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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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Chapter 12 The (post-)ESDP process usage area

Introduction

Besides the IGCs usage area, another area to look for strategic positions that demarcate the usage of the concept of territorial cohesion is, as the analytical quadrangle showed above, the (post-)ESDP process. A trait of this usage area is that it largely concerns informal (European) policy making and knowledge production as expressed in the process leading to the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) *par excellence*, but also thereafter – hence the label ‘(post-)ESDP process’. The relatively new though established area of European spatial planning action and the territorial cohesion (policy) one in creation then relate, as spotlighted in the fan of metanarratives and narratives of the IGCs usage area. Although these areas of action are similar, they differ too. The stories showing the concept’s usage in the (post-)ESDP process thereby go in-depth content wise. Still, also from them one can deduce an order (§12.1) in which this time a nitty-gritty of the concept’s aggregated strategic positions appears (§12.2). Due to (again) the departure-point of this research (i.e. European spatial planning; see Chapter 3), we are thereby mostly interested in how the concept substantively influences European spatial (planning) policy (§12.3). From this order, aggregation, and substantive influences two main conclusions can be drawn (§12.4).

12.1 Overviewing multiple and close-knitted promotions in the (post-)ESDP process usage area

The order of the myriad of specific stories told in the (post-)ESDP process usage area (see Appendix D) gives an overview of the developing strategic positions concerning territorial cohesion in the informal practices of European spatial planning. The multi-shaded patchwork of general stories thereby frames the firm bundle of territorial cohesion metanarratives and closely knitted package of narratives, and the intertwined stories on territorial cohesion and spatial planning themselves structure them. Surprisingly, although the concept’s usage for European spatial planning is threefoldly contested in the IGCs usage area, it is not problematic here. What is more, spatial planning and territorial cohesion themselves and their bond are in this usage area explicitly promoted. The usage of territorial cohesion for an implicit promotion of the whole area of European spatial planning might then informally lock areas of action by influencing verging forces; albeit by fitting substantive positions from one inert area into another, re/assembling (conceptual) corridors within these areas, and/or creating a totally new (European) area of action which overlaps and intersects with the previous ones.

12.2 The nitty-gritty of the aggregated positions for the concept in the (post-)ESDP process usage area

An implicit promotion of spatial planning interests through territorial cohesion would be multi-purposive. It would namely mostly be conducted *via* the six metanarratives, which all represent usages of the concept which are accepted here. The strategic positions represented by these metanarratives then substantively endorse: i) polycentrism, ii) the interrelated policy objectives of competitiveness, balance, and sustainability, iii) the accessibility of services or infrastructures, iv) observation of the territory, v) substantive and processual coordination of policies, and vi) the territorial dimension. No wonder, then, that in such a multi-purposive enforcement the stories are multi-shaded and specific, especially when it concerns territorial cohesion’s unifications of policy objectives, full territorial information agenda, and complex territorial governance – besides the relevance of details more in general that is.

Perhaps because this nitty-gritty is framed by detailed puzzles and calls for coordination (i.e. a want for overview), the threshold for positions to be accepted in it appears to be low. The way in which a represented concern forges with territorial cohesion is disputed in all the metanarratives though (e.g. territorial cohesion needs polycentrism or *vice versa*, territorial cohesion provides a policy framework or *vice versa*). In this competition between positions for prominence, only the concerns with accessibility are dimmed, especially if involved with services. Moreover, all these traits that demarcate the concept's usage are reinforced by the strong alliances between positions. These predominantly advocate spatial/territorial structures and coordination for policy objectives, coordination linked to the territorial impacts and dimension of policies as well, and a composite of foci to observe the territory. Then again, these alliances also add positions, entangle their particularities, and deviate structurally. They could therefore not only strengthen positions, but also disturb their interests. We could thus wonder how this low threshold for competitions and alliances between disputed and entangled ways of forging territorial cohesion positions affect the role the concept plays.

