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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 18 Concluding the discourse analysis of the concept of territorial cohesion

Introduction

This conclusion of the discourse analysis of the concept of territorial cohesion will show where the concept is going and who wins from this. Its meta-interpretation of territorial cohesion interpretations arrived here in three steps. These are followed below as well, as each answers a sub-question of this research, that is, what is the meaning of territorial cohesion, how is the concept used in the European Union, and how do these two relate? The first step mapped territorial cohesion meanings and knowledges, what brings an ethereal order forward that just shows where the concept is going (§18.1). The second step mapped its power practices, what brings an organised chaos of earthly matter forward that shows that at least the dominant *status quo* wins with this direction (§18.2). The third step pointed out that their relations between this “ether” and “earth” form the concept’s hermeneutic horizon (§18.3), what enabled a demarcation of the discourse’s vagueness (§18.4). Each of these steps thereby provided ways to critique the ivory tower of territorial cohesion expertise (§18.5) and thus opened up room for reflective questioning (§18.6).

18.1 The ethereal order of territorial cohesion meanings and knowledges

A taxonomy of *Sinn* above *Bedeutung* seems to structure the concept’s ethereal order of propositions. Its more substantive descriptive, normative, policy objective, and instrumental kinds of meaning and its more technical policy coherence, spatial planning, and territorial governmentality ones thereby group too many territorial cohesion definitions to mention here. The common ground of territorial cohesion meaning can then be outlined by that all these meanings harbour certain same tensions (e.g. cohesion on which territorial level), share one feature (i.e. no ground for tangibilisation), and several features are shared by almost all of them (e.g. no dealings with multiple territorial levels). These semantics frame territorial cohesion knowledge.

In the concept’s epistemic appear descriptive, normative, and policy objective intensions, such as a layer approach, equal opportunities, and a policy hyper-cube respectively. Intensional fragments of territorial governmentality do so as well, which could for instance become rationalities that link detailed spatial knowledge and territorial governing, just as claims do that open the door for a transposition of the system of spatial planning knowledge into territorial cohesion. The territorial cohesion gaze then comes forward as a kaleidoscope with certain dominant pieces (e.g. quantitative descriptions, social/liberal ideals, economic conceivings of policy objectives). Moreover, the commonalities of its pieces indicate where territorial cohesion might be going: a system of knowledge of the apolitical and tangible world seen through a relational and totalising perspective and with a (state-)government and policy focus.

18.2 The earthly chaos of the concept’s power practices

A topical order of the IGCs, (post-)ESDP process, Regional/Cohesion policy, and European Funds seems to form the whole field for the earthly chaos of the concept’s usage in power practices. In these four usage areas many positions are taken, but those on balance, services, territorial specificities, coordination, and the territorial dimension set the agenda. Yet, each position re-/mobilises bias with a metanarrative for where territorial cohesion is about, either in the addition of an European Union competency, the promotion of European spatial planning, the substantive expansion of Regional/Cohesion policy, and/or a channelling of European funding.

The IGCs thereby filter how the concept may appear, the (post-)ESDP process delivers almost all its content, Regional/Cohesion policy cherry-picks from this, and the European funds resonate all three with a guerrilla-like deployment for territorial cohesion. The concept then stands out by moving as a three-way crossing over all these marginal power practices with their fuzzy line of in/formality.

The usage of territorial cohesion might then be going towards an indistinct symbiosis which subjects European spatial planning to Regional/Cohesion policy, this accompanied by, on the European level, in/formal concertedness, a flexibility in management, and/or, on lower levels, nebulosity. That is to say, territorial cohesion appears to selectively re/organise institutional spaces in an institutional context where “everything streams”. This could for instance mean more influence for European spatial planning if it becomes more economic, but mostly implicates more non-decision. Therefore, besides wins in minor scuffles, the *status quo* dominates thus – i.e. *divide et impera*.

18.3 The concept’s hermeneutic horizon

European politics would affect much of the territorial cohesion discussion and research on it might have policy implications. This points to discursive practices that form the concept’s hermeneutic horizon by relating its ethereal order and organised earthly chaos. As almost all territorial cohesion pro/positions overlap, many possibilities appear on this horizon to forge reciprocal relationships of tactical productivity (e.g. with territorial cohesion indicators and the distribution of funds). Due to the involved power-knowledge effects, territorial cohesion knowledge then reassess the concept’s re-/mobilisation of bias in forms (e.g. by descriptively ordering standpoints on it) and informs government (e.g. by devising a European Territorial Cohesion Index). Thus the dynamic and complex network of discursive interdependencies could be weaved between its knowledge under construction and transforming usage.

