Spatial imaginaries: tyrannies or transformations?
Edited by Simin Davoudi

This Policy and Practice (P&P) originated from the Roundtable discussion held in the UK and Ireland Planning Research Conference at Queens University Belfast on 11-13 September 2017. Its aim is to explore the representational and performative role of spatial imaginaries in both describing and ascribing identities to places and thus influencing spatial relations and planning practices. The P&P consists of four contributions which reflect on and respond to the editor’s opening essay by focusing on a number of key questions that are pivotal in understanding spatial imaginaries and their role in planning thoughts and practices, such as: how do spatial imaginaries come about? Which mechanisms and tools are drawn upon to construct, circulate and galvanize them? How and why certain spatial imaginaries become dominant in planning? And, what is the role of planning in generating, uncovering, enacting or resisting certain imaginaries?

Imagination and Spatial Imaginaries: a conceptual framework
Simin Davoudi

Introduction
We often think we know what a ‘smart city’, a ‘global city’, a ‘resilient city’, a ‘world city’ or a ‘post-industrial city’ looks like even if we have never lived in or visited one. Labels such as these perform a specific spatial imaginary which over time become the taken-for-granted representations of cities. Constructed and circulated through images, discourses and practices, they generate far-reaching claims on our social and political lives. In planning, spatial imaginaries such as these are often adopted and enacted as unproblematic representations of places of yesterday, today and tomorrow. Their role in power struggles over places and spaces is masked by the processes of de-
politicization in which dominant spatial imaginaries are essentialized and naturalized as true representations of the ‘reality’.

This opening essay aims to cast light on two related, yet distinct, concepts of imagination and imaginaries. Although they are frequently used, often interchangeably, in planning, they have received limited conceptual clarity. The essay traces their intellectual history and takes a brief excursion in their genealogical landscapes to summarize some of the key contributions to the debate. It draws on the foundational work on social imaginaries to offer a relational understanding of spatial imaginaries. Here, spatiality is understood as emergent from the relationship between the spatial, temporal, social, material and cognitive worlds.

Imagination

For every plan there is a non-plan, for every net, there’s a contra-net. The uncontrolled areas are essential places in life and need not to be known, but understood.

From Andrei Tarkovsky’s film, Stalker (1979)

One such uncontrolled area is imagination. Imagining things that are not yet present or may never be present is a human trait as old as the Oracle of Delphi; and imagining urban futures is as old as Plato’s description of the ideal city-state in the Republic. Thomas More’s Utopia, inspired by Plato’s ideal city, was written 500 years ago. But, such a long history has not led to a common understanding of what imagination is. In one dominant tradition going back to Plato, imagination is condemned as inferior to, or a mere reflection of the real. It is seen as a source of deception, a medium of distortion and displacement, an obstacle to reasoned belief, and a barrier to the discovery of truth. In their definition of ideology and their discussion of the fetishism of commodities, Marx and Engels (1846 [1970]: 46-47) famously asserted that, “life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life”. Clearly, they knew that the Oracle of Delphi was in the life of the Greeks a power as real as any other but, they considered such imaginary creation as a deceptive sign of powerlessness. Similarly, Louis Althusser’s (1971:162) critique of Marx considers imagination as a pure illusion when he defines “Ideology” as “a ‘Representation’ of the Imaginary Relationship of Individuals to Their Real Conditions of Existence”.

In another tradition the opposite view is advocated whereby imagination is considered as a necessary mediator that enables us to conceive of the real in the first place and act on it. It is seen as an enabling power and a motivating force for change. For example, drawing on his work on the power of intuition in scientific discoveries, Michael Polanyi (1966:85-93) argues that, “to know what to look for does not lend us the power to find it. That power lies in the imagination.”

Imagination also lies at the heart of Jean–Paul Sartre’s theory of existentialism. In the opening of *The Imaginary*, he suggests, “… imagination is not an empirical power added to consciousness, but it is the whole of consciousness as it realizes freedom” (Sartre, 1940: i). For Sartre, therefore, freedom is intimately connected to and enabled by imagination. If we cannot imagine the world being different from what it actually is, we can never be free.

Many planners would agree with the latter view as they tend to celebrate and praise the creative imagination of visionary planners and urbanists such as Ebenezer Howard and his Garden City, Le Corbusier and his Radiant City, Frank Lloyd Wright and his Suburban City, and many more. In all these, we consider imagination as the work of individual mind but, imagination also operates at an intersubjective level and it is this collective imagination that is called social imaginary.

**Social imaginary**

The intellectual history of the concept of social imaginary goes back to the work of philosophers and sociologists such as, Georg Hegel and his notion of ‘spirit of a people’ and Emile Durkheim and his notion of ‘collective consciousness’. Durkheim (1893:39) asserted that, “The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society forms a determinate system with a life of its own. It can be termed the collective or common consciousness.” Although these ideas have long influenced anthropological studies, they have only recently been applied to the understanding of how modern societies and their institutions have come about.

The term social imaginary itself began to appear only in the 1950s and in two parallel works. One was Charles Wright Mills’ *Sociological Imagination* which he defined as being a conceptual tool that “enables us to grasp history and biography and the relationship between the two within the society” (Mills, 1959:6). The other was the anti-Soviet writings, in the French journal *Socialisme*
au Barbarie, by somebody called Paul Cardan which later turned out to be a pseudonym for the Greek-French philosopher, economist and psychoanalyst, Cornelius Castoriadis. In 1975, he published, under his own name, *The Imaginary Institutions of Society* in which he fused Marxian and psychoanalytic theories to argue that, “It is impossible to understand what human history has been or what it is now outside of the category of the imaginary; a unifying factor that provides a signified content and weaves it with the symbolic structures”; a factor that “is not simple 'reality'.

Nor is it strictly rational nor positively irrational, neither true nor false and yet belong to imaginary creation” (Castoriadis, 1975:101). Castoriadis’ book was not translated to English until 1987 which probably explains why he is not cited in the subsequent theorizations of imaginaries, notably in the classic work of Benedict Anderson (1983): *Imagined Communities*. Anderson cuts through the divide between political science and ethnography to define a nation as “an imagined political community”; imagined, because its members may never encounter or know each other yet, “in the mind of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson, 1983:6). He suggests that, “nationality, or nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artifacts of a particular kind” that came into being at the end of the 18th century and despite their changing meanings, they still “command a profound emotional legitimacy” (ibid:4). What ties together something so heterogeneous and spatially dispersed as a nation, is their shared practices of narrating, remembering and forgetting. It is the tacit social ordering rules that are reflected and carried in the rituals of birth, death, marriage, and other forms of significations. In short, what ties them together is their shared social imaginary.

