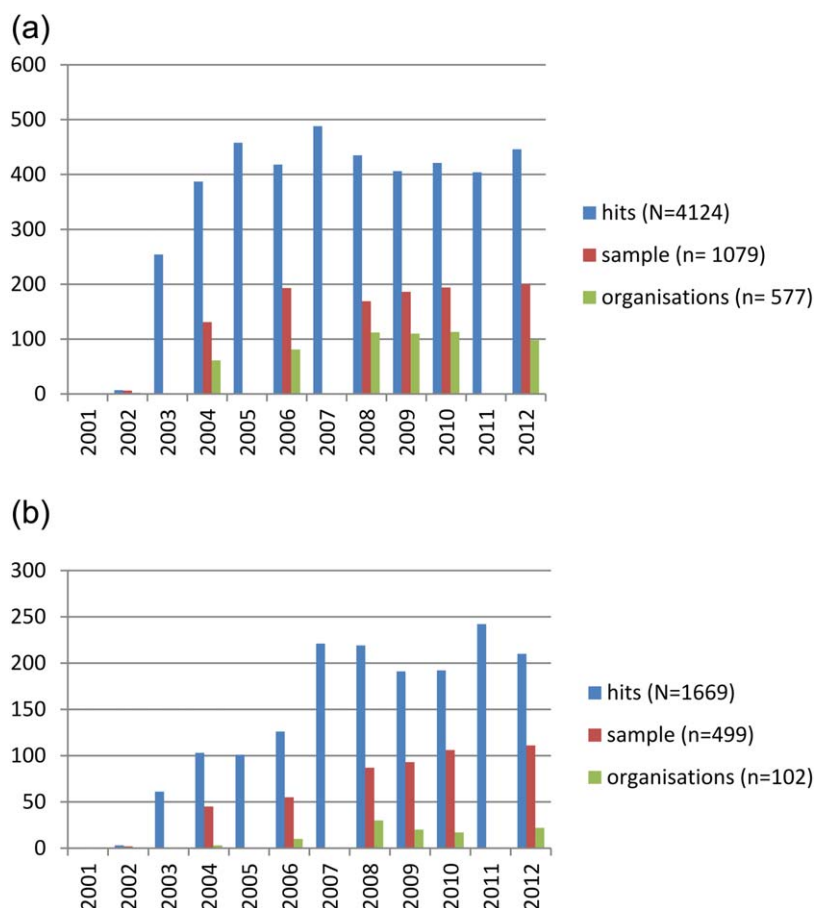
Figure 3. *The popularity of the two rural regions in the regional newspapers for (a) Meierij and (b) Het Groene Woud. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]*

organisation or a co-operation between cities, as an agent that 'does things' such as lobbying for investments in infrastructure from The Hague[10] or competing against other cities for the title of European Capital of Culture.

Apparently, the readers were expected to have gained some familiarity with BrabantStad, as the number of explanations decreased over time (see Table 3). The explanations that did appear were brief: the five biggest cities of Brabant;[11] the co-operation of the five large cities in Brabant;[12] or simply the names of the five cities.[13] Not all explanations were neutral; in an article on the 8th of September in 2006, the *Brabants Dagblad* called it a "pretentious co-operation". Approximately a third of the articles referred to BrabantStad as an area: it was called an agglomeration;[14] it was compared to the

Randstad;[15] and its accessibility and roads were discussed.[16]

Professionals seemed to have become increasingly aware of the region (see Table 3). Its name was used by politicians in the five constituent cities, by provincial and national politicians, and by politicians in the neighbouring municipalities, who looked with envy at the investments being made in BrabantStad.