The resulting territorial cohesion weave can be characterised as policy-centred with a critiqued dominance of economics and much fibre, or even fabric, from spatial planning. This might entail a research tradition and institutions (e.g. ESPON) set up for a symbiotic relationship between knowledge and power (e.g. describing European policy-making for government). Hence, when ESPON solely researches accepted territorial cohesion perceptions it at once exemplifies where territorial cohesion is above said to be going and who wins from this.

18.4 The territorial cohesion discourse as ivory tower

The territorial cohesion discourse can be seen as an ivory tower from which the reasonableness of articulations is circumscribed. Only these qualify for territorial cohesion expertise and thereby mediate between the concept’s earth of marginal and/or subordinate areas of action and its ether of many naturalised objects. Four rules then demarcate the statements within this horizon full of discursive interdependencies: i) all objects can neither be political nor tangible, ii) all operations must be policy-centred in specific ways and lack reflective argumentation, iii) all concepts must be open to relate their content to that of others, and iv) all theoretical options must be adopted. Much conditions these broad rules of formation, but especially a fixing of the dominant *status quo* outside the discourse’s gaze would individualise it further, as thus, arguably, everything within it can appear in a constant flux.

Individualised in this way, the discourse could function as a *Discursive Nodal Point*. This by pinning the many territorial cohesion meanings down in metanarratives, relating them according to the concept’s three-way crossing, and thus tying together many (policy) discourses (again, too many to mention here). Three prospects for such a structuring of its discursive interdependencies appear: a discursive formation, aggregation, and thoroughfare surface. When the territorial cohesion discourse would tie other discourses together in its phase of creation, a discursive formation surface is formed. Then the discourse would not change fundamentally, as its articulations just have to follow the rules of formation mentioned above. When it would become a

discursive aggregation surface, this merely implies contested particular changes. The discourse then namely appropriates policy discourses with a holistic battle arena in which statements should also follow the topical order of the concept's usage. When it would become a discursive thoroughfare surface, however, this does imply a fundamental change. Because the discourse then structures other discourses with a territorial view, this view supplements the rule to which all of its operations should oblige. Then again, since many conditions thwart such a change, the territorial cohesion discourse most likely remains rather vague.

18.5 Critiquing territorial cohesion expertise to create more freedom for thinking (differently)

How the discourse limits which territorial cohesion articulations are considered to be reasonable can be critiqued in many ways; seen from a decentred viewpoint, here the upshots of this research begin. First of all, the many territorial cohesion meanings make it semantically arbitrary to choose one over another. The unsolved tensions (e.g. which territorial entities) and illogical leftovers (e.g. dealing with multiple territorial levels) that uncover their common ground then underline the arbitrary limitation of the first mentioned arbitrariness. Less obvious than arbitrary territorial cohesion meanings is the inconsistency of the concept's semantic system due to the contradictions between its kinds of meaning (e.g. description or ideal, policy coherence or objective). Still, what could baffle you more is that this arbitrary and instable common ground of meaning nevertheless appears to frame territorial cohesion knowledge.

If so, the concept's lack of epistemic firmness is not surprising. The critique of territorial cohesion knowledge thereby goes beyond its lack of theory or reflection and the arbitrary choices for specific relations between an idea and fact. A "ragged carpet" of epistemic ruptures namely appears. Here particular claims within the concept's descriptive, normative, and policy objective knowledges contradict (e.g. the hyper-cube and layer approach intensions on spatial entities). In itself such contradictions between them are not inexplicable, but the absence of argumentation on them is, just as, in the case of territorial cohesion, their lack of place- or territory-boundedness. Above such particulars three general ruptures appear: i) between the apolitical world and political perspective of the territorial cohesion gaze, ii) in the trade-off between the tangible intensions and extensions without classified facts beyond policy "facts", and iii) in the gaze's perspective between either relations or a demarcation as basis for territorial cohesion knowledge. Yet, most astonishing might be that none of the involved claims stratified into knowledge, as there is no intension-extension trade-off. Instead, the crux in the creation of this knowledge seems to lie in its interplay with meaning, that is, in combining information as territorial cohesion knowledge. Moreover, even if territorial cohesion knowledge does come about, no rationality appears to structure it into a system. Hence, if you, as this research does, define a discourse as a system of knowledge and its associated practices, then no territorial cohesion discourse would exist.

You could also arrive at this conclusion by considering the indecision about the concept's power practices. These namely do not merely change in uncertain ways (e.g. in the employed techniques), but the many territorial cohesion positions in it appear to be contested in everything. Taking one thereby does not merely involve an arbitrariness of "subjective" preference, because as good as none of them are innate to the concept and almost all a bricolage instead. Moreover, when you regard territorial cohesion as bricolage of areas of action, the concept does not clearly organise a common ground for decision-making either (e.g. where to talk about). In its place systematic uncertainty stands in the shape of a battlefield and castles in the sky.

