Regional integration in Central Asia: From knowing-that to knowing-how

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines regional integration in Central Asia in the context of two types of knowledge, that is, knowing-that and knowing-how. While knowing-that prioritizes representational (i.e. “talking”) practices of actors to explain region-building processes, knowing-how focuses on non-representational (i.e. “doing”) practices. The article demonstrates that the orthodox scholars, who deal with the region of Central Asia, mostly employ knowing-that to explain region-building processes. The article criticizes knowing-that, assuming that this type of knowledge limits our understanding with regard to how regions get their boundaries and symbolism in the era of globalization and standardization of sectoral activities. Thus the article develops and introduces an alternative knowing-how framework to better understand the region-building processes in Central Asia and beyond it.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine regional integration in Central Asia in the context of two types of knowledge, that is, knowing-that (i.e. representational practices in the form of “talking”) and knowing-how (i.e. non-representational practices in the form of “doing”). As I analyze the literature on regional integration in Central Asia, I conclude that an understanding of region-building processes in Central Asia has been limited mostly to the knowing-that knowledge. Knowing-that is characterized by “talking” practices of actors, that is, discourses and imaginations that actors employ to justify certain actions. The article assumes that these discourses and imaginations may have nothing in common with processes that are produced by self-referential sectoral activities (i.e. “doing”), within which actors are engaged.

When speaking about “talking” practices of actors applied to the region of Central Asia, we have to mention about the five stans Central Asian spatial discourse (Azizov, 2015). This discourse informs official as well as academic practices relating to Central Asia; it determines the perception of Central Asia as a common integrative space. Such Central Asia, as an imaginative term, has social consequences, which provide significance to concepts such as geopolitics, balance of power and balance of threats. The five stans Central Asian discourse then conforms to an image, in which Russia, the U.S., and China are the central geopolitical players fighting for geopolitical supremacy and causing balance of powers and threats in the region (Azizov, 2015). While interpreting the regional processes in Central Asia within the five stans knowing-that knowledge, most scholars could not get rid of this five stans logic, hence they explain such processes only through the framework that the five stans discourse imposes on these scholars. Thus the five stans discourse limits our understanding with regard to how regions...
get their boundaries and symbolism in the era of globalization and standardization of sectoral activities.

Knowing-how, on the other hand, is less discursive and it targets at non-representational practices of actors, that is at “doing”, to see how actors engage bodily within the globalized world rather than “talk”. In so doing, it allows us to free our analysis from politicized imaginations and discourses. To see regional processes in a knowing-how light means to look into sectoral self-referential activities of actors, through which they communicate and remain connected to each other in the era of globalization and standardization. This era is characterized by the sectoral institutionalized standards such as the “Doing Business” rating of the World Bank, “the QS Higher Education System Strength Rankings”, “the Society Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication” (SWIFT); all these sectoral standards have already been institutionalized as the standard practices, the meaning and functioning of which less depend on actors’ political discourses and imaginations. It is these standard practices that give actors a geopolitics-free language of communication; actors socialize with each other, engage into practical, non-representational practices through these standards. In this regard, regional processes, that is, a process of becoming part of some common global practices, are not characterized by “some integration of parts into some social whole via common norms, but is used to refer to the specific connectivity of communication” within the standard practices (Kessler, 2012, 80). Self/Othering in terms of region-building is not the result of geopolitical and historical discourse/imaginations, but it is a process of practicing these standards and experiencing who is part of these standards and who is not.

To develop the idea set forth in this introduction in detail, the present paper is structured as follows. First, knowing-that and knowing-how are discussed, referring to scholarly works on regional integration in International Relations. This part shows that regions are imaginative spaces and these regions are produced and reproduced through the speech acts of elites and other region-builders. This is one perspective of reading regions, which may have nothing in common with the real practices of actors “on the ground”. Next, knowing-how is introduced as an alternative perspective to approach regions in the era of globalization and standardization of sectoral activities. This type of perspective reads region-building processes from the viewpoint of cross-border sectoral connections, which are non-representational self-referential practices of actors. This approach is then applied to the states of Central Asia, in particular, to Kazakhstan to understand how this country could be understood out of the five stans Central Asian spatial discourse. Final remarks conclude.

2. Regions and regionalism in a theoretical perspective: knowing-that and knowing-how

It is widely known that in social sciences we distinguish two types of knowledge, that is, knowing-that and knowing-how, through which region-building processes are explained (Hameiri, 2013; Pollack, 2001; Risse-Kappen, 1996). Knowing-that is characterized by representational practices, which prioritize discourses, imaginations and simulations as well as speech acts that actors employ to justify certain interest-driven actions, i.e. geopolitics. Knowing-how, on the other hand, is less discursive and imaginative, and it targets at non-representational practices of actors to see how actors engage bodily with the globalized world rather than just “talk”.