RURAL BRABANT: MEIERIJ AND HET GROENE WOUD

The Meierij is a traditional region with a thick identity. As it no longer has an official political or administrative function, it may be

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deinstitutionalising. However, the analysis indicated that Meierij was still a meaningful region. Regional newspapers, and especially the *Brabants Dagblad*, frequently used the name Meijerij or Meierij (both spellings occur). This region was mentioned in over 4,000 articles in the selected decade and little over 1,000 times in the regional sample. Half of the articles in that sample popped up because they reported about institutions that had Meierij in their name (Figure 3a). A plethora of local institutions made the headlines: a housing association 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 Meijerij'); a song festival ('Liedertafelfestival de Meijerij'); a slowfood association ('Slowfood Kempen-Meierij'), etc. All of these organisations were located within the region. Their use of the name Meierij and the fact that many deal with heritage and culture indicated that the Meierij was indeed a traditional region with a thick identity.

Whereas the articles solely about such institutions were excluded from further analysis, this still left us with a large set of reports about the Meierij. There, the word Meierij was mostly used to mean a 'region out there' (see Table 4). In that sense, the newspapers carried a story on a local soccer match[17] or the launch of a book on local history[18] and discussed the results of national elections for each of the municipalities in the Meierij.[19] These reports about the elections followed the usual format: journalists described a certain phenomenon that was discernible in the Meierij and then discussed the development for a number of villages in the region.[20]

The variety of topics (from soccer matches to recreational bike tours and nature walks, and from local politics to heritage conservation) led us to conclude that the Meierij is a region with a thick identity. Some topics were recurrent: leisure and tourism,[21] history and heritage,[22] landscape reconstruction and rural development,[23] and finally municipal co-

Table 4. *How regional newspapers report about Meierij – main findings.*

Meierij in regional newspapers – summary	
How frequent?	1079 articles; 577 referred to organisations with Meierij in the name; approx. 90% appeared *in BD*, 9% in *ED*, and 1% in *BN/de Stem*
Who?	Journalists and a range of local stakeholders: politicians, entrepreneurs, host of dance event, heritage experts/devotees, Dutch National Railways
Explanation?	No, but journalists often compare developments such as for election results or budget cuts for a number of Meierij municipalities
What?	Region: place where people live, events occur, festivities are held
Topic?	Miscellaneous: municipal cooperation & amalgamation, elections, closure of churches, heritage, sports, public transport, tourism & recreation, public libraries, agriculture, spatial planning (landscape reconstruction)
Other clues?	Many local /regional social and cultural organisations had Meierij in the name. Spelled either Meierij or Meijerij, but Meierij was more frequent.

operation and amalgamation.[24] The ongoing attention to such topics indicated that the identity of the Meierij is not just backward-looking, focused on history and heritage, but was also deemed important for future developments and challenges. The variety of topics reported in connection with the Meierij coincided with the wide range of local stakeholders that used the name Meierij (see Table 4).

Between January 2003 and December 2012, over 1,600 articles used the search term Groene Woud, 499 of which were part of our sample (Figure 3b). Not all of them used it to refer to the case-study region, however. Groene Woud is also a street name in Oudenbosch and Breda and a neighbourhood in Tilburg, all predating the National Landscape. A few articles in the sample

referred to those other 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 region.[25] One of these establishments is a regular meeting place for (guided) walking tours and thus featured frequently on the list of upcoming events.

The analysis of newspaper articles indicated that since the National Landscape had been established, the name Groene Woud had also been given to institutions located in Het Groene Woud. It was adopted by companies such as the regional branch of a co-operative bank (Rabobank Groene Woud Zuid) or Alzheimer counselling (Alzheimercafe Regio Het Groene Woud).[26] Several local organisations related to the National Landscape were also set up, such as the streekcoöperatie Het Groene Woud (a regional co-operative of producers and sellers of regional products and recreational businesses), and the regional festival Het Groene Woud. These associations and their projects, such as certification of regional produce or a special bank account, generated news and thereby further familiarised inhabitants with the region. The regional festival, for example, drew considerable publicity (10 articles in 2006, 15 in 2008, 17 in 2009, but only 2 and 3 in 2010 and 2012). Some of the reports on the festival set forth the goals and characteristics of Het Groene Woud as well. Although a share of the reports thus informed readers about such projects (which might have been initiated by or the result of its designation as National Landscape), the identity that followed from the news reports was not as thin as that of BrabantStad. Perhaps that is because Het Groene Woud was not solely referred to as the organiser of the projects but also as the location where these projects took place.

