

Core and Periphery

In order to understand the influence of the Rhine area and the area that influences the Rhine area, it is necessary to investigate its context. A collective of factors (demographic, cultural, infrastructural, etc.) make the area along the river Rhine to a focus zone within Europe. We try to mistrust this fact as much as possible in order to redefine its current condition.

Europe does not have a clearly defined center or core but one can surely talk about a certain centrality, from a core zone, which is economic, institutional and cultural dominating. In our part of the project Beyond Plan B we go on a quest for Europe's periphery and core with the help of economic, social-political and cultural parameters.

The current relationship between urbanity and economic growth seems to be easily explained. Where there is a high concentration of people, there is a high concentration of connections which leads to a higher information flow than in less populated areas. A higher information flow is resulting in higher exchange rates and consumption. This advantage of high concentration in a rather small area can't be competed by other, softer qualities, of less densely populated zones. Thus, according to this theory, high density is good business.

What happens to high density areas can be explained with the core-periphery model which constructs the link between areas of high concentration to areas of low concentration.



Roger Brunet (born March 30, 1931) French geographer and "inventor" of the Blue Banana

centration of inhabitants, trade volumes, infrastructure, etc. The most intriguing part of this model is its scalelessness, thus it is not only applicable to cities but also to villages and social groups as well as to the world at large.

In our study we investigate Europe in the light of the core-periphery model to either prove it or trash it but as starting point it helps us to reorganize this vast atomized space.


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Column: Italy refutes the idea it's on Europe's "periphery"

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The words "core" and "periphery" have become standard terms to describe the winners and losers in the euro crisis. But how could anyone with the slightest sense of history, or knowledge of art and culture, call Italy or Spain peripheral to Europe, while placing Finland and Slovakia, or even Germany and Holland, at Europe's core?

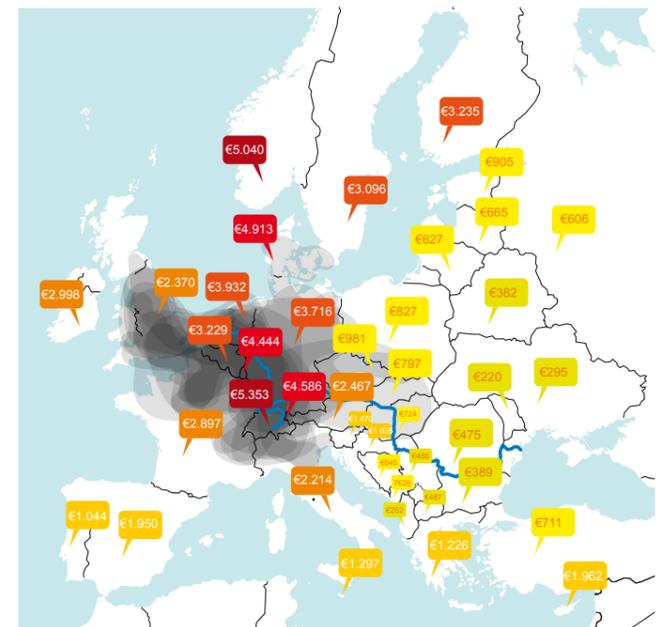
... With every step toward a resolution of the crisis, the peripheral countries have lost political autonomy, economic opportunity and national self-esteem, while the core countries, especially Germany, have been enriched and empowered.

By Anatole Kaletsky, Wed Aug 22, 2012 3:00pm EDT
 (Anatole Kaletsky is a Reuters columnist. Any opinions expressed are his own.)

Since the financial crisis hit the Euro Zone the word 'core' got used frequently in attempts to describe the economic differences within the European Union, which for some poses a threat while for others it is a reassurance of their seemingly strong position. Generally it is assumed that Europe's core is financially healthy, well educated and blessed with less corrupt administration. "Europe might be sick, but at its core it is healthy", this is the im-

age most Europeans, which are of course from the core, want to present to the world outside. But is this true? What and who is the core?

