The place where streams seek ground. Towards a new territorial governmentality: the meaning and usage of the concept of territorial cohesion in the European Union

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Part III  Methodological framework: discourse analysis

Introduction

The main question of this research asks: what is the meaning and usage of the concept of territorial cohesion in the European Union? As scientific research cannot answer such a question unmethodically, it needs a methodological framework. This is what this Part of the research's frame unfolds: discourse analysis and why this method is chosen.

For starters, the concept of territorial cohesion consists of the words 'territorial cohesion' as its signifier and the marked meaning they stand for. As might be common for signs, 'territorial cohesion' seems to be far from meaningless, as it appears to mean too much (Hoggart&Lees&Davies, 2002: 32). Moreover, analysing the concept and what it means and reporting back what is found might leave us with nothing but text. A situation which starts to look like Tansey’s (1990) portrayal of “there is no outside-text” Derrida (Derrida, 1967: 158) and “literature breaks the relation between sign and meaning” De Man (De Man, 1967, in De Man, 1983: 12, 17), who perform their eternal dance in the infinity formed by the edge on a mountain of words whose top and bottom are not visible. As a consequence, there would be no final ground guaranteeing ‘the ultimate meaning of language’ (Hoggart&Lees&Davies, 2002: 32).

This research on the concept of territorial cohesion does not concern itself with absolutes such as the Abyss (Χάος/Khaos) and Ground*, but seeks to investigate the contemporary (non-)existing ground for territorial cohesion, even if de/constructed, uncovered by outlining the dance on the territorial cohesion tune. Foucault

* See for example Heidegger (2001).
is welcome here, although he is (by others) related to post-structuralism, which views signs and meaning as inseparable but not united. He criticises Derrida by pointing to a route out of the realm of text. Foucault argues that if a teaching holds that only the text, that is: not the words but their lattice, tells "the meaning of being", its masters would be given ‘that unlimited sovereignty that allows it indefinitely to re-say the text’ (Foucault, 2006: 573). This does not entail a reference to the real world beyond text(s) as a way out, nor does it offer some ground to stand on for research on the concept of territorial cohesion.

The problems of analysing the concept of territorial cohesion are that many things appear uncertain, complex, and conflicting. How to deal with this? Which method to follow, which process or technical means of collecting and analysing data (Hoggart&Lees&Davies, 2002: 310)? And which methodology, which coherent set of rules to follow grounded in a specific view on the nature of ‘reality’ (i.e. ontology) and basis on which knowledge claims are made (i.e. epistemology) (Hoggart&Lees&Davies, 2002: 310)? Hence, even when absolute Chaos and Ground are not sought for, they come up again in every scientific and/or academic research. A pragmatic way to deal with the methodology of this research is by offering a choice of a strong and a weak version of the argument. In the strong version the shown methodological approaches are posed as the only sound ones for social science due to ontological and epistemological reasons. The weak argument, however, merely suggests that the chosen approaches conveniently suit an investigation of the concept of territorial cohesion as methodological framework. What, then, is the path that should be followed when doing this research goes beyond simply ordering the concept by following when it is mentioned – e.g. how to further analyse the statements on territorial cohesion? To give an idea, the methodological problematic will be introduced in the following paragraphs.

An important and consequential consideration is honesty. In the footsteps of interpretative approaches to human geography, the research does not deal with inert matter as natural science but with 'intersubjective understanding(s) of other people,' who consciously respond to how researchers understand them (Hoggart&Lees&Davies, 2002: 16). An implication here is that we do not as empiricists, positivists, and critical realists try to do experimental science in search of law but interpret in the search for meaning (Geertz, 1973/1975: 5). This understanding has involved an embrace of qualitative methods, such as discourse analysis (Hoggart&Lees&Davies, 2002: 22). To prevent cultural and linguistic pitfalls after this scientific turn, practices are considered as more fundamental than theoretical discourses. Although meanings are cultural and communicated linguistically, 'the ways of acting and thinking at once' should thus discipline interpretation (Foucault, in Foucault, 1997b: 463; Flyvbjerg, 2001: 115). A problematic question arises here for the concept of territorial cohesion: what are its practices if there actually are any?