Debates in social sciences and in IR are still going on in terms of which knowledge – knowing-that or knowing-how – is plausible and well explains a particular social phenomenon (Neumann, 2002). Roland asserts (Roland, 1958, 380) that the social world is not only characterized by representational knowledge (knowing-that), i.e. knowledge that is formed by thinking within one’s ‘cognitive repertoire’, that is, a priori knowledge. This world is also characterized by non-representational practices that actors experience daily (Pouliot, 2008); these practices go beyond the discursive/imaginative practices that take place in-between actors; these discursive/imaginative practices, however, might be different is terms of what actors really do in the world. In the real world, the actors do not passively fit into discourse/imaginations, but they could produce and reproduce new meanings by what they do daily in the framework of the global sectoral standards.

Within knowing-that, as it is assumed, actors imagine by referring to a priori knowledge, that is, a theoretical knowledge; they are assumed to act in a way that, for example, if we talk about Central Asia, the five stans discourse “says” to do; that is, the regional processes in Central Asia could possibly be explained within only the practices of the five stans, and any attempt to see, for example, Kazakhstan out of this five stans spatial arrangement is a myth (Tolipov, 2006). Consequently, within knowing-that we cannot understand a type of behavior that the stans have that does not conform to an imaginative five stans knowledge. Knowing-how helps us re-read the limitedness of knowing-that by focusing on a practice-oriented behavior of actors in different sectors, that is, what actors do rather than what they “say”. It is this practice-oriented behavior that produces and reproduces discourse/imaginations in the era of increased cross-border sectoral activities.

2.1. Knowing-that and regional processes

Knowing-that prioritizes discourses and imaginations over sectoral practices, that is, what actors actually do in explaining region-building processes (Agnew, 2013; Paasi, 1986, 1991, 2009; Ridanpää, 2015). Paasi (2009, 121) argues that “[r]egional identity, an idea at least implicitly indicating some cohesiveness or social integration in a region, has become a major buzzword.” To show this regional identity as the main element in region-building, Paasi points at a concept institutionalization (1986), i.e. regions “gain their boundaries, symbolism and institutions in the process of institutionalization” (2009, 121). Paasi shows how such an institutionalization of regions accentuates the power of regional elites to produce and reproduce regions through speech acts, historical narratives as well as discourses.

Paasi’s framework to region-building employs knowing-that in a sense that regions are the result of making in the course of narrativization by elites using their administrative power to construct reality through speech acts,
story-telling, etc. Paasi uses the concept of *structures of expectations* in understanding the emergence of a region and its regional identity. He (1986, 122) asserts that “[t]he existence of regions is preceded by the existence of region-builders, political actors who, ... imagine a certain spatial and chronological identity for a region, and disseminate this imagined identity to others.” Following Foucault’s genealogical posture, for Neumann, the region-building is constituted historically; elites refer to historical events to justify discourses on region-building. In that, regions are regarded to be politically produced discourses (rather than seeing discourse as reflective of an external political reality). As such, “[r]egions are defined in term of speech acts; they are talked and written into existence” (Neumann, 1994, 59). Studying the common historical and cultural heritage of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, Neumann argues that this heritage seems to be inevitably given as long as these states’ politicians/region builders perceive and discourse them as inevitably given as to identify themselves as the Scandinavian region.

Buzan’s work (Buzan, 1991) also contributes to knowing-that on region-building issues; he points at the categories of amity/enmity which are employed within discourses to produce a sense of regional collectivity. According to him, the process of discursive elaboration in terms of amity/enmity relations among states within a particular geographical area leads to the construction of a security complex. As such, region-building is a relational phenomenon defined in terms of *fear* within a discourse, that is, how representational fear causes regional identities. A regional security complex has a meaning within a particular discourse, even though one cannot really see on the ground invading troops, launching rockets, bombing terrorists, etc. Like Buzan, Paasi (2009) argues that regions are institutionalized through the historically driven discourses of elites who shape common structures of expectation that are based on “us” and “feared them”. Paasi (2009, 141) says:

...in Finland the narrative of national identity has crucially built on the distinction between Finland and Soviet Union/Russia since the nineteenth century. The production and reproduction of this distinction, at times accentuating cultural difference, at times suggesting enmy images, has historically accentuated the importance of such institutions as literature, newspapers and other media, as well as education. Dichotomies between us and them are used in Finland at times also on the sub-state regional level as a basis for the narratives on regional identities and to distinguish provinces from each other.