There were several further clues that awareness of Het Groene Woud as a region was growing. First, 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"[27] or "Estate Velder is located in national landscape Het Groene Woud"[28]. Journalists wrote about (motor)bike tours,[29] a network of walking trails,[30] investments by the province in the area,[31] the cultivation of a heritage strain of grain[32] and about special Groene Woud cows.[33] These topics concurred with the aims of the regional co-operative. Moreover, such reports supported the creation of an image of Het Groene Woud as an attractive region, ideal for walking trips or cycling tours in rural settings.

Second, the felt need to explain the region decreased over the years. Many of these 'explanations' just mentioned the status of the area: as a National Landscape or variants of that concept (see Table 5). Other explanations referred to its location: Het Groene Woud was described variously as the green heart in between the cities Tilburg, Den Bosch and Eindhoven;[34] as the diamond-shaped area between Eindhoven, Tilburg, Den Bosch and Veghel;[35] or as the triangle Oisterwijk – Sint Oedenrode – Best.[36] One article gave a detailed and layered description, locating Het Groene Woud in the Meierij between Den Bosch, Veghel, Oirschot and Oisterwijk.[37]

Third, the Eindhovens Dagblad seemed to get more interested in Het Groene Woud from 2010 onwards. Some of the readers of the Eindhovens Dagblad live in Het Groene Woud, but up till 2010 they heard less about it than the readers of the Brabants Dagblad. That was either because stakeholders in the surroundings of Eindhoven became more aware of Het Groene Woud, or because the newspaper increasingly came to see Het Groene Woud as meaningful to its readership.

A final indication of the growing familiarity of the region was the plethora of people and organisations that used its name (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.[38] This indicated that either these organisations used the name and the newspaper simply copied it, or that the newspaper itself decided to place the event in Het Groene Woud.

REGIONAL NEWSPAPERS AND THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF REGIONS

The content analysis of news reports in the three regional newspapers provided insight

Table 5. *How regional newspapers report about Groene Woud – main findings.*

Het Groene Woud in regional newspapers – summary	
How frequent?	499 articles; 65% appeared in *BD*, 29% in *ED*, and 6% in *BN/de Stem*
Who?	Journalists and a range of people and organisations: politicians from several Groene Woud municipalities, local leisure entrepreneurs, farmers, regional tourist board, inhabitants, regional investment agency BOM.
Explanation?	Decreasing: In 2004, 75% of the articles explained the region, in 2006 only 50%, from then on about 40%. Explanation was often a brief reference to 'status' or function. Other common explanations referred to the location.
What?	Specific kind of region (National Landscape, national park, nature reserve, woodlands, rural area), and region as place where people live and events take place.
Topic?	Nature (or nature development), leisure and tourism, heritage, spatial planning, the Groene Woud festival, local food and land art projects.
Other clues?	Creation of institutions with Groene Woud in the name and related to National Landscape aims, such as the festival and a branded bank account. Also institutions were renamed to include Groene Woud. Stakeholders claimed Het Groene Woud; e.g., city marketing slogans. Groene Woud was used as argument for or against developments.

into the institutionalisation of the five selected regions. We found that the amount of attention given by newspapers to the regions varies, not only over time but also among the three newspapers and across the

regions. This uneven exposure could explain the different levels of awareness of the regions. Close reading of the news reports, however, offered more detailed insight into the diverging processes of institutionalisation in these five regions.