The next stop in this short historical excursion is Charles Taylor’s highly influential *Modern Social Imaginaries* (2004) which laid the foundation for much of the subsequent writings in the field. His conceptualization of imaginaries and modernity provides a useful ground for separating critical insights from shallow substitutions in the debates about spatial imaginaries. In the opening page of his book, Taylor (2004: 1) asks: how did “Modernity … that historically unprecedented amalgam of new practices and institutional forms …, ways of living …, forms of malaise…” come about? He replies, it came about through changes in social imaginaries which he defines as follows:

“By social imaginary, I mean something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode.
I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” (Taylor, 2004:23).

Based on the above, social imaginary is that which produces a community, holds it together by giving it temporary coherence and identity, and subject it to change. There is a clear conceptual proximity between Taylor’ definition and Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) conception of ‘habitus’ and also what the followers of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger call the ‘background’ (Searle, 1995) or ‘worldview’ (Naugle, 2002).

Taylor’s grand narrative of the social imaginary of modernity misses two important contributing factors. The first one is the role of science and technology in the construction of modern social imaginaries. To fill this gap, George Marcus’ (1995) work on techno-scientific imaginaries and Sheila Jasanoff’s (2015) work on socio-technical imaginaries have gone a long way. The second missing dimension is the role of space and place in the construction of modern social imaginary. This is curious, because Edward Said (1978) published his Orientalism nearly 30 years before Taylor’s. He not only paved the ground for the subsequent work on geographical imaginaries, but also unraveled the geopolitics of spatial imaginaries. He used Foucault’s discourse theory to demonstrate how a spatial imaginary of ‘the Orient’ had been produced through travelogues, arts, literature and scholarships to justify and advance colonial ambitions and practices. Said (1993:7) reminded us that, “the struggle over geography is not only about soldiers and cannons, but also about ideas, forms, images and imaginings”.

Spatial Imaginaries
Since Said’s monumental work, the concept of spatial imaginary has attracted a growing and diverse body of literature but Josh Watkins (2015: 508) suggests, these “predominantly describe spatial imaginaries as representational discourses about places and spaces” with the exception of a few which define them as performative (e.g. Gregory, 2004; Bialasiewicz et al., 2007; Watkins 2015). Furthermore, the existing literature largely focuses on the social construction of spatial imaginaries and pays little attention to the role of space and place in the construction of social
imaginaries. A relational view of space and place requires a dialectical combination of the two (Davoudi, 2012). Based on a relational perspective, spatial imaginaries can be conceptualized as presented in Box 1.

Spatial imaginaries are deeply held, collective understanding of socio-spatial relations that are performed by, give sense to, make possible and change collective socio-spatial practices. They are produced through political struggles over the conceptions, perceptions and lived experiences of place. They are circulated and propagated through images, stories, texts, data, algorithms, and performances. They are infused by relations of power in which contestation and resistance are ever present.

**Box 1: Spatial imaginaries, a definition**

The above definition can be unpacked into a number of interrelated features that are briefly elaborated below.

*Spatial imaginaries are background understandings*

They are tacit, taken for granted understandings of spatiality that give sense to, enable and legitimate collective spatial practices. They are socially held assemblages of stories, images, memories and experiences of places. Following Taylor’s lead, they give us a sense of how one place differs from another, how different places fit together, how to navigate through space and what to expect from the spatiality of our everyday lives. They help us make connections between our individual self-understanding of place and the modern ideal of spatial order. A good example of this background understanding is the spatial imaginary of modernity itself whose moral order is predicated on three interrelated principles of functional order, public space and property rights that are to be secured through democratic frameworks. An explicit expression of this moral order can be found in the Charter of Athens and its manifesto for the ideal functional city that is fit for the machine age. Today, we would be hard pressed to find any modern planning system that is not predicated on these principles. These tacit and taken-for-granted spatial orders are so weightless and invisible that we hardly even think about them, let alone having to justify them.
**Spatial imaginaries are emergent**

Although imaginaries are not theories or doctorines *per se*, they may start by discursive practices of theorists which through processes of deliberation and conflict gain traction and “generate more and more far reaching claims on political life” (Taylor 2004:5). Taylor argues that the moral order which underpins Western social imaginaries was originated from Walter Grotius’ and John Locke’s Natural Law theories which introduced modern conceptions of rights, equality and political legitimacy.

Planning history is rich with examples of such a process whereby an idealization of place by an individual or a small group of people has grown into complex spatial imaginaries by being embedded in planning thoughts and practices. The Charter of Athens, mentioned above, was the brainchild of a small group of avant-garde architects and urbanists who established the *Congres International d’Architecture Moderne* (CIAM). Other familiar examples include, Daniel Burnham’s bird’s-eye view of Chicago and the city-region imaginary, Patrick Abercrombie’s Green Belt and the imaginary of urban containment, and Albert Plesman’s Randstad (ring city) and the polycentric imaginary. However, two points are worth emphasizing. First, it is not always easy to trace the origin of spatial imaginaries or to attribute them to a specific idea. The ‘smart city’ imaginary, for example, did not emerge from a single idea. It has been made possible by a complex assemblage of investments by high-tech corporations, academic publications, think tanks’ reports, planning policies, practices of big data collection and algorithmic inventions, newspapers’ and social media’s stories and images and even popular video games. Second, as Taylor (2004:33) suggests, “Ideas always come in history wrapped up in certain practices, even if they are only discursive practices”. This means that ideas and practices are not rival causal agencies that are situated in a dichotomy between the ideal and the material; they fold into each other reinforcing their effects (Raynor, 2018).