Representational discourses that are organized in terms of *self* and feared *other* are produced and reproduced by elites to materialize the structures of expectations among masses in order to create the sense of regional collectivity. In the next section, I will demonstrate how scholars represented the Russian fear in order to generate representational practices as to demarcate the conceptual boundaries between Central Asia and Russia. Meanwhile, to conclude, I have to mention that this part of the article has scrutinized the essence of knowing-that, which is employed by the IR scholars to explain region-building at a theoretical level. Knowing-that is a type of knowledge, which prioritizes representational practices (“*taking*”) of actors over non-representational ones (“*doing*”). In this knowledge, he or she starts from what actors “say” rather than
looking into what they do in different sectors. Hence, while interpreting the social reality with regard to regions, he or she tries to fit the logic of practices “on the ground” into discourses/imaginations that region-builders produce to cause regional meanings. Knowing-how presents a different perspective to understand a non-representational social reality, to the discussion of which I now turn.

2.2. Knowing-how

Knowing-how starts from non-representational practices, that is, from what actors do and experience daily in their sectoral interactions across national borders. This means that region-building, if to conceive it as a social phenomenon, is characterized by the connectivity of sectoral communications rather than it can only be understood by the logic of representation of the Self in the face of the feared Other.

Within knowing-how, regions are made of peoples whose common identities and interests are constituted by shared sectoral practical understandings rather than by geographical, historical and cultural (language) commonness. These shared practical understandings are based on actors’ dependable expectations of, for example, economic prosperity, economic competitiveness, etc. Actors could form a region, an economic regional community, when their daily economic interactions are institutionalized through some kind of standards (for example, the “Doing Business” rating of the World Bank) that make such interactions predictable and trustworthy on a daily basis. To be part of these standards means to share a practical knowledge on how to achieve economic prosperity and economic competitiveness as well as to be part of the common top world economies. These standards are those that are connected globally due to the technological developments and standardization, which make daily practical interactions more frequent and free of politicized representations (Adler, 2007, 343–344, 347).

Dogma-free discourses and representations facilitated by the functioning of standards and technologies, for example, in the economic sector, could lead to the emergence of the structure of collective expectations among actors in the globalized world. Within knowing-how, we understand that states regionalize with other states based on the functioning of these standards in a particular sector. At a representational level, state A could be the feared Other to state B, but at a sectoral (non-representational) level this does not stop the latter to engage into the practical interactions in economy with the former. Within discursive representations, some states could be imagined as balancers or bandwagoners in the context of a geopolitical discourse, but these imaginations have nothing to do with the practical knowledge “on the ground”.

What is the power behind the practical knowledge? Why do weak states engage into practical interactions with other strong states? The theory of balance of powers of Waltz and the balance of threat theory of Waltz are deficient to explain daily sectoral interactions at a micro-level. Their theories only imagine states either as balancer or bandwagoner. States may engage into practical interactions with other states because of economic interdependence in different sectors and because of a positive image of material progress; they understand each other because of the standardization of a language they use in their practical interactions. Adler (2007, 349) mentions “[e]conomically and technologically weak states, thus, associate positive images of material progress with ‘successful’ or powerful states or regions, such as the European Union.” In this sense, power from a knowing-how perspective is associated with an image of economic success and progressive state that the standards such as, for example, the “Doing Business” rating of the World Bank secures. States strive to share the practices of successful states, try to emulate the practices that these successful states experience in economy, for example. By this way, we can observe the emergence of the structures of regional expectations centered on the non-representational practices.
of states; that is, the communities or regions of successful states, progressive states, competitive states, etc.

However, while thinking about regions in terms of sectors, we should not generalize and put states in a single region. State can regionalize with other states based on the cooperation via the standards in the economic sector, but can be closer to another in education, for example. In the globalized world, there will be a mistake to think that a state, when is regionalized within a particular geographical area, could not regionalize with others beyond that geography in different sectors. For example, Kazakhstan has regionalized with Russia within the Eurasian Economic Union, but it tries to be closer to the West in education (e.g. under the Bolashak program most Kazakh students go to U.S., the UK, France and Germany rather than Russia). In this sense, Kazakhstan tries to emulate the West, tries to share common progressive Western practices in education. There is no single regional arrangement that a state could be attached to in the era of globalization and standardization.

