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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

Hissink Muller, B.M.

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Chapter 13 The Regional/Cohesion policy usage area

Introduction

As the two previous chapters showed, the IGCs could be seen as drawing the official limits in which territorial cohesion may be used and the (post-)ESDP process as informally demarcating its substantive space. The strategic positions of Regional/Cohesion policy then demarcate the official policy limits for possible usages of the concept. Because formal European policy substances are more confined by official limits than those of informal practices, the Regional/Cohesion policy usage area could in the analytical quadrangle made above be placed somewhat between the IGCs and (post-)ESDP process ones. Moreover, Regional/Cohesion policy is within these confines only concerned with policy (making), thereby re/forming the substantial policy space with, among others, a focus on cohesion objectives and an attention to Services of General (Economic) Interest (SG(E)I) – two major issues in the IGCs that are not stressed in the (post-)ESDP process.

These traits make that the stories in the Regional/Cohesion policy usage area treat territorial cohesion substantively, something the stories of the IGCs do not do, but less in-depth than the specific stories of the (post-)ESDP process. As shown by their order (§13.1), in which this time a clear-cut bundle of the concept's aggregated strategic positions appears (§13.2). The departure-point of this research (i.e. European spatial planning; see Chapter 3) then only indirectly returns in our main interest. Ways in which the concept changes the direction of the future European Regional/Cohesion policy (§13.3), that is, a legitimate interest for every territorial cohesion research, could namely come from the (post-)ESDP process usage area. Also from this order, aggregation, and direction two main conclusions can be drawn (§13.4).

13.1 Overviewing clear-cut and interweaved promotions in the Regional/Cohesion policy usage area

The order of the stories told in the Regional/Cohesion policy usage area (see Appendix E) gives an overview of the developing strategic positions concerning territorial cohesion in the formal practices of European policies. Hereby the general stories portray a frame of strives in which the clear-cut though consistent bundle of territorial cohesion metanarratives and the substantively alike interweaved narratives with an own dynamic dwell. The latter two are structured by the allied stories on territorial cohesion and regional/cohesion policy themselves respectively, in which promotions of them, apart and in their bond, uphold them both. This also *via* contested seizures of the concept, as the concept's usage for an expansion of the Regional/Cohesion policy area of action simultaneously demonstrates the colonisation of informal practices and the opening of the door for forces outside the established policy area; albeit by the iteration of substantive positions, the formal addition of a new (European) area of action or arrangement of informal practices, or through (conceptual) remobilisations. Yet, the strategic positions of interest thereby manifest themselves within the framing trenches of the prevalent political, economic, and social struggles (e.g. concerning European integration, growth, welfare). What is more, through the years these positions are structured by combats against national control, for a wider geographical area of influence, and towards an alliance with the Lisbon Strategy. One could then ask in which battles territorial cohesion is involved.

13.2 The aggregated settlement of positions for the concept in the Regional/Cohesion policy usage area

While territorial cohesion and regional/cohesion policy themselves are mutually supportive in the Regional/Cohesion policy usage area, the choice of whether the concept belongs or adds to regional/cohesion policy is contested. The settled amalgam of positions to fight over is then delineated by four metanarratives. These gather: i) challenging surges underway that push for territorial cohesion as cohesion objective or territorial dimension; ii) indecisive quarrels on whether to pursue balanced development objectives foremost or also economic or environmental ones (in combination); iii) a peculiarly placid putting forth of the idea of substantive and primarily processual coordination; and iv) a weakening union between the swelling cloud of specific territorial interests (i.e. from specific to all territories and also pointing to territorial realities, impacts, and capital) and accessibility concerns as the officially given ground for territorial cohesion to go beyond (i.e. services besides transport).

Territorial cohesion positions could thus be involved in each of the battles that structure them. That is, if the concept adds to Regional/Cohesion policy this, arguably, implies the policy's expansion, either as territorial dimension or cohesion objective. Moreover, while following the abovementioned order of metanarratives further, one could pose that economic objectives are more in lign with the Lisbon Strategy, coordination of European Union policies strengthens supranational forces against national control, and the increasing promotion of specific territorial interests entails a widening of Regional/Cohesion policy's geographical area of influence.

The ways in which these strategic positions recently adhere to each other thereby reinforce the usage of the concept as territorial dimension, for economic and environmental interests, and for processual and mostly substantive coordination. However, these adherences also isolate the positions on specific territories and service provision (i.e. by leaving these concerns out of connections), what further weakens them. This development of adherence and isolation might rearrange the strategic positions of territorial cohesion, because then particularly the combined interest to provide enough services in all territories loses out and especially the blended concern to coordinate policies with territorial impacts grows. However, the question is what role all these territorial cohesion positions play in the re/direction of the concept's key formally established area of action, that is, the European Union's Regional/Cohesion policy.