**Spatial imaginaries are collective**

They are shared by a large group of people, if not a whole society. They are repertories in which everyone plays their part. This means that “a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider (imagine) themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one” (Seton-Watson, 1977:5). In a similar vein, a neighbourhood exists as long as it is held as a place
in people’s mental map and experienced through their spatial relations. It is through the collective agency of spatial imaginaries that certain places are called into being (Healey, 2006) and given identity and meaning. An example of the role of spatial imaginaries in social and cultural identity building is the intricate bound between the imaginary of the countryside and the English identity which, by the way, remains a great irony, given that Britain is the first and the most urbanized country in the world. Both the irony and the identity is manifested in period ‘hands off our land’ campaigns which are mobilized whenever there is a perceived threat to the countryside imposed by a planning reform. The following quote is particularly revealing: “Despite England being an urban nation since the Industrial revolution, our rural self-image is fundamental to English identity” (Strong, 2011, no pagination). Similar ties exist between the imaginary of ‘wilderness’ and the Scandinavian identity.

**Spatial imaginaries are performative**

While “the understanding makes the practice possible, it is the practice that largely carries the understanding” (Taylor, 2004:25). The relationship between understanding and common practices are two-ways. Spatial imaginaries not only enable and legitimize material practices through representation. They are also enacted and maintained by these practices (Gregory, 1995). Planning tools such as maps, images, diagrams and scenarios do not simply represent an urban future. They also perform the future in the present, and by doing so, they essentialize a specific imaginary of urban futures which has material consequences for how cities are planned, redeveloped, invested in and re-imagined. Benedict Anderson (1991) highlights the role of census data, maps and museums in creating the imaginary that binds people together as a nation. The same role can be attributed to spatial practices and planning (Sykes and Shaw, 2018). For example, in the last fifty years, they have played a key role in creating an imaginary that binds heterogeneous and multi-lingual nations together as a European community. Consider the well documented role of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) in invoking a pan European spatial imaginary.

Again, the history of planning is full of examples of the performativity of spatial imaginaries. Consider Le Corbusier’s ‘skyscrapers in the park’. It did not just represent the modern city, it created it by being taken up in the construction of thousands of, often poorly imitated, high rise blocks around the world. Oskar Nymeir’s Brasilia did not just represent the ‘new age’ imaginary,
it also helped generating it. The master planning for the new capital city was both the carrier of that imaginary and its maker. Another well-known example is the enduring core-periphery imaginary of Europe which has been frequently invoked and animated through practices of, data collection, mapping, naming (‘Blue Banana’, ‘Bunch of Grapes’, and ‘Pentagon’) and other forms of signification.

Collectivity and performativity are the two key features that distinguish imaginaries from imagination as a work of individual mind. That is why a Lilypad (Floating, amphibious Ecopolis for Climate Refugees) is an act of imagination, but not, as yet, a spatial imaginary of urban future.

Spatial imaginaries are epistemic and normative
They not only describe how things are, but also prescribe how they ought to be. By assigning distinct characteristics to places, they squeeze out competing imaginaries. For example, Nate Milington’s work on Detroit shows how images and stories of its deindustrialization has produced a dominant imaginary of the city as a site of urban decay. By “writing its residents out of the frame” they have naturalized the city as ruin (Milington, 2013:280). In some ways, this imaginary shapes the future of Detroit as it reconfigures its past. Spatial imaginaries can inscribe binary division such as, Orient and Occident, global North and global South, developing and developed world, and core and periphery Europe. They create zones of inclusion and exclusion and delineate boundaries between us and them. They stigmatize some places as de-industrial, peripheral or broken and glorify others as smart, core, or resilient. Golubchikov (2010) call this a process of ‘othering’ some places against others. They engender mental maps of places which shape how people relate to them and how they structure their everyday life, where to live and where to visit (Reid, 2018). Spatial imaginaries that are based on idealized models, such as ‘Global City’, are particularly prescriptive. They project a sense of inevitability which suggests not only how things are and ought to be, but also how they will be, and why it is essential for all cities to follow suit and be ‘global’ (Golubchikov, 2010). Doreen Massey (2007) argues that globalisation is a spatial imaginary which disseminate narratives of its own inevitability and, therefore, has become “a self-fulfilling prophecy” (Watkins, 2015:513). Planning has played a key role in producing, spreading and putting into practice such idealized models. By doing so, planning becomes the ‘scapegoat’
for neoliberal ideological fantasies, as argued by Gunder (2011) who draws on Lacanian understanding of imaginary as ‘fantasy’.

_Spatial imaginaries are contingent and dynamic_

Through power-infused processes of redaction, spatial imaginaries are reflected on, debated, adapted, and confronted with resistance, contestation and change (Crawford, 2018). Although they exert a strong hold on our imagination, spatial imaginaries are not immune to change; there are always cracks in the concrete, rooms for interrogating taken-for-granted assumptions, and space for the emergence of alternatives imaginaries. The political is constantly re-instantiated through practices of everyday life (Certeau de, 1984). Evidence of resistance to normalized imaginaries of ‘resilient city’ is the ‘Stop Calling Me Resilient’ posters. They began to appear throughout New Orleans in 2015 in response to the City’s resilience strategy. They quote Tracie Washington of the Louisiana Justice Institute who in dealing with victims of Hurricane Katrina stressed:

“Stop calling me resilient, because every time you say, ‘Oh, they’re resilient’, that means you can do something else to me. I don’t want to be resilient … I want to fix the things that create the need for us to be resilient in the first place” (Feldman, 2015, no pagination).

_Transformative imagination_

Planning as politics of place is a key site where alternative spatial imaginaries can originate and flourish through dialogues and practices and, crucially, through the acts of imagination which is “the capacity to see in a thing what it is not, to see it other than it is (Castoriadis, 1975:81). The greatest work of imagination is “its ability to imagine how we might be otherwise” (Yusoff & Gabrys, 2011: 517). This view of imagination cut through the Enlightenment’s dichotomous perspective on real versus illusionary, reasons versus emotions, facts versus fictions, and politics versus arts to highlight the power of imagination “to become, in many respects, the hidden shaper of politics” (Ezrahi, 2012:7). As Francoise Delsarte eloquently put it, “imagination … is never governed” (Stebbins, 1886:97), even though imaginaries are. Such an understanding of imagination underscores the role of individuals not as cogs in the machine, but as political actors who engage with and transform the world. But, imagination will be limited if it produces images that only serve to perpetuate the dominant spatial imaginaries. For it to be transformative it needs
to transcend the boundaries of the imaginary in which it operates. This means acting simultaneously in and on the real (Reid, forthcoming) in order to open new horizons of meanings and new orders of things. In the context of planning, it means imagining and reconstituting a totally different kind of places out of the unequal mess of globalizing and urbanizing capital, going wild (Harvey, 2012: xvi). After all, ‘In dreams begin responsibilities’ (Yeats, 1914; epilogue).