First, the Meierij was not a mere remnant of a traditional region. Journalists still treated it as a meaningful region, even though it lacked 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 dealt with culture and heritage or with cultural organisations that are named after the region, a confirmation of our assumption that this region has a thick identity.

Second, there was little evidence of institutionalisation of the region Brabantse Stedenrij. Rarely did the newspapers use that name, but when they did they felt a need to explain it. Interestingly, Brabantse Stedenrij did mean something to some stakeholders. In two articles we found evidence of 'exclusion': Oss, Veghel and Uden were said to lie outside the Brabantse Stedenrij.[39]

Third, Waalboss was more locally known: the region was only mentioned in the *Brabants Dagblad*. Moreover, it developed into a single-issue region. Discussions of the business park dominated the news reports about Waalboss. The focus of the *Brabants Dagblad* on these debates might hinder a meaningful connection of the public with the region. Whereas people would not be likely to identify with a business park, they certainly would not do so if they associated its development with nothing but local conflict.

Finally, the more recently created regions of Het Groene Woud and BrabantStad showed the strongest signs of institutionalisation, albeit in different degrees and guises. The content analysis revealed that both regions took on several of Paasi's shapes. Even though BrabantStad was established as a network of cities, and not a contiguous area, it has developed some territorial shape. Some articles mentioned sub-regions of BrabantStad, and the *Eindhovens Dagblad* reported about agreements on mobility in the 'Zuidoostvleugel' (south-eastern wing) of BrabantStad.[40] Another clue about the

territorial shape of BrabantStad came from its antagonists. The regional newspapers reported about some opposition to it, especially by those cities in Brabant that did not belong to BrabantStad. Bergen op Zoom and Roosendaal to the west, Oss to the northeast, Veldhoven and Veghel – Uden to the east were said to feel excluded and 'marginalised'.[41]

The antagonism felt in BrabantStad against both the country's core region Randstad Holland and the national government in The Hague was a recurring topic in the regional newspapers. They regularly carried reports of dissatisfied local or provincial politicians. The usual complaint was that 'The Hague' was focused too much on the Randstad and as a result did not invest enough in Brabant and BrabantStad. This discourse resurfaced every autumn when the government announced its budget. Complaints about the lack of investment dealt mostly with infrastructure and culture. Once the planning document *Nota Ruimte* pointed out that BrabantStad was the second most important engine of the national economy (after Randstad), expectations rose about national funding for the area, but these were never met. This antagonism may seem *ad hoc* – responding to a particular decision by the national government. However, it originates in a Brabant tradition of 'othering'. These 'old' feelings of unfair treatment by the central government (the so-called Generaliteitscomplex, see Van Oudheusden 1996a; Bijsterveld 2000) tend to resurface every now and then.[42]

On the other hand, news reports also demonstrated that institutionalisation has only been partial. BrabantStad was established to prevent intra-regional competition, but the rivalry between the constituent cities was not easily overcome. Newspapers reported some envy within BrabantStad, for example with regard to night trains. Helmond complained in 2006 when no night connection was planned for that city. Tilburg complained in 2010 when a pilot project of night trains was terminated and Tilburg lost its nightline to Den Bosch (and Utrecht – Amsterdam). Tilburg argued that BrabantStad as a whole would benefit from a 'complete' schedule of night trains.[43] Overt conflict arose when Tilburg announced its intention to let investors build a large shopping mall. The other cities feared that their inner cities would lose customers. Newspapers reported frequently about this dispute, for example when an alderman of Breda visited Tilburg and was bluntly told that BrabantStad had no say over what happened in Tilburg.[44] Even though BrabantStad did not manage to contain the feelings of intra-regional competition, reports of such 'issues' can also be interpreted as part of the establishment of BrabantStad as an important new region. Had BrabantStad not mattered to these local politicians, they would not have complained about it.