While representational practices (knowing-that) centered on the question of “how do we feel/perceive (about) other?”, non-representational practices (knowing-how) target at questions such as “who is a successful state in the sectors of economy, education, sport, etc.” and “whom should we emulate as a competitive state?” (Adler, 2007, 350–351). This implies that with knowing-how actors act upon each other not on the basis of representational knowledge, that is, an assessment that state A has with regard to state B via, for example, a written discourse (see Campbell, 1992); rather actors act upon each other, already knowing that it is a successful state based on the assessment of the “Doing Business” rating in economy or “the QS Higher Education System Strength Rankings” rating in education. For example, Kazakhstan acts upon the U.S. in the sector of education (the Bolashak program), knowing that this state is a successful actor in that sector, even though in politics, that is, an art of governance, Astana tries to emulate Moscow, knowing that Washington is the Other to its practice of governance. The knowing-that knowledge with regard to Central Asia, for example the five stans spatial discourse, however, could not imagine Kazakhstan out of this five stans Central Asia and fails to see Kazakhstan’s Eurasian identity.

Once we interpret the stans out of the five stans spatial discourse, we start our analysis from global sectoral standards that these states are embedded in and through which they stay linked to each other. As I have already mentioned, these standards are free of politicized imaginations and power/knowledge discourses; they rather operate self-referentially (Albert & Hilkermeier, 2004; Boldyrev, 2013; Helming & Kessler, 2007; Peña, 2015), and they connect state A with state B via SWIFT, for example, even if the former has a negative discourse with regard to the latter.

The global sectoral standards – “Doing Business”, “the QS Higher Education System Strength Rankings”, “the Society Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication” – are the self-referential social systems, which operate based on their own logic and codes. For example, “Doing Business” operates based on the logic of competitive economies; “the QS Higher Education System Strength Rankings” operates based on the prestigious universities and institutes code, and SWIFT operates based on standard payment orders, consisting of only letters and digits. These codes are less affected by discursive imaginations of actors; actors are linked to each other globally based on these codes and they communicate and interact functionally with each other by referring to these codes. Functional sectoral communications take place outside of actor’s discursive interactions. The distinction between “saying” and (sectoral) “doing” is necessary because these social sectoral systems are distinguished from their environment, that is from actors’ discursive interactions, through the environment’s higher degree of complexity in the era of globalization and institutional standardization (Kessler, 2012).

3. Knowing-that: regional integration in Central Asia

So far the article has discussed the theoretical aspects of knowing-that and knowing-how in the context of region-building processes. In this section, I will now turn to the discussion of what the meaning of “we-ness” in Central Asia is within the knowing-that knowledge. To elaborate the task of this section, I will divide my discussion into two parts: knowing-that at an official discursive level and knowing-that within the academic discourse on regional integration in Central Asia.

3.1. The official discourse within knowing-that

Regional integration or the formation of regional identity in post-Soviet Central Asia has drawn upon the ‘five stans’ spatial discourse (Azizov, 2015); this discourse imagines that the five states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – represent one Turkic-speaking nation (i.e. the Turkestanism discourse); this discourse makes us a priori know what the region of Central Asia is and how it should be in terms of “we-ness”. A political imagination of these states as one nation, including Tajikistan, even if it is a Persian-speaking nation, has been institutionalized by the elites of the stans in the post-Soviet period. Once former Uzbek president Islam Karimov said that Uzbeks and Tajiks are one nation, who speak in two different languages. Thus in the post-Soviet period the five stans’ elites have disclosed the region in terms of a common home for these states to institutionalize their politics, economy, social life, etc.

Brzezinski’s (1997) observation shows how Turkestanism informs the political imagination in contemporary Uzbekistan, which in turn projects it on the idea of collectivity of five stans Central Asia. In this sense, at a discursive level, Turkestanism collects all five Central Asian states into the single spatial arrangement based on the Turkic-speaking collective ‘Self’. A brochure called ‘Turkestan Nash Obshchii Dom (Turkestan is Our Common Home)’ (Karimov, 1995) imagines and materializes such a historical commonness. The brochure discusses how the five Central Asian states started to institutionalize the idea of five stans in post-Soviet Central Asia in the context of the ‘our common home’ metaphor. The represented idea of the Turkic-speaking nation has played a crucial role in shaping the collective structures of
expectations in post-Soviet Central Asia; the speech acts that the Central Asia elites used materialized the structure of collective expectations within masses, including within academia, in the region (see the next section to understand the academic discourse).

