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# Territorial Cohesion Beyond State Territoriality

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## RÉSUMÉ

La cohésion territoriale est une compétence partagée de l'UE et de ses membres. Le discours sur la cohésion territoriale invoque « une Europe équilibrée », « une Europe compétitive », « une Europe verte et propre », le scénario d'une « politique cohérente de l'UE », ce dernier point représentant son argument de vente unique. Cependant, en tant que compétence partagée, la cohésion territoriale est soumise au principe de subsidiarité favorisant les États-nations et « la territorialité d'état ». La perception sous-jacente de l'espace est celle de conteneurs fermés emballés dans de plus grands. À cette vision « territoriale » de l'espace, la littérature juxtapose une vision « relationnelle », cherchant à réconcilier les deux. Du point de vue de la cohésion territoriale cela implique de réfléchir à une forme négociée de territorialité : « planification douce » pour « espaces doux ». Quels sont les modes opérationnels d'une « planification douce » et qu'est-ce que ça signifie pour la cohésion territoriale de l'Union européenne et peut-être même pour l'UE comme tel ?

## MOTS CLÉS

Cohésion territoriale, territorialité, planification douce pour espaces doux

## ABSTRACT

Territorial cohesion is a shared competence of the EU and its members. The discourse on territorial cohesion invokes a “Europe in balance”, “Competitive Europe”, “Green and Clean Europe” and a “Coherent EU Policy” story line, the latter being its unique selling point. However, as a shared competence, territorial cohesion is subject to the subsidiarity principle privileging nation states and “state territoriality”. The underlying view of space is one of closed containers encased within larger ones. To this “territorial” view of space, the academic literature juxtaposes a “relational” one, seeking to reconcile the two. For territorial cohesion, this implies exploring a negotiated form of territoriality: “soft planning” for “soft spaces”. What are the modes of operation of “soft planning” and what does this mean for EU territorial cohesion and maybe even for the EU as such?

## KEYWORDS

Territorial cohesion, territoriality, soft planning for soft spaces

## INTRODUCTION

The Treaty of Lisbon that came into force in December 2009 finally confirmed territorial cohesion as a shared competence of the EU and its members. Alongside its role in assisting European regions that were lagging behind, the Commissioner for regional policy responsible for bringing the concept into the discussion, Michel Barnier, gave it several other meanings. Waterhout (2008; see also Van Well, 2012) identifies four “story lines” in the ensuing discourse: “Europe in Balance”, “Competitive Europe”, “Green and Clean Europe” and “Coherent EU Policy”. Faludi (2010) argues that the latter is the unique selling point of territorial cohesion reflecting, as it does, the tradition of spatial planning. Also, “Coherent EU Policy” complements the emphasis in the Barca Report (2009) on

integrated territorial development policies. This paper focuses on the spatial framework within which to pursue the coherence of EU and other policies impacting upon space.

## **1. THE COHERENT EU POLICY STORY LINE RAISING THE ISSUE OF STATE TERRITORIALITY**

The “Coherent EU Policy” story line implies the coordination, much like under French *aménagement du territoire*, of regional, environmental, agricultural, transport policies and so forth, ensuring that such policies acquire added value by forming coherent packages, taking account of where they take effect, the specific opportunities and constraints here and there, now and in the future (Faludi, 2010). What is relevant here is territorial cohesion as a shared competence and therefore subject to the subsidiarity principle. Thus, the primary frame within which to seek coherence is the territory of the nation state. In other words, subsidiarity privileges state territoriality, but of course the nation state may share its territoriality with sub-national administrations and also with the EU. It follows that where territorial cohesion is being sought below, above or across its territory, it must go through the sieve of state territoriality and must meet with the approval of the institutions of representative government. However, this fixed spatial frame takes no account of the multiplicity of arenas, identities, interests and power relations criss-crossing territorial boundaries. Working to maintain the existing nested government hierarchy and in particular state territoriality, subsidiarity is a conservative principle (Faludi, 2013a). In this respect, it is similar to the dominant view of EU “multi-level governance” which mostly refers to vertical relations between bodies of government. True, the advocates of the concept, Hooghe and Marks (2010), distinguish between a Type I which refers to this conventional view and a Type II, but it is only fair to say that the spatial implications of their Type II referring to functional relations are underdeveloped (Faludi, 2012). Subsidiarity as well as multi-level governance, at least in their conventional interpretations, may thus be criticised for their failure to problematise underlying notions of territory and of territoriality. Territory is seen as a container with fixed walls within which that state exercises its territoriality.