12.3 The asymmetric substantive influences between territorial cohesion and European spatial (planning) policy

In this intricate promotion of European spatial planning with territorial cohesion, the influence of the concept can radiate with every exposure. However, influences the other way around seem to be stronger, with the older and even more nuanced scene of multiple narratives (i.e. from the (post-)ESDP process) fitting its content into the concept. The territorial cohesion metanarratives namely mimic the self-directed dynamic of the narratives that promote spatial and territorial structures, the territorial dimension of policies, and competitiveness and sustainability, including the loose commitment to accessibility and augmentation of coordination interests in this. Furthermore, through their holistic links these narratives (and other ones; see Appendix D) give spatial and territorial development twists to territorial cohesion quarrels, thereby posing the ESDP as these quarrels' major cause and concentrating on (economic) observation in general and territorial capital in particular. This would leave scarce turf for positions in the (post-)ESDP process usage area that only belong to territorial cohesion.

When territorial cohesion positions are obtained from European spatial planning, then the concept's usage is not problematic in these practices, arguably, the more so because its usage is on-going in an uncontested promotion of both. Yet, insofar the concept's own ground differs, frictions might arise. This could become problematic when the concept would desert polycentrism, advance territorial instead of spatial concerns, and instrumentalise spatial development. Moreover, for accessibility both differing from and mimicking European spatial planning have risks: either the concept differs by dealing with services according to the official line (see Chapter 11), or it mimics by dealing with services in the familiar infrastructural ways and then deviates juridically. This besides that the specificity, complexity, and indecisiveness of territorial cohesion stories and the hazards they point to (e.g. the heated debate on the European Union's territory) could be problematic for European spatial planning by themselves. Notwithstanding that territorial cohesion positions seldom diverge from European spatial planning, the concept could therefore influence it nonetheless.

The substantive influence of territorial cohesion on European spatial (planning) policy might then commandeer the polycentrism campaign away (to research domains) and re/claim the processual structures of spatial planning for coordinative and framing usages within expansive territorial ways of doing. Moreover, if the concept reassembles passages within the narratives, then the outline of the territorial cohesion positions would simultaneously instrumentalise spatial development, fasten planning traditions even tighter to the structural quest to unify territorial governance, and institute the desire to plan – not European space, but – the territory of the European Union. The conclusion might be, however, that *qua* appearance the promotion of the concept for European spatial planning seems to be effective with these spatial planning stories on territorial cohesion. Yet, whether these utterances have any punching power remains to be seen.

12.4 The two main conclusions on the concept's usage in the (post-)ESDP process usage area

The two main conclusions to draw from these usages of the concept in the (post-)ESDP process usage area are therefore that the promotion of territorial cohesion in European spatial planning processes informally demarcates the substantive limits for possible usages of the concept (e.g. polycentrism or territorial capital, spatial development or territorial governance) and that there is no contested usage of the concept in this, only competitions and coalitions between usages.

The reorganisation of areas of action with the concept as described by the (post-)ESDP process usage area shows that if a new area of territorial cohesion action is created, it would largely overlap with practices of European spatial planning. European spatial planning practices extend beyond the part that forms a context for territorial cohesion though, and therefore consists of more than the substantive positions fitted into the concept. The sacrifices that the informally established area of European spatial planning action nevertheless might have to make to continue its support for creating a territorial cohesion area of action can indicate the indistinct border of both. That is to say, to merely save its influence European spatial planning could need a queen sacrifice of polycentrism and to surrender spatial and territorial development concerns to coordination processes in a compromised pursuit for territorial governance.

However, it might not be territorial cohesion that influences these changes. Besides pervasive political agenda's (e.g. on governance, Lisbon Strategy), other areas of action could affect European spatial planning *via* the concept too, especially when these areas of action are related to territorial cohesion. The European Union's Cohesion Policy is such an area, one that demarcates the official policy limits for possible usages of the concept (see the next chapter).