Acknowledgment
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Constructing ‘the coast’: the power of spatial imaginaries
Jenny Crawford

Introduction
My interest in the slippery spatial imaginaries of ‘the coast’ dates back to working as a local authority planner in integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) in Scotland in the 1990s. What became intriguing to me then was how many ‘coasts’ there seemed to be in relation to what might geographically be represented as the one linear coastline of the Moray Firth. This multiplicity appeared to have direct impacts on the scope and nature of the development trajectories that were admissible to discussion. Based on that experience it seemed to me that imaginaries of coast might offer particularly rich insights into how space is socially constructed in the context of both development and environmental policy and what the implications for power outcomes might be. As Pierce et al. (2011: 61) emphasise, relational place “becomes ‘exposed’ for investigation and scholarship as it is made and remade, or via contestations”. Remaking of place has been intensified by the introduction of statutory marine spatial planning in the UK. The introduction of new legislation and institutions for planning and environmental decision-making has unsettled planning in coastal areas. It has highlighted both new development trajectories and the vulnerability of marine resources and the land-sea interface. In the context of both marine spatial planning and ICZM, a diversification of narratives of development to encompass ecological sustainability, interconnectedness and new mechanisms of user participation in the processes of local plan-making might be expected; but is this the case?

Coast as spatial imaginary
During 2014 and 2016 I undertook an analysis of how local planning policies were positioning the coast in relation to development narratives for the authorities adjacent to the coastlines of the Solway Firth and Northumberland. In doing so, I explicitly employed the concept of spatial imaginaries of ‘the coast’ as representations of space that hold shared, operative meaning and in doing so enact or perform relations of power in the processes of place-framing, involved in the production of planning policy. In this context I understood power outcomes in terms of discursive dominance and exclusion, on the one hand, and discursive diversity and inclusion of different voices, on the other. In my analysis I wanted to explore the ways in which imaginaries of coast
were invoked in policy texts and their relationship to the conflicting development discourses active in the area.

Key conflicting development narratives for these areas (revealed through a series of interviews with policy actors) as summarised in Box 1, reflect conflicts inherent at much broader scales in both English and Scottish planning policy. What was surprising was the way in which coastal imaginaries appeared to be mobilised in relation to these conflicts, consistent with processes of discursive exclusion.

| Globally competitive industries as basis of development (energy, defence and tourism) | Community-led, environmentally based development partnerships as basis of development |
| High-end housing markets as driver of development | Affordable and social housing as driver of urban and rural regeneration |

**Box 1: Conflicting narratives of development**

The analysis revealed five distinguishable imaginaries associated with “coast” that are active within development policy.

<p>| Coast as Other | Associated with distinctive traditional local cultures, based on marine activities, particularly fishing and seafaring |
| The Wild Coast | Associated with qualities of drama, isolation, tranquillity and vulnerability, with a strong emphasis on international/national importance of such qualities |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Rural Coast</th>
<th>Discursively associated with the qualities of the elite “rural idyll” but also with romantic pastoral ideas of community and identity</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Old Industrial Coast</td>
<td>The legacy of labour-intensive industry, in advanced states of economic decline, associated with ports, mines, heavy industry and rail transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Industrial Coast</td>
<td>Associated with globally recognized high-tech and high-skilled industry, including nuclear and renewable energy and the defence industry</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Box 2: Active imaginaries of ‘the coast’**

The dominant development narratives conscript areas that are framed in terms of the Rural Coast, New Industrial Coast and Wild Coast. These imaginaries are paradoxically compatible in terms of perceptions of global high-tech market cachet. The association with elites, the evocation of marketable “quality”, including high environmental quality and the “rural idyll”, work to locate an area as competitively “viable” (Massey, 1991, 2005). Indeed in Cumbria, for instance, New Industrial Coast is actively being promoted in tandem with new executive housing in villages and rural areas and the desirably affluent lifestyles associated with the Rural and Wild Coasts are in direct conflict with urban regeneration needs. In fact, areas framed as Coast as Other and/or closely linked to Old Industrial Coast are strikingly excluded from wider development narratives for the area – they are essentially peripheralised as unviable according to the dominant development narrative and they are discursively silenced within the overall policy narratives.

Such constructions may have deep socio-cultural and historical roots. The imaginaries described in the above analysis can be contrasted with very different constructions of land-sea space by non-Western, non-industrial cultures (Mulrennan & Scott, 2000; Silver, 2014). At the same time, Ryks (2014) describes how New Zealand land use plans have constructed coast as both “troublesome” and “messy”, associated with traditional community interests requiring “containment”, and elite, high value real estate. It is possible to distinguish the more consciously promoted versions of ‘reality’, such as the New Industrial Coast, that incorporate the conceived spaces of economic
planners, drawing on the dominant narratives of global competitiveness and ‘administrative rationalism’ (Hofmeester et al., 2012).

**Reflections on city imaginaries**

There are intriguing resonances between the way in which imaginaries of “the coast” appear to be mobilized and the discussion of imaginaries of ‘the city’ described by Davoudi (2018). A city can simultaneously carry a wide range of imaginaries. A ‘global city’, a ‘resilient city’ or a ‘smart city’ may be clearly recognizable in relation to dominant development narratives. However, it seems fair to say that imaginaries of the ‘just city’ or the ‘zero carbon city’ are largely excluded from local development narratives in the UK. Both present particular challenges to development narratives based on the logic of consumerism. Other interesting imaginaries in this context are the ‘healthy city’ which appears to be gaining greater traction, while the imaginary of ‘the garden city’, drawing on multiple historical and cultural associations, is currently being mobilised in an attempt to overcome ‘urban’ versus ‘rural’ tensions in English property markets.