The news reports suggested that the institutionalisation of Het Groene Woud was more pronounced. The symbolic shape of this region was discerned from the large number of articles about it as well as from the many topics connected to the region. News reports also demonstrated the onset of an institutional shape – organisations renamed themselves and new Groene Woud organisations (related to the aims of the National Landscape) were created, such as the Groene Woud co-operative, the festival, and branded bank accounts. Given that the newspapers reported about these organisations, they clearly expected such developments to be of interest to their readers.

Even though the exact borders of the national landscapes were not drawn in the 2004 policy document *Nota Ruimte* but had to be set by the province later on, the region soon became a place where journalists located events. By 2010 the territorial shape had become stronger. Newspapers reported the unveiling of a number of ANWB road signs of Het Groene Woud that had been placed along the main motorways in the area.[45] The papers also reported about a municipality taking liberties with the borders, pointing out that only certain parts of Sint-Michielsgestel belong to Het Groene Woud. Nevertheless, that municipality used the same Groene Woud signs for all its walking trails.[46]

The media thus picked up on initiatives in Het Groene Woud and thereby reinforced the formation of the different shapes of the

region. The increasing awareness of Het Groene Woud might be what tempted several actors to try to lay claim to Het Groene Woud. For instance, city marketing in Boxtel came up with "Boxtel, sparkling centre of Het Groene Woud",[47] and a co-operation among local entrepreneurs invented the slogan "Liempde, hospitable heart of Het Groene Woud".[48] Het Groene Woud is even claimed by outsiders, namely policy-makers in Den Bosch and Eindhoven.[49] All these news reports hinted at the growing awareness of Het Groene Woud, not only in the media but also among stakeholders.

One last 'piece of evidence' of the ongoing institutionalisation of Het Groene Woud comes from the occasions on which Het Groene Woud was used as an argument to allow or prohibit certain developments. A watermill that could be rebuilt in Liempde was represented, by one of the persons involved in this plan, as a possible asset to Het Groene Woud.[50] Plans for the redevelopment of the area the Vleut in Best repositioned the local zoo as one specialised in animals that now live or used to live in Het Groene Woud.[51] On the other hand, protesting neighbours claimed that a particular company did not fit in Het Groene Woud.[52] Such claims implied that Het Groene Woud had developed a thick regional identity, serving as a touchstone to determine what does or does not belong in the area.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper has reviewed how newspapers report about older and more recently created regions within the borders of the traditional region of Noord-Brabant, a Dutch province with a well-established identity. It has tracked the institutionalisation of these five regions through an analysis of newspaper reports over the last decade. The assumption was that news reports can make readers more aware of the region and its relation with other regions. It is through representations, for example in the news media, that regions gain meaning. The comparison of five regions within one political-administrative context revealed marked differences in how

often and the manner in which newspapers reported about regions. The news reports suggested that some new regions institutionalised and became meaningful places outside the administrative context in which they were created. Meanwhile other regions remained underexposed. In these dynamic, layered situations, the institutionalisation of new regions did not result in a de-institutionalisation of older regions in the same area. Rather, it led to a more complex layering of the identities of these regions with respect to each other. Regions that partly overlap (both in time and space) can coexist in spatial consciousness. At times journalists even connect these overlapping regions in their reports.