Generally, the core is a myth. Since we learned that not the earth is the center of the universe, we know that everything is circling around everything. Even our sun is, only is the center and fix within our solar system, because if one zooms out it is clear that also she is circulating around a core in the galaxy, which itself is again circulating and so on and so on. Another fact is that standing right at the core and in the center, it is impossible to realize one's position and the scale of it. It needs messengers that provide us with news and gossips from the periphery/core or one needs to go there themselves,



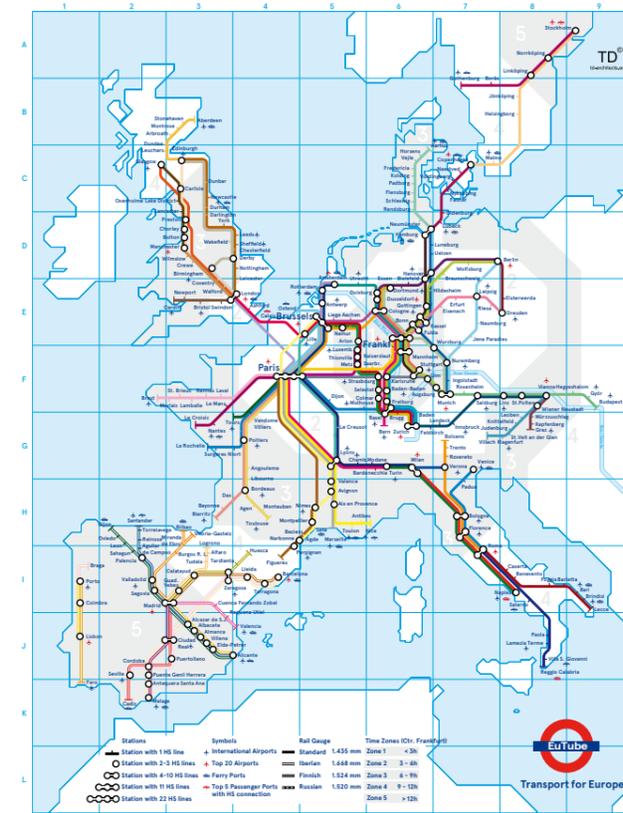
hourly wages within Europe

tegration of Europe's core could be fully under way since I could be simply not aware of it.

Next to the economic reality there are also spatial, demographic, cultural realities and if we choose to define the core for example by the density of population, then there is no sign of disintegration in Europe. To the contrary, the Europe's core zone, which was once defined by Roger Brunet as Blue Banana and has taken on since then various shapes but never really left the area spanned between Liverpool and Genoa, with the river Rhine at its center, is still gaining people while Europe's periphery (in demographic sense) is gradually thinning out and is becoming ever more peripheral.

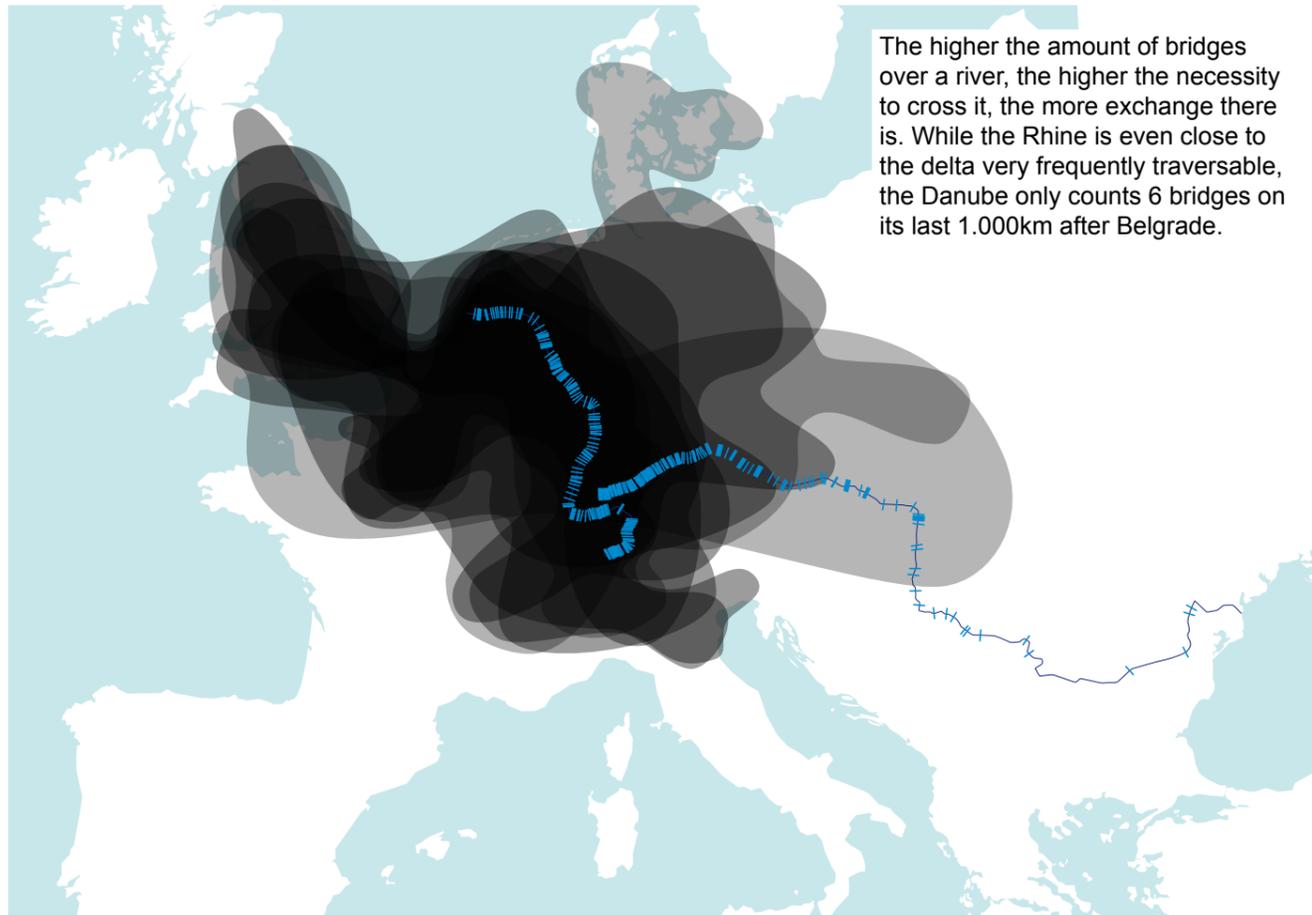
Seen in this light, Europe's core seems to intensify rather than disintegrate. If one looks at infrastructure densities, headquarters of multinational corporations or hourly wages, in each of these values the core is much better off than the area we call periphery. No wonder that for example Italy is not getting tired to point out that it is not at Europe's periphery with the hint that it is at least one of the founding member states of the European Union, an idea which was born in the center.