**Spatial imaginaries in planning**

An analytical spotlight on the way in which the mobilization of particular imaginaries supports dominant narratives while, alternatively, other imaginaries are excluded from the development arena, through the medium of policy texts, offers a useful tool for engaging with power dynamics in planning processes. As the analysis of coastal imaginaries suggests, it is possible for multiple and sometimes seemingly contradictory imaginaries to be conscripted in this way. The power dynamics involved are multifaceted and contingent. However, these very characteristics open up possibilities for repoliticisation in the face of globally dominant development narratives that are operating to silence innovation and alternative development trajectories for localities. In seeking more sustainable and inclusive development approaches, an awareness of how existing spatial imaginaries are being conscripted and mobilised in any development policy process can become the focus for exploring and dismantling levers of exclusion and domination. The example of imaginaries of ‘the coast’ suggests insights into how currently dominant development narratives, which privilege economic competitiveness and arguably undervalue environmental and social goods, might be uncovered, challenged or resisted to achieve fairer and more environmentally sustainable outcomes.
As Davoudi (2018) stresses, it is vital to be able to question spatial imaginaries that are assumed to be irrefutable common sense, and not only to forge new imaginaries but to understand the mechanisms through which such alternative imaginaries can be silenced within place-framing processes. Planning concerns what Massey (2005:140) described as “the avoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now”. Planners struggle to resist the capture of such negotiations by dominant, socially and ecologically destructive interests. In bringing all voices to these negotiations, the imaginative work that enables the inclusion of intergenerational and nonhuman actors will play a key role. These actors are integral dimensions of spatial imaginaries, either in terms of their inclusion or exclusion. Are local planning processes constrained by spatial imaginaries that have been captured by dominant development narratives or can they reach out to experiment and innovation? Revealing spatial imaginaries offers the potential for local plans and local planning processes to be both more transparent and transformative.

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The Formation of Value in Spatial Imaginaries

Ruth Raynor

Introduction

*It's raining outside. Heavy rain. Cosy in the warm although water pushes through cracks in the ceiling. Buckets catch the drips. Themselves a kind of warmth: efforts to keep things going. The room functions, just about. But it’s a threatened embrace. It’s a punished building, teetering but still dignified. It’s a full building, inscribed with photographs, crafts, piles of equipment, a tea urn, lists, knocks and bumps and firm reminders to wash our hands, be kind, keep joining in... It’s a room filled with potential.*

This provides location and, at times, action for a theatre play developed with a women’s support group in a supposedly ‘deprived’ part of the North East of England. This imagined room is not far removed from the actual building with/ in which we developed our ‘fiction’, less the cracks. Less, I should say, water physically entering the space. It’s a folding then of the memory and the anticipation. Our room, the actual room, a dusty blue hall in a family support service is also perhaps a threatened embrace. It holds and/or is comprised of the same effort, the same remains of activity, the same sadness that this may or probably will become something else.

In our play, that setting would become narratively dynamic and dramatically interactive, it would perform and be performed with (especially when the rain comes in). But what does the room work to do? Perhaps it gives a sense of ‘precarious’ place: a tested region struggling after de-industrialisation? More specifically it evokes the effects of current threats to the operations of our third sector organisation, following cuts from local authority budgets: as a bucket catches drips, attempts at holding together persist.
In this short piece, the room is an allegory. It’s a way into my thinking about the forces (and excesses) of abstracted value in the emergence and circulation of spatial imaginaries. Here I engage with Irigaray’s chapter ‘Women on the Market’ (1985) to consider how spatial imaginaries are mediated by ‘sensually invested structures of convention’ (after Berlant 2008) with focus on patriarchy and the capitalist economy. For Irigaray (1985:173) ‘Marx’s analysis of commodities as the elementary form of capitalist wealth can thus be understood as an interpretation of the status of woman in so-called partriarchal societies…’ In this case a woman becomes a commodity through her relation with ungraspable value and through that process she (as commodity) becomes abstracted from her own intrinsic value by a relation with gold or phallus (or something else altogether). Despite this, for Irigaray, a woman always also maintains, contains and, keeps hold of her own intrinsic value and her capacity to generate pleasure and joy for herself. It is the ascription of the third term that produces women as commodities - always worth ‘less or more.’ The third value is volatile: making her vulnerable to those shifts.

Abstracted Value

Drawing on this intervention from Irigaray, which critiques and expands on Marx’s account of value in the political economy, I suggest that imaginaries of place, people located there, and particular formations of abstracted or ‘ungraspable’ value become in relation with one another. For example, in the UK culture, women ‘on benefits’ and women from or based in the North East Region of England are variously ascribed as ‘lacking value’. Images, articles and other forms of expression produce those people and places at the bottom of a hierarchy- which is itself a form of spatial imaginary. They enforce a common narrative (intensified amidst austerity) that poverty is shameful and that getting out of poverty is an autonomous project. This folds back into the lived realities of those people and places. It is a double violence, since the same poverty is determined at least in part, by an unequal distribution of opportunities and resources, and by barriers to employment that impact particularly on single mothers- these are effects of the capitalist systems of exchange. And all the while those people, and places continue to hold intrinsic value.
The ascription of abstract value onto people, objects and places often operates on the level of the imaginary- but the formations and effects of those imaginaries are also material and visceral. For example, in the North East of England coal seams close to the surface and to rivers, made extraction and transportation easy. This geology became differently significant as coal became commodity. Extraction, exploitation and abandonment took place, in line with usual rhythms in the building up and breaking down of landscape- a consequence of the capitalist economy as described by Harvey (2001). This shows how the application of abstract value re-makes both imaginaries and the materiality of place. Echoing Berlant’s (2011) ‘hoarding’, I suggest that the traces of those rhythms remain in places and spatial imaginaries. This can be found in a contemporary account of the region:

For as long as anyone alive will remember, this [the North East of England] has been a 'problem region': a special case, a sick man… Despite dollops of public money and years of heroic effort… [these] former industrial heartlands are quietly decaying… When you go back to the North-East, the landscape's kind of crumbling. There is this sort of sadness. It feels like a people who've been weakened, who've just been cut loose.  (Becket, 2014: No pagination)

Here, the North East of England is embodied as a sick man: decaying and cut loose. This article ascribes the success or failure of region(s) through limited terms and reduces the North East to a place valued in relation with another place (in the article - Detroit) according to certain terms. It evokes decay, failed heroism, and sadness that fold into the lacking of the region. The article gives little focus to shifting market forces that may have facilitated such failure (on which see Hudson, 2001), instead the region is narrated as sick, lost, lacking. However, the author could have expressed the region through different kinds of value, or without the ascription of abstracted, relative value at all, and in doing so he could have made different imaginaries of the place. For example, he might have written on sea air, friendliness, pubs that have escaped gentrification, hills, historic ruins, seeing the bridges unfold across the Tyne as you arrive home on the train, atmospheres of positive and negative solidarity. Those were not the author’s experiences or his interests. Instead, writing from London after a brief visit to the region he creates the North-East as
a bounded and decaying object, failing in comparison to others; a failure predominantly through the terms of its capacity to generate money value.