The differences between the news reports on the five regions are interesting. Both BrabantStad and Het Groene Woud were frequently mentioned in the regional newspapers. The role of the news media in their respective institutionalisation processes seems rather different, though. BrabantStad was more often associated with conflict or doubts about its relevance. Het Groene Woud, on the other hand, was associated with reports about touristic developments and innovations, cultural landscapes and local co-operation. There seemed to be a more positive vibe in Het Groene Woud; maybe the journalists were less critical about the need for these developments compared to the projects initiated by BrabantStad. Het Groene Woud can be easily connected to existing images of Brabant. BrabantStad, in contrast, seems to be more difficult to explain and harder to link up with those images. This difference may be related to the branding of these two regions. The website of BrabantStad displays the Brabant colours (red and white) but otherwise does not seem strongly oriented to the inhabitants. The homepage showcases topics such as the art of co-operation, increasing attractiveness, improving accessibility and strengthening 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 photographs 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 the insights it yielded could not have been derived from an analysis of a single regional newspaper. Parts of Het Groene Woud lie near Eindhoven; therefore, the readership of the *Eindhovens Dagblad* is actually partly in Het Groene Woud. But the *Eindhovens Dagblad* initially paid less attention to Het Groene Woud than the *Brabants Dagblad* did. From 2010 onwards, the *Eindhovens Dagblad* reported more frequently about Het Groene Woud. The content analysis prompts some questions about this agenda-setting process. Did stakeholders in the area get more involved in Het Groene Woud and thus create more news about this area? Or did the *Eindhovens Dagblad* gradually come to see Het Groene Woud as a meaningful region for its readers and therefore pick up more news about the area?

The research has reaffirmed the claims that Simon (2004) and Simon *et al.* (2010) made regarding the usefulness of analysing how frequently a region's name appears in media representations to understand the institutionalisation of the region. However, by moving beyond a mere quantitative analysis of the use of the names, we have gained a deeper understanding of the role of the media in institutionalisation. The regional newspapers proved to be a valuable source – they are an active agent in the construction of knowledge about the region. The clues the regional newspapers offered about the ongoing institutionalisation of BrabantStad and Het Groene Woud, moreover, correspond to findings from prior analysis (Terlouw & Van Gorp 2014).

The content analysis made it possible to discern between thin and thick identities. News reports about some regions narrowed in on a single issue, while other regions seemed to invoke more diverse stories. Further building on Terlouw's (2009) differentiation between thick identities as backward-looking and thin identities as more project-oriented, the present analysis indicates that the identity of more institutionalised regions can be both forward- and backward-looking.

For instance, reports about the Meierij were focused not just on its heritage and history but also on the present (soccer match) and the future (municipal amalgamation).

Geographical proximity is an important factor in the creation of news – as reaffirmed in our analysis. The Randstad-based national newspapers reported incidentally about regions in Brabant. Some people within Brabant undoubtedly would interpret this as yet another sign of the marginalisation of Brabant by Holland. However, proximity was even a factor in the selection of newsworthy items at the regional level. Readers of the *BN/De Stem* in the west of Brabant live outside Het Groene Woud and the Meierij and are thus exposed to far less coverage on these regions than the readers of the *Brabants Dagblad*. In short, regional papers in the Netherlands have a very local focus. Just how narrow their coverage is becomes clear when one considers that that each of the regional newspapers has several editions for sub-regions within their area. But it was precisely this local focus that made the regional newspapers so well suited to the purpose of our research. Moreover, it is at this local level of the news reports that some meaning initially accrued to the new regions that were created at a scale between municipality and province.

Notes

1. Populist newspaper: popular newspapers, newspapers that focus more on sensational topics and human interest and less on the economy, politics and foreign affairs. Note that the Dutch populist newspapers do not completely resemble the British tabloids.
2. 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 database includes full articles (but without pictures) from all sections of the newspapers: from headlines to sports, culture and travel, and it even contains opinion pieces and letters from readers. The archives were accessed through the University Utrecht Library subscription to Nexis Lexis.
3. *Brabants Dagblad*, 24 July 2009.

4. See for example: *BN/ De Stem*, 1 and 2 October 2004, *Eindhovens Dagblad*, 8 and 9 September 2006.

5. See for example: *Brabants Dagblad*, 19 September 2008, *BN/De Stem*, 23 and 25 September 2008 and *Eindhovens Dagblad*, 22 October 2008.

6. See for example: *Eindhovens Dagblad*, 19 September 2008.

7. See for example: *Brabants Dagblad*, 5 June 2004.

8. See for example: *Brabants Dagblad*, 4 September 2008.

9. See for example: BN/De Stem 22 September 2006 and 31 August 2012, *Brabants Dagblad*, 18 June 2008 and 15 October 2009.