Although discourse analysis can be accused of scepticism, the approach should not be confused with perspectivisms such as 'ontological nihilism' or 'epistemological solipsism': 'The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external of thought, or with the realism-idealism opposition' (Jensen&Richardson, 2003). It does have to do with their specificity as objects being constructed in terms depending on the structuring of a discursive field. 'What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence' (Laclau&Mouffe, 1985: 108). Ergo, 'it is how we attach meaning and significance to things that is discursive, and it seems difficult to imagine how to think, communicate or act without doing this' (Jensen&Richardson, 2003: 64). Then again, if discourses are seen to represent aspects of the world – e.g. ‘processes, relations and structures of the material world, the ‘mental world’ of thoughts, feelings, beliefs[,] the social world’ (Fairclough, 2003: 123-124) – then an essential acknowledgement for social science hinted at above is that its ‘object is a subject’ (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 32). This distinction between social reality and actual physical conditions leads to an agnostic attitude of the researcher 'about both the existence of social problems under investigation and the truth of any claims made by informants about them' (Hoggart&Lees&Davies, 2002: 28).²

² This distinction of objects as objects and subjects as objects makes a common argument made by (critical) realists irrelevant: although when you walk on the street you surely would not ponder about the choice of realism/relativism when a car comes at you, especially when it goes too fast, you will have a hard time to (literally) bump your head against a State in, for that matter, justice, laws, society, money, values, free will, etc.
At first glance though, territorial cohesion and an analysis of the concept do not only have to do with social reality but also with spatial reality. These realities intertwine and affect each other through time, as both the struggle for control over territory and over historical and social meaning form a part of the history made by human beings. According to Said (2003: 331-332) ‘[t]he task for the critical scholar is not to separate one struggle from another, but to connect them, despite the contrast between the overpowering materiality of the former and the apparent otherworldly refinements of the latter’. This materiality does not represent itself, as a spatial entity is ‘represented by means of power relations expressed in strategies, discourses and institutional settings’ (Beauregard, 1995: 60; Richardson & Jensen, 2003). Planning space can therefore be seen as an expression of a "will to order" (e.g. Boyer, 1983; Diken, 1998; Flyvbjerg, 1998; Sennett, 1990; Wilson, 1992). Hence, this planning research follows Perry’s (1995: 237) thinking of ‘planning as a spatial and strategic discourse [rather] than as a science or knowledge of space’ (Richardson & Jensen, 2003). An application of a discourse analytical approach to the developing formation of the concept of territorial cohesion thus becomes challenging, as it does not only interpret texts and the social world, but the tangible objects they refer to and the connections between these three realms as well.

The interrelated problems of this research which has the concept of territorial cohesion as research object have to be treated in this Book I’s Part III about the used methodology. The questions are: i) which practices does the concept have to discipline interpretations in search for meaning, ii) what are the effects if social science’s object is a subject, and iii) how to link text, the social world, and tangible reality? The framework presented to deal with these problems is meant for a discourse analysis of socio-spatial relations and focuses on territorial cohesion from the viewpoint of the emerging European spatial policy field. The methodology is based upon a type of discourse analysis that follows Foucault (e.g. 1969, 1971 in Bouchard, 1977; in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982; in Lotringer, 1989, 1990) and can be compared to the approach of Hajer (e.g. 1995; in Faludi & Salet, 2000). It has exemplars in Richardson & Jensen (2003) and Jensen & Richardson (2003) and might add to the recently increasing usage of discourse analysis and constructionist approaches by related research disciplines such as European Integration Studies (Diez, 2001: 5-6) and Urban Studies (Jacobs, 2006: 39). Building hereon, the discourse analytical methods try to reveal ‘how new modes of policy thinking, institutional structures and practices are being constructed, challenging those that have evolved in the different EU member-states [in] a complex milieu of power struggles and contested meanings which extends across Europe and reaches from local to transnational policy arenas’ (Richardson & Jensen, 2003: 8). The discourse analytical methodology used will be explained in the forthcoming chapters.

This Part III on the methodological framework of discourse analysis takes five steps, one step per chapter, to further explain what this chosen approach entails for research on the concept of territorial cohesion. It first (Chapter 4) situates the methodology with the general questions of: i) how to place discourse analysis in scientific debates, ii) what is it (i.e. its definition) and what not, iii) for what is discourse analysis used, and iv) what are the possibilities and limitations of the used discourse analysis? In the next three steps this methodology is further operationalised to research territorial cohesion through an analytical separation of its meanings and usages whose related networks form the discourse. That is, by showing how to map the definitions of territorial cohesion in Sinn and Bedeutung (Chapter 5) and in its power practices through Narrative Policy Analysis (Chapter 6), to come up with the rules demarcating the territorial cohesion discourse which relates the concept’s meanings and usages as Discursive Nodal Point (Chapter 7); for the interested reader the actual methods used to do this discourse analysis (e.g. how to analyse and gather information and discipline interpretation) are discussed in Appendix A. The last step taken in Part III’s explanation of the discourse analytical methodology concludes by pointing out the aims of this approach (Chapter 8).

For an argument of a revival of strategic spatial planning see Faludi & Salet (2000).