‘A bucket catches drips’

Becket’s (2014) article caused a certain level of local outrage. It was circulated through Twitter and Facebook and criticized by residents, business members and other supporters of the North East for containing assumptions and inaccuracies. A petition was set up urging the author to return (from London) to the region and write ‘a more balanced and educated piece’ (Pidd, 2014). And it really mattered who felt that they had the right to speak on this matter; that is who could construct the region in this way, and from which experience they were speaking. This was especially important amidst an absence of other articles - other constitutions of the region. And certainly, national mainstream media was thought to have become increasingly London-centric since budget cuts had led to a dwindling of resident Northern correspondents (Pidd, 2014). Although thousands of comments emphatically celebrated the excessive joys of the North East, some responses used the same terms of analysis, i.e. they contested the accuracy of ‘numbers,’ drawn on to claim the region as a sick man, rather than questioning their hegemony. They insisted that the region had value through the same abstracted terms that were used to argue that it did not. Together Becket’s article and the responses to it produced a different imaginary of the region: an exchange - a mode of affirming each other [and place grown from that place which grows into that place. In this act perhaps a bucket catches drips: a spatial imaginary escapes and exceeds the terms of abstract value, which are always less or more. (Though perhaps, inevitably, those spatial imaginaries become appropriated- folded back into constitutions of the place, as ‘creative’ as dynamic and therefore as holding a different kind of value.)

By becoming embedded in the construction of spatial imaginaries, abstracted values can mediate how people know a place without really knowing a place. These imaginaries matter- they do work. They can evoke the effects of de-industrialisation and subsequent economic instability that have resulted from the rhythms of the capitalist economy. This may insight action for change, additional funding, or ‘do down’ a place even further through a lack of corporate investment, depleted house
prices and so on. Whatever the outcome, those terms of measure and their representations risk reproducing the problem of a value that is less or more, and that is more or less volatile.

Therefore, adding to the various features of spatial imaginaries discussed by Davoudi (2018), I seek to emphasise the importance of paying attention to how different formations of abstract value ‘get inside’ or mediate spatial imaginaries and what work they do. We should notice the forces of abstracted value in the constitution and circulation of spatial imaginaries, consider abstracted values themselves as spatial (vertical) imaginaries and understand how imaginaries can escape and exceed values that are ‘less or more.’ Values then become an integral part of place-making, both in the imaginary and in their material manifestations. ‘Ungraspable’ value is both entangled with and abstracted from place. And as those values shift and flow, places remember, traces are left behind.

References


(T)here Be Dragons: Exploring Spatial Imaginaries Through Collaborative Mapmaking

Bryonie Reid

Introduction
Spatial imaginaries in Northern Ireland have been shaped in particular ways by our history of conflict. Identity is key to this conflict, and place is key to identity. I have spent my career to date as a researcher, writer and artist exploring why place has been so important to me, why it has become entwined with identity, and what that means on the island of Ireland. My interest in place – how we use it, how we understand it and how we imagine it, as well as how we construct belonging in it – stems from the feeling of having, or being in, no place. From its creation, Northern Ireland has been in a state of ‘in-between’ or ‘not quite’: neither Irish nor British, at least according to popular understandings, but not clearly something else either. It can be a struggle in Northern Ireland to feel a sense of belonging beyond the local, for both Protestants and Catholics.

Place and identity
The place-identity still ascribed to Ireland is based on an imaginary developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This imaginary, closely allied to the cultural revival and subsequent revolution, focuses on the west of Ireland as the site of pure Irish Otherness. It privileged rural and often sublime landscapes, with cottages, turf stacks, mountains, bogs and shore forming a shorthand for the Catholic, Irish-speaking peasantry who were supposed to provide the greatest contrast with the urban, bourgeois, Protestant, English-speaking English – as well as the descendants of English and Scots planters who settled in the north of Ireland in the early seventeenth century and failed to wholly assimilate.

In the decade between 1912 and 1922, a tumultuous time in global and national terms and in Ireland culminating in partition and civil war, the North presented a special problem to this spatial imaginary. It simply would not fit. The dominant spatial imaginary for the North revolved around its industrial heartland, Belfast. This imaginary conflated the urban and industrial, prosperous and
capitalist, with Protestantism and Britishness, and it was anathema to the dominant spatial imaginary for the rest of the island. Both imaginaries were highly selective and partial but, very powerful.

**Spatial imaginaries in conflict**

The unionist and nationalist politics that the two imaginaries represented continued to clash in covert and overt ways. The imaginaries themselves, however, survived by ignoring each other. Clare O’Halloran (1987:1) mentions the power of “the nationalist map image”, which remained, post-partition, an image “of the whole island as a distinct geographical entity, bounded by the sea and with no internal divisions” Meanwhile, unionism failed to develop any spatial imaginary that stretched beyond the shipyards, mills and factories of Belfast. A statelet carved out of the island against the will of most of its people, it lacked historical and geographical heft and those who called it into being could not engage with its geographical position. In fact, its geography was a threat. Not only was it tacitly claimed by the Irish Free State and later Republic of Ireland, but also the North’s rural landscapes were essentially no different from the rural landscapes of the nationalist South, and could not be relied upon to symbolise the North as the South’s Other. This leads indirectly to the comment of a young man from the Protestant Fountain in predominantly Catholic Derry in 2000: “I don’t think Ulster is meant to be a place. It’s just meant to be the Protestant people” (quoted in McKay, 2000:308). Likewise, Northern Catholics express the sense that they are, perhaps, “not accepted in the Republic, not accepted in Northern Ireland… just not accepted” (Nash, 2016:79). Northern Ireland, therefore, can be a kind of no-place. This ambiguity, the lack of an agreed and stable spatial imaginary, is a catalyst for militant and minutely localised territorialisation. Historian A.T.Q. Stewart (1977:180-182) explains it thus:

> The very essence of the Ulster question… is that [Protestant and Catholic] do live together, and have done for centuries. They share the same homeland, and, like it or not, the two diametrically opposed political wills must coexist on the same narrow ground… The two communities are not intermingled… but they are interlocked… This gives rise to a situation in which the “territorial imperative” is extremely insistent… The war in Ulster is being fought out on a narrower ground than even the most impatient observer might imagine, a
ground every inch of which has its own associations and special meaning… Locality and history are welded together.