But not territorial cohesion's semantic and epistemic arbitrariness and instability, neither the systematic uncertainty of the concept's arbitrary usage, nor their correlation is the most problematic aspect of territorial cohesion expertise. Its dubiousness namely lies in their discursive interdependencies which ensure power-knowledge effects (e.g. epistemic ruptures signal contrapositions). Put simply, with territorial cohesion every intellectual choice always implies a political choice. And with the concept this sinister linkage at least seems to justify that power is exercised technocratically.

Paradoxically, the territorial cohesion discourse would do so with a structure of rules of formation that indefinitely and unspecifically delineates objects and limits of politics. That is to say, how can a (composite) political rationality imbue policy with “reason” when its boundaries and structure are vague? This does enable two ways of critique though. That these rules deny/accept articulations first begs the question of how arbitrary territorial cohesion expertise becomes when other rules for its “argumentations” could logically wise be just as plausible. Yet, because they include such a multitude of meanings, metanarratives, and (policy) discourses, the alternative critique is that this makes the ones included the more arbitrary (i.e. where to draw the line) and the discourse too instable to function (even as *Discursive Nodal Point*).

The drastic conclusion might then be that the difficulty to pinpoint a territorial cohesion discourse down (i.e. in its (system of) knowledge, power practices, and rules of formation) suggests that it does not exist. Also the discourse constructed above would then be mere appearance – i.e. *unisono quasi una fantasia*. What thereby does not help either, is that only premises come forward that certain articulations belong to territorial cohesion, but arguments for why this is actually the case do not appear. When Faludi (in Faludi, 2005a: 115) for instance proposes for many interpretations of territorial cohesion to rub off on another in a polycentric process, perhaps this could at least be done more clearly when the (contra)dictions and (contra)positions are argued over. One could then say that the concept lacks knowledge and argumentation and therefore merely prescribes (the thought of) the taking up of positions. That is, territorial cohesion is neither a discourse, nor one with major mental power practices, but a *politique spirituelle* in itself.

All in all, one can understand territorial cohesion as the place where streams seek ground. For instance, Harvey (1996: 260-261) believes that ‘cogredience’ is important in urban life, that is, ‘the way in which multiple processes flow together to construct a single consistent, coherent, though multi-faceted time-space system’; and Graham&Healey (1999) add that cogredience is crucial for notions of urban planning and the city. The territorial cohesion discourse can then be characterised as both representing and being a place for such a flowing together due to, respectively, the many objects and processes it includes and the various meanings/knowledges, powers, and rationalities that form it. However, while these streams meet, they do not appear to construct a consistent and coherent system, and there seems to be no ground for this either, not in facts or tangible objects, neither in decisions, nor in thinking. Yet, the ideas involved are oriented toward tangibility, the positions are put on the agenda for decision-making, and the proposed premises need argumentation, that is, they seek a ground. Hence, the obscurity of the territorial cohesion discourse might therefore simply point out that if you want to describe, understand, explain, and/or order the world, other concepts are more worthwhile. This problematisation of the foundations of the concept of territorial cohesion thus anticipates that practitioners (of science) no longer know what to do, what calls for reflection.

18.6 A reflective questioning of territorial cohesion

After the critique of territorial cohesion expertise above especially academic research could try to illuminate why the concept’s ivory tower is positioned as it is and so circumscribes as it does. Besides that such a querying entails a different thinking about territorial cohesion, the involved questions also probe to what is outside the discourse. That is, to reflect on what the territorial cohesion discourse means you need a certain generalisation *moderatum*.

Academic research could firstly do so by replacing the question of ‘What is a territorial cohesion interpretation?’ for the one of ‘Why these territorial cohesion interpretations?’. Although the broad rules which demarcate the discourse suggest that they less individualise territorial cohesion than features which extend beyond it, some of its features appear to be specific nonetheless. Cognate theories can spotlight them by differing in fundamental aspects. Formulated in a question: which alternatives to the current territorial cohesion interpretations are available in theoretical debates?

Academic research could also do so by feeling free to replace the question of ‘What is a territorial cohesion interpretation?’ for the one of ‘Why territorial cohesion interpretations?’. As the territorial cohesion discourse might be part of a new territorial governmentality and appears to be easily modified by deeper discursive structures, one could explore the ways in which it fits in reflections on the total system of relations. These could enlighten what (lack of) conjunction and force relations in general confrontations want a territorial cohesion gaze which apparently accepts the *status quo*, justifies technocratic government, and does not oblige a territorial view. These could also enlighten how a discourse without a tangible or thought-out ground supports our regime of truth and the key role social science plays in it. Formulated in a question: what strategic value of the territorial cohesion discourse prevents that the vague and minor concept has not been discarded already?