13.3 Territorial cohesion's influence on the future direction of Regional/Cohesion policy

The European Union's Regional/Cohesion policy could expand its area of action by *via* the concept of territorial cohesion roaming the by the IGCs usage area drawn frontier of what is un/official and by (thereby) colonising positions of the (post-)ESDP process usage area. In the Regional/Cohesion policy usage area the official demarcation for territorial cohesion positions (i.e. SG(E)I) is for instance transgressed by an on a par placement of territorial cohesion besides the economic and social cohesion objectives – an approach challenged later on – and a developing role for coordination concerns with the concept even infringes not (yet) established precincts. Moreover, the set objective of sustainable and balanced development is reused by claiming it for territorial cohesion and the concept's official base of providing services is partly followed by tying it to the formal task of reducing the backwardness of specific territories.

However, the strategic positions of territorial cohesion in Regional/Cohesion policy lean less on the IGCs than towards the (post-)ESDP process. This with the (post-)ESDP process' informal ways of doing and sources of information, the more so when these positions in Regional/Cohesion policy are associated. Hereby the concept's interest comes forward in three ways: i) the territorial dimension for economic and social cohesion (or even other objectives), ii) a balancing between economic, social, and environmental issues (which would substantively restructure the Regional/Cohesion policy), and iii) a pursuit of substantive coordination (which

plays a major role for the concept by interlocking its strategic positions). As a consequence, these moves leave the confrontation of informal coordination with formal cooperation in the open (e.g. it is disputed who should coordinate for what). This challenge would increase in importance when the concept is used for the territorial dimension of policies in general or the coordination of all policies, as such an usage could increase the influence of European Regional/Cohesion policy on other (formal) areas of action. Nonetheless, if this arrangement of positions that roam the IGCs and cherry-pick the (post-)ESDP process usage area belongs to territorial cohesion, then the concept might reorder European Regional/Cohesion policy by expanding its area of action and/or area of influence.

Albeit that territorial cohesion could also influence its formal context in this usage area without expanding the Regional/Cohesion policy area of action (e.g. by substantive restructuring), this seldom seems to happen. Yet, in the surrounding narratives with an own dynamic the same strategic positions are taken without the usage of the concept too. Though differently ordered, the narratives thereby point more to territorial cohesion as a way to promote the older but also new regional/cohesion policy concerns than *vice versa*. That the concept was in the interest of regional/cohesion policy used to campaign for balanced development, specific territories, and the provision of services early on then leads to the consideration of the concept's pointlessness. The rise and decline of the positions for sufficient services in all territories with territorial cohesion strengthens this possibility, as it points to a temporary usage of the concept for a standpoint sustained in its regional/cohesion policy context.

However, strategic positions can also be fortified through a by territorial cohesion and Regional/Cohesion policy contested appropriation. The novel promotion of the territorial dimension and approach, coordination of (all) policies, the usage of ESPON information, and rare mention of polycentrism namely ensue both with and without the concept. There are home-grown interests of European Regional/Cohesion policy as well though, these lay in economic and social cohesion, cities, and coordination through the Lisbon Strategy. Territorial cohesion in contrast reigns where it involves the balancing between economic, social, and environmental issues – established cohesion objectives are not invaded by this assemblage – and annexed the care for coordinating policies with a territorial impact (or *vice versa*). Moreover, territorial cohesion's advance in horizontal cooperation on the regional governmental level and governance as a strategic approach for the implementation of policies – which is prominent in the (post-)ESDP process usage area – offers practices to cope with the concept's discrepancy between informal substantive coordination and formal cooperation. Still, as Regional/Cohesion policy roams its official limits, cherry-picks from European spatial planning, and expands its area of action in largely the same ways with and without the concept, territorial cohesion can even as merely a corridor between in/formal areas of action be cut down to size tremendously (i.e. to balancing objectives, coordination of policies with a territorial impact, governance strategies).

13.4 The two main conclusions of the concept's usage in the Regional/Cohesion policy usage area

From these usages of the concept in the Regional/Cohesion policy usage area two main conclusions can therefore be drawn. First of all that territorial cohesion in formal European Union policies promotes the expansion of Regional/Cohesion policy by combining a roaming of the official limits with a cherry-picking from the informal (post-)ESDP process. However, the difficulty to recognise innate territorial cohesion positions in this also thrusts towards the concept's pointlessness.

The Regional/Cohesion policy usage area thus shows that for many of the strategic positions of territorial cohesion the concept is not needed to expand established areas of action. Nevertheless, this would be easier when the IGCs broaden the formal base for the usage of territorial cohesion, the more so for its inbuilt interests. Some of the spatial planning stories on territorial cohesion for the promotion of the concept for European spatial planning might then become formal positions by entering the Regional/Cohesion policy area of action.

However, besides the possible influences of these in/formal strategic positions on practices of policy-making, one could ask how these changes will bear any consequences. A main way in which the European Union implements policies is through the leverage of funding. Portraying the concept's usage in the European funds would therefore wrap up the represented demarcation of territorial cohesion practices (see the next chapter).