**Collaborative mapmaking**

Ambiguity can be threatening, but it can also be richly productive. I became interested early on in what was happening beneath, beyond and between the cracks in this sectarian geography. In my practice as an artist and facilitator, I pursue those alternative spatial imaginaries that arise out of equivocality. Since 2010 I have been working with my sisters in a collective called quarto, and together we have developed a collaborative mapmaking methodology to use with groups exploring what place, identity and the past means to them. The methodology allows us to draw out some of the real and powerful complexity of individual (as opposed to national) spatial imaginaries.

Our methodology stems from my practice as an artist and cultural geographer and my sisters’ practices in facilitation, museum studies and community outreach in heritage. We wanted to engage groups in an activity and produce a visual outcome. Drawing from feminist theory about the importance of bodily understanding, and knowing that territorialism in Northern Ireland tends to constrain physically as well as mentally, we wanted to include an opportunity to be in and experience the places we were talking about, too.

Our mapmaking process begins with a guided tour of the place in question. We ask participants to engage critically with guide’s narrative and think about what they hear and see, and what they do not hear and see. On returning we spend some time talking about the relationships of mapping to power. Maps may pretend merely to record knowledge, but in fact help to shape it through choices about what to leave out, what to include and how to represent it. Maps made in association with invasion, colonisation or plantation often erase or censor pre-existing spatial imaginaries. We use the vivid example given by Sharon O’Brien (quoted in McClintock, 1997:89):
The tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy, living along what is now known as the United States/Canadian border, fleeing northward after a raiding attack, watched with growing amazement as the soldiers of the United States army came to a sudden, magical stop. Fleeing southwards, they saw the same thing happen, as Canadian mounties reined to an abrupt halt. They came to call this invisible demarcation the ‘medicine line.

The idea of maps as partial and subjective is resonant in particular ways in Northern Ireland. During the Troubles, maps published by Ordnance Survey Northern Ireland were likely to omit security installations, for example. At the same time residents of Ballymurphy in west Belfast replaced their English-language street signs with Irish-language ones, scrambling the sense of the maps carried by British soldiers.

The point is to emphasise that no map can sustain a claim to objective totality, but all represent a spatial imaginary, and as discussed in Davoudi (2018) they perform that imaginary. The idea behind collaborative mapmaking, therefore, is to proliferate; to represent more and different spatial imaginaries. We ask participants to create maps based on their bodily, emotional and psychological experience of the place we tour, including associations, inherited stories and memories (see Maps 1 and 2). When we spend time at the end of a workshop hearing about, interpreting and reflecting upon the maps, their capacity to tell nuanced and moving stories becomes clear. The spatial imaginaries they represent can act as a corrective to the limited and limiting idea of ‘Protestant’ and ‘Catholic’, ‘unionist’ and ‘nationalist’ or ‘loyalist’ and ‘republican’ places. While participants’ maps exist within that context, they also reach beyond it.

References


Unpacking the spatial imaginaries of ‘One Belt, One Road’- from representation to performativity
Olivier Sykes and Dave Shaw

Introduction
In 2013, China sought to respond to depressed demand in the global economy by launching a major macro-economic initiative known as ‘One Belt, One Road’ (OBOR). This seeks to re-imagine the traditional trade links that existed between China, much of Asia and Europe dating back over thousands of years, in what became popularised as ‘the Silk Road’. This initiative has a number of spatial dimensions and implications, ranging from infrastructural projects, regional development to Eurasian geopolitics. This short paper considers the OBOR concept from the perspective of spatial imaginaries in terms of both representational and performative discourse. The latter is a useful conceptual lens for interpreting and interrogating how the OBOR vision may affect material practices and geographies for spatial planners who are engaged in strategy and place-making in territories that come within the ambit of OBOR.

‘OBOR’ as a representational discourse
 Much discussion of spatial imaginaries has viewed them as being representational discourses, placing an emphasis on interpreting how they are constituted linguistically through text and images (Watkins, 2015). Applying this perspective, the OBOR initiative can be seen as seeking to (re)represent the spatial imaginary of ‘the Silk Road’ – the diverse trading routes, dating back thousands of years, connecting Europe, much of Asia, and ultimately reaching into China and the city now known as Xi’an. The way the OBOR initiative is being represented linguistically and through images, seeks to reassert a spatial imaginary created by such material links. The term ‘Silk Road’ is itself relatively recent, having been coined by the German geographer and traveller Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877, when ironically the importance of these trade routes had temporarily diminished. The Silk Road, in the singular, was also to an extent a misnomer, as in practice, it comprised a number of overland and maritime networks connecting places together to facilitate the two-way trade of goods and services. Yet, even though the linguistic representation of the Silk Road was an oversimplification of the material and geographical reality of the trade links between and through its constituent territories, and its emergence coincided with the decline
of the importance of these trade routes, it nevertheless has anchored a powerful spatial imaginary which resonates to the present day. The very term ‘The Silk Road’ may conjure-up an imaginary of camel trains, encampments under starry desert night skies, and the sights, sounds and smells of ‘exotic’ and ‘faraway’ (for Europeans!) cities like Tashkent and Tehran. In associating the trade route(s) with the material silk, the term also tied into the western perceptions of ‘the East’ as a place of luxury, sensory stimulation, and fulfilment. The imaginary of the Silk Road carries echoes of the western ‘Orientalism’ identified by Edward Said (1978) in which ‘The East’ and its places, peoples and traditions were variously patronised, romanticised, loved, feared and othered through linguistic and visual representations. Such representations also served to legitimate the various acts of Western colonial expansion and imperial dominion over other peoples and territories. Yet it should also be remembered that the trade links and cultural influences flowed in both directions along the Silk Road, and its legacy is also claimed beyond Europe. For example, in X’ian it forms an important part of the city’s identity, marketing and ‘tourist offer’. Indeed one of the striking features of OBOR is that it seeks to appropriate and reanimate the (originally) ‘European’ terminology and spatial imaginary of the Silk Road for the material ends of re-establishing spaces for co-operation based on reconnecting, or better connecting, places largely through improving infrastructure connections (see Map 1).