## **2. BEYOND STATE TERRITORIALITY**

Sack (1986) defines territoriality as a spatial strategy of controlling resources and people by controlling area. This is often equated with state territoriality. However, government control is diminishing. European integration and, where applicable, also regionalisation change the application of state power and raise the prospect of socially constructed new identities, for instance in cross-border regions (Nilsson, Eskilsson and Ek, 2009). Although a challenge to state power, this challenge remains territorial: it juxtaposes new territorial units and identities to existing, usually strongly established state units and their associated institutions and identities, forming a veritable territorial-administrative complex. Challenges also come from another direction, that of non-state actors, including public and private service providers exercising control over resources and people in ways where functional logics dominate over territorial ones. Whatever the direction of the challenge, seeking to formulate coherent policy, as territorial cohesion requires, involves sharing territoriality. The very rationale of European integration is in many respects precisely this. However, creating the wider spatial envelope of the EU, a derived state territoriality at the supra-national scale so to speak, is but one way in which this may take place. In reality, there are many more diffuse forms of negotiated territoriality cross-crossing the nested hierarchy of the EU and also other multi-level

polities. This relates to multi-level governance Type II, much less well appreciated than multi-level governance Type I. The argument in this paper is that negotiated forms of territoriality reflect the reality of an interconnected world much better than do hierarchies. As a consequence, the concept of territory as such needs to be rethought. There are cross-border and transnational territories that by definition do not fit into state-territory containers. The manifold “unusual regions” emerging (Deas and Lord, 2006) between them reflect various forms of an unconventional “meta-geography” (Murphy, 2008) not based on state territories. In addition, there are also the functional regions which Type II refers to.

### 3. SOFT PLANNING FOR SOFT SPACES

The above relates to arguments in the planning literature about soft spaces supplementing –but not replacing– hard ones, and about soft planning supplementing hard planning. Popularisers of the concept, Allmendinger and Haughton (2009: 3) review the relevant literature. They conclude that it reflects “... an apparent predilection for promoting new policy scales, initially at least through the device of fuzzy boundaries”. Faludi (2013bc) discussed innovative studies conceptualising such soft planning. There is much of it going on under the Cohesion policy objective “European Territorial Cooperation” (Ek and Santamaria, 2009). Also, under the authority of the European Council, the European Commission coordinates relevant policies and brokers agreements on concrete actions under the Macro-regional Strategy for the Baltic Sea Area and for the Danube Area, with one for the Adriatic Ionian region having started only recently. There is no way of saying how this will work out under the Financial Framework 2014-2020, but at least the Commission has announced that macro-regional strategies will play a role. From all this, one may conclude that territory is not necessarily the fixed envelope of all major aspects of social and political life as it appears under the classic notion of the nation-state and its sovereign control over a fixed expanse of space.

For some time now, academic research has explored such issues. The “relational versus territorial debate” opposed “radicals” to “moderates”, in particular in the UK where this related directly to regional policy and regional reform. Instead of “... the misleading celebration of self-reliant regions that actually remain entangled in centrally orchestrated policy frameworks, radicals have called for a more radical revision of the UK territorial management”. Whilst sympathising, “moderates (...) have pointed out the need to be aware of the persisting relevance of the territorial dimension of socio-spatial processes” (Varró and Lagendijk, 2013: 21). This amounts to a combination of territorial and relational readings. Likewise, Harrison discusses how alternative concepts of the region have been invoked in the UK. He shows how statutorily required “key diagrams” reflect the move from a one-dimensional to a polymorphic view of regions. Harrison also notes the backlash, when it comes to official policy, against the “relational” view. His conclusion is that what is needed are “... ever-more-complex configurations in order to make emergent strategies compatible with inherited landscapes of socio-political organization, and for new conceptual frameworks capable of theorizing the ‘inherently polymorphic and multi-dimensional’ nature of social relations” (Harrison, 2013: 71-72), a reference to Jessop, Paasi and Jones (2008). Nilsson, Eskilsson and Ek (2010) draw attention to the fact that the process also involves the re-negotiation of socially and historically constructed regional identities. All this chimes well with the observation that territorial governance is becoming complex.

## CONCLUSIONS

Arrangements for dealing with polymorphic and multidimensional social relations in a territorial-cum-relational reality are –and are sure to remain– opaque. At the same time representative government seems to require clear choices to be put before territorial constituencies as the ultimate arbiters, through the electoral process, of policies. This may lead to the construction of make-believe worlds, as if present-day reality could continue to be contained within the existing territorial-administrative complex. In this respect, the common response, increasing or decreasing territorial units to attain a better fit with territorial issues, does not solve much. Territory comes in multiple and overlapping forms. The fixed territories that we know are islands in a sea of malleable ones. This may not be obvious, but the wave patterns caused by the interaction of the many functional territories floating in that sea unremittingly re-model the islands' shorelines, like tectonic movements do. Remaining within this metaphor, territorial cohesion may refer to how well the activities on the islands are integrated, but this is only part of the story. It may equally well refer to how the islands and their inhabitants manage their relations with the sea of functional territories around them and how they deal with tectonic movements potentially changing their very shapes. So conceived, the pursuit of territorial cohesion means conceptualising, and re-conceptualising territorial relations, amounting to ever-new spatial visions, the tool-in-trade of soft –because non-binding– strategic spatial planning (Zonneveld, 2005; Ek and Santamaria, 2009). Such spatial visions are not intended to replace hard analyses of the shape of the islands. Rather, their purpose is to better cope with the islands' multiple interrelations with the sea and to prepare for changes to their shape, implying changes also to the situation and the identity of the islanders.

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