All founding members of the European Union are "Blue Banana States" and the EU's major institutions are all based within its core zone. The juvenile core-community had at its beginning still competition from the EFTA (European Free Trade Association) which was in the 1960s referred to as the "Outer Seven" while the EU, called EEC (European Economic Community) at that time, was nicknamed as the "Inner Six". The Suez Crisis made the UK rethink its geopolitical position in Europe and provided the incentive to switch sides from the "Outer Seven" (with its numerical majority) to the "Inner Six". From that



EU Tube, high-speed rail network in Europe, 2013

anyway, something has to move to be able to realize. Everything is both, a center and periphery simultaneously. Being core or periphery is a relative condition that depends on the current perspective and context. Thus if we talk about a core (or center), it only can be a core on the move and a core in a specific scale, at a specific moment in a specific genre, with dynamic observers. Only in this light the current economic discussion about core-Europe and periphery-Europe can be discussed since we have to accept and respect the economic unstable condition of this core. By the time this text will be read a disintegration of this core can already be set in motion, or even at the time this text is written this disin-



The higher the amount of bridges over a river, the higher the necessity to cross it, the more exchange there is. While the Rhine is even close to the delta very frequently traversable, the Danube only counts 6 bridges on its last 1.000km after Belgrade.

bridges over the Rhine versus bridges over the Danube



Jan Brueghel de Oude; Christ Preaching at the Seaport, 1598

time on the battle was won for the group now called European Union and from that time on it kept on expanding outward.

But what is the nature of this EU expansion? Of course one has to apply to become a member but how much pressure is there on non member states? How much dinner invitations does one miss if one is not a member of this club?

Is the EU expansion a spatial, a geopolitical project? Or is it, as often presented, a redistribution project which gives money from the rich (the core) to the poor (the periphery)? Or does the core need cheap labour within its free market-economy?

Spatial expansion always involved spatial planners and triggered fantasies of future occupation. Not so with the EU expansion. No strategic masterplan seems to exist for the new territories that joined the soft empire. Instead an unprecedented library of rules and standards needs to be taken over by each new member state. But each and every little rule in this compilation has the ability to influence the physical landscape of the member state. Most of these rules are not indented as regional or urban planning tools but e.g. to protect the health of the citizens or in the case of "Natura 2000", to maintain or

increase Europe's bio-diversity. Thus unnoticed (or not?) the spatial organization and layout of the European Union transformed but not through planning but govern. Maybe this subversive planning style is nothing new and always has been the strongest tool for shaping the cities? Are the rules and laws of the EU just like the market rights in the Middle Ages and the defence strategies in the Renaissance?

These are some of the main questions we are dealing with right at the moment.

Of course there might be no core, and there might be no periphery and it is possible that exactly what we define as core is the periphery and what we see as periphery is the core. As said before, the core is a trap, since everybody defines it's own focus of investigation as the core around which everything else is centring. We intend to avoid this trap but also to step into it, wholeheartedly.