Launched by the current Chinese President Xi Jinping, the initiative is intended to be a long-term vision for the next thirty-five years. It envisages three overland routes (‘The Silk Road Economic Belt’ including both road and rail) and one maritime route (Aoyama, 2016). The principles of peace and co-operation, openness and inclusiveness in decision-making, mutual learning and benefit are foregrounded by the initiative’s promoters in arguing that the initiative will help create ‘win-win’ situations for all those involved. President Xi Jinping has stated that the OBOR initiative “should be jointly built through consultation to meet the interests of all, and efforts should be made to integrate the development strategies of the countries along the routes. It is not closed but open and inclusive; it is not a solo by China but a chorus of all countries along the routes” (cited in CBBC and FCO, n.d.). Yet there are also some commentators who see the initiative as China flexing its economic muscles as part of an agenda to develop as a hegemonic global power, or at least seeking new markets to help absorb over capacity in her home market thereby avoiding, or mitigating, a domestic economic crisis. Indeed, Aoyama (2016, 22) argues that a key question
as the initiative develops will be whether China is ‘able to convince the world that it is not a threat but rather an opportunity?’

‘OBOR’ as a ‘performative’ spatial imaginary

For Watkins (2015: 519) a performative view of spatial imaginaries examines how they ‘influence the material practices producing our geographies’ and help overcome a ‘representation-then-action’ view of causality whilst also stressing how material practices may also modify spatial imaginaries. Similarly, Davoudi notes how ‘ideas and practices are not rival causal agencies’, adding that the existing literature on spatial imaginaries “largely focuses on the social construction of spatial imaginaries and much less on the role of space and place in the construction of social imaginaries” (Davoudi, 2018: X). This attention to space and place seems particularly important in a ‘performative account’ of spatial imaginary because it involves considering not only how the spatial imaginary of OBOR may be affecting material practices, but also how material practices within the territories it covers may modify the spatial imaginary of OBOR.

We have shown how OBOR has been represented through a discourse that seeks to reanimate the spatial imaginary of the Silk Road with hoped for material effects in terms of improved communication routes both by land and sea, and increased trade links. The investments and infrastructure associated with OBOR may, for example, modify the relational geographical position of places creating a variety of spatial development opportunities and challenges. To date sixty five separate nation states have become associated with the initiative and a newly established Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank has been created, intended to support infrastructure investment in the Asia-Pacific area. As an initiative which covers such a range and number of countries across Asia and Europe, the places which are, or become connected/reconnected to the new revived and re-imagined networks are likely to have distinctive experiences that may in turn/in time modify its underpinning spatial imaginary.

This turn towards performativity encourages debates on spatial imaginaries which go ‘beyond text,’ giving greater emphasis to material practices and how these in turn may modify imaginaries. Thus, the practice focused research might explore how planners and other place makers respond to imaginaries promoted through mobilising visions such as OBOR. Reflecting planning’s
character as an interventionist social practice (Taylor, 1998), it is unsurprising that planning history is full of examples of spatial imaginaries which have emerged, become collectively shared by groups of people, and gone on to achieve performative agency (Davoudi, 2018). Planning scholarship may also offer avenues for the analytical development of the ‘performative turn’ in spatial imaginaries research. For example, the performance school of plan evaluation, developed by Dutch planning theorists, similarly emphasises the performative role of strategic planning (Mastop and Faludi, 1997). Here strategic spatial plans, frameworks, visions and doctrines are viewed as instruments which frame spatially significant decision-making and action, and considered to be ‘performing’ when they play “a tangible role in the choices of the actors” to whom they are addressed (Faludi 2000: 306). When decision makers imagine or interpret a message of a plan and modify it to their specific local context, the plan might be said to have ‘generative capacity’ (Faludi 2001b). Whilst OBOR is described as an ‘initiative’ rather than a strategy, or a policy, and is far more fluid in character than a formal spatial plan, it nevertheless articulates a spatial imaginary to be operationalised through spatialized investments. Given the diversity of territories and contexts across which the OBOR applies, the performance view of spatial strategy evaluation, may offer one line of enquiry through which the performativity of its spatial imaginary could be assessed.

Conclusion
Both ‘representational’ and ‘performative’ paradigms of spatial imaginaries offer useful perspectives to help define research agendas in relation to OBOR. It also seems clear that such research should not be undertaken in a de-territorialised vacuum, as the transformative spatial imaginary that is articulated through OBOR becomes performative through a process of context-dependent re-territorialisation in which material practices and the actions of planners and other place-shapers may modify the initial spatial imaginary. Such processes may mirror those which have shaped the evolution of the planning discipline and informed performance based conceptions of strategic planning. Apprehending OBOR from the perspective of performative spatial imaginaries also directs our attention to further practice-based and political issues and potential impacts. Macro-economic policies and initiatives, especially those linked to global trade and trade liberalisation may be negotiated from a national or a ‘global-region’ perspective (e.g. the EU), and, as in the case of OBOR, these may typically be promoted as offering ‘win-win’ outcomes. Yet in
practice, the impacts of such initiatives are often spatially uneven, and if planning is conceived of as a futures orientated activity, then planners surely need to be aware of how such wider factors and settings, and associated ways of imagining space, notably through ‘spatial transformation imaginaries’ (Watkins, 2015), have the potential to shape their localities. For, as Davoudi (2018, X) notes, individuals such as planners are not just cogs ‘in the machine’ but themselves political actors who are ‘engaging with and transforming the world’ potentially transcending the boundaries of the ‘dominant spatial imaginaries’ within which they operate.

References


Map 1: ‘One Belt, One Road’ corridors and nodes

Source: Suzanne Yee, Department of Geography and Planning, University of Liverpool, based on a map produced by China Investment Research (20150