Chapter 11
The Disoriented State

Bas Arts and Arnoud Lagendijk

Abstract: On the basis both the theoretical arguments and the empirical observations presented so far, this chapter introduces the thesis of the ‘disoriented state’. This concept serves as an alternative for the ‘retreated’, ‘hollowed-out’ or ‘dead’ state, as proclaimed by others. The concept pictures the state as being ‘lost’ in a diffuse, multi-scalar and partly unknown geographical setting, and to being ‘uncertain’ about the nature, characteristics, consequences and, hence, governance of complex issues. Paradoxically, the state seems to remain the power container in international and domestic politics, given its abundance of resources, locus of political authority, de jure recognition of national sovereignty, etc. However, it is ‘surrounded’ by: (1) distanced governance arrangements; (2) re-territorialised political spaces; and (3) decentred statehood. While states also promote these changes, through their various neo-liberal programs, they feel plagued by these at the same time. Calls made earlier for more meta-governance, reflexivity and even irony should be seen in this light.

Keywords: State theory, governmentality, disoriented state, meta-governance, territoriality, policy practices

11.1 Introduction

The starting point of this book was formed by a discussion on three major shifts: in governmentality, territoriality and governance (Chapter 1). In this chapter we will reconsider these shifts. We will focus, in particular, on the extent to which they have become empirically manifest, and how they intersect. In doing so, we

---

Bas Arts (✉)
Chair of the Forest and Nature Conservation Policy Group, University of Wageningen, PO Box 47, 6700 AA, Wageningen, The Netherlands
e-mail: Bas.Arts@wur.nl

Arnoud Lagendijk
Department of Spatial Planning, Radboud University of Nijmegen, PO Box 9108, NL-6500 HK, Nijmegen, The Netherlands
e-mail: a.lagendijk@ru.nl
pursue an approach that is somewhat different to the first part of the book. Grounding our discussion in the empirical findings both at a more general (Part II) and specific level (Part III), we are able to follow more of a ‘bottom-up’ approach. In developing our argument, however, we will also seek to identify certain common threads and trends, with a particular interest in how the core themes of our work intersect.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. The three shifts are first related to the case studies of this book. We then provide a further reflection from the perspective of the ‘grand theories’ with which this book started. Subsequently, we will discuss, in a schematic manner, the way we see governmentality, governance and territoriality bearing upon each other. In this section, we make explicit how certain links are already made obvious in the preceding chapters, and we will provide further theorisation. The final part will focus on the position and role of the state. Under the heading of the ‘disoriented state’, we argue that recent transformations have compounded the fragility of the state even further, despite the pervasiveness of neo-liberal ideas and practices. On the other hand, we also confirm the notion that the state continues to be the political ‘power container’ of the contemporary world. This situation can only, in part, be attributed to external conditions, such as economic, social and broader political developments. It is specifically our focus on governmentality, in conjunction with governance and territoriality, that helps to shed light on a series of (partly) state-internal developments representing both cause and outcomes of increased ‘disorientation’.

11.2 Triple Shift: New Territorialities, Governmentalities and Governance Practices

This book posits three shifts: in governmentality, territoriality and governance (see subtitle of the volume). Moreover, as explained in Chapter 1, it links the emergence of these shifts as ‘grand narratives’ to local practices. As a matter of practice, largely following from the set-up of this volume, the narrative presented so far has tended to adopt a top-down logic. In this conclusion, we seek to balance this by starting, in a more ‘bottom up’ fashion, from the empirical observations. As a consequence, we start this section with new governance practices, after which higher level implications in terms of (state) territoriality and governmentality will be scrutinised.

11.2.1 Shifts in Governance

The shift in governance is generally understood as the emergence of multi-level, multi-actor and multi-sector governance. Jessop (Chapter 4) refers to the localisation of social policy and the Europeanisation of employment policy, both domains that have been (mainly) nationally organised and steered by state bureaucracies