10. See for example: *Brabants Dagblad*, 30 September 2006 and *BN/ De Stem*, 18 October 2006.

11. BN/De Stem 8 July 2004.

12. *Brabants Dagblad*, 16 September 2008

13. See for example: BN/De Stem 19 May 2004 and *Brabants Dagblad*, 12 June 2009.

14. *Brabants Dagblad*, 18 September 2006.

15. *Eindhovens Dagblad*, 17 September 2008.

16. *Brabants Dagblad*, 27 September 2006 and *Eindhovens Dagblad*, 14 July 2010.

17. *Brabants Dagblad*, 6 September 2009.

18. *Brabants Dagblad*, 6 October 2009.

19. *Brabants Dagblad*, 13 and 14 September 2012.

20. See for example: *Brabants Dagblad*, 18 June 2008, 16 September 2009 and 18 August 2010.

21. See for example: *Brabants Dagblad*, 23 August 2004, 27 April 2009 and 5 October 2010, *Eindhovens Dagblad*, 1 July 2006 and 24 June 2008.

22. See for example: *Brabants Dagblad*, 22 October 2004, 15 August 2006, 24 May 2008, 19 October 2010 and 20 September 2012, *Eindhovens Dagblad*, 31 July 2004 and 14 October 2009.

23. See for example: BN/De Stem 21 August 2008, *Eindhovens Dagblad*, 7 July 2008 and *Brabants Dagblad*, 24 September 2010.

24. See for example: *Eindhovens Dagblad*, 12 May and 31 August 2012, *Brabants Dagblad*, 22 and 29 September 2012.

25. Allegedly, the region was named after one of these bars, where one of the first meetings of the initiators took place.

26. See for example: *Brabants Dagblad*, 23 and 24 September 2008.

27. *Brabants Dagblag*, 20 August 2008.

28. *Brabants Dagblad*, 16 September 2010.

29. See for example: *Brabants Dagblad*, 15 May 2008 and 25 May 2009.

30. See for example: *Brabants Dagblad*, 24 July 2009.

31. See for example: *Eindhovens Dagblad*, 26 October 2010.

32. See for example: *Brabants Dagblad*, 9 May 2008.

33. See for example: *Eindhovens Dagblad*, 7 May 2008 and *Brabants Dagblad*, 9 September 2010.

34. See for example: *Brabants Dagblad*, 17 September 2008 and 25 June 2009, *Eindhovens Dagblad*, 26 September 2012.

35. *Brabants Dagblad*, 10 October 2006.

36. *Brabants Dagblad*, 7 July 2008.

37. *Brabants Dagblad*, 28 September 2012.

38. See for example: *Brabants Dagblad*, 14 October 2004, 10 October 2009 and Eindhovens Dagblad 3 September 2008.

39. *Brabants Dagblad*, 23 June 2004.

40. *Eindhovens Dagblad*, 7 May and 28 August 2008

41. See for example: *Brabants Dagblad*, 29 May 2008 and 27 April 2010.

42. See for example: Brabants Dagblad 30 August 2008, *Eindhovens Dagblad*, 2 September 2008.

43. *Brabants Dagblad*, 22 July 2010.

44. *BN/ De Stem*, 23 September 2008.

45. See for example: *Brabants Dagblad*, 6 October 2010.

46. *Brabants Dagblad*, 23 and 24 July 2009.

47. *Brabants Dagblad*, 10 July 2008.

48. *Brabants Dagblad*, 1 July 2008.

49. *Brabants Dagblad*, 23 July 2009 and *Eindhovens Dagblad*, 17 July 2010.

50. *Brabants Dagblad*, 17 October 2008.

51. *Eindhovens Dagblad*, 18 September 2009.

52. *Brabants Dagblad* 24 June 2010.

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