For example, in January 1993, the heads of the five stans gathered in Tashkent meeting, initiated by Uzbek President Karimov. As a result of this meeting, the five stans signed a “Protocol of Five Central Asian States on a Common Market”. Assessing the practice of meetings among these five stans, Kazakh President Nazarbayev drew attention to the existence of traditional and friendly ties among the five stans. The Kazakh president added that at the contemporary stage, in the post-Soviet era, these ties should be institutionalized and strengthened. During the press-conference the leaders of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan mentioned that “during the Tashkent meeting all preconditions were laid down for creating a new community of Central Asian states.” They also stressed that “no one should doubt about the fact that the states of Central Asia, which are the traditional neighbors with their common culture, traditions, and language, would pursue their own path of development” (Levin & Karimov, 1993. The quotes are my translation from Russian).

The institutionalization process continued in Tashkent, on January 10, 1994. During the Tashkent Summit, the Central Asian Common Economic Space was formed between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Few days later, after the summit, Kyrgyzstan expressed its readiness to join this space. During the press-conference, Uzbek President Karimov asserted that the signed document is regarded to be the logical and natural state of being. According to him, the peoples of these neighbor states – Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan – have common traditions and language, and due to the will of history, these peoples were forced to separation (Levin, 1994. The quotes are my translation from Russian).

Reflecting on the practice of implementing of the Central Asian Common Economic Space, the Kazakh president asserted that for the last year the trade turnover between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan increased 2.5 times. He mentioned that this is characterized by the natural state of being. According to him, the Soviet system used to force the Kazakh grain to be exported to countries located thousands of kilometers away, instead of exporting it to the neighbor country – Uzbekistan (which had to import grain from Canada in turn). The same applied to other consumption products. President Nazarbayev mentioned that Kazakhstan used to buy cable and electronics from other countries for doubled prices when it could buy these products from Uzbekistan (Levin, 1994. The quotes are my translation from Russian). As it is clearly seen from the judgments of leaders of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, economic integration in the post-Soviet era drew upon the discourse of historical and cultural commonness. At least the common historical heritage was asserted to justify new economic integration in the region in the post-Soviet period, that is, how better to integrate these five stans. Dadabaev asserts that at that time there were predictions among scholars and politicians with regard to the unification of Central Asia into one state, a new Turkestan, which had existed in the region prior to the Russian Revolution of 1917 (Dadabaev, 2010, 27–28).

The regular meetings among the stans continued further. Following the summit held on April 29–30, 1994, in Kyrgyzstan, the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan again met on July 8, 1994, in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The meeting was marked by the adoption of a joint communiqué. This joint document again asserted that the meeting contributed greatly to cementing a “traditional friendship and cooperation among our countries and nations that are bound historically by common roots.” Among other documents, three states signed an agreement on creating the Central Asian Bank for Cooperation and Development. Reasoning about the regular meetings among these three states, the Uzbek president asserted that ‘the nations of Central Asia since olden days are regarded to be peoples of a common land, and, that is why, they are common in their mentality and expectations with regard to the happy and prosperous life and future’ (Karim, 1994. The quotes are my translation from Russian).

On April 24, 1995, a meeting of the Heads of Governments in Bishkek approved a five-year integration plan among the stans. Drawing upon the analyses of many experts, Dadabaev asserts that “the institutional dimension of regional integration was finally established at this summit: the Executive Committee of the Interstate Council, the Council of Ministers of Defense, the ‘Centralazbat’ peace-keeping force, the Assembly of Central Asian Culture and so on” (Dadabaev, 2010, 28). Reflecting on these institutions among the stans, the newspaper “Pravda Vostoka” observed in 1995 that (my translation from Russian):

A year ago a mechanism of economic integration was set up in order to create a common economic space between the republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. In July, 1994, in Almaty, the Interstate Council and the Central Asian Bank for Cooperation and Development were set up by these states. The desire of the sister nations of the ancient Turan, their common goals, a natural gravitation to and the feeling of proximity to each other of our nations contribute not only to a normal operation of this mechanism, but also it [this commonness] offers new opportunities to it. (Sharif, 1995)

The newspaper reasons that the institutionalization of Central Asia in terms of the stans draws upon the historical and cultural commonness that traces back to the idea of Turan, i.e. Turkestanism. This shows a co-constitutive character of the five stans discourse and the official discourse among the Central Asian leaders. The presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan again met in Jambul, Kazakhstan, on December 15, 1995. The meeting was marked by signing a document on further integration scheme that had to be implemented until 2000. Within this scheme, the decision was taken with regard to creating the structures such as the council of prime-ministers and, in the future, the Central Asian parliament. Besides, during the stay in Jambul, the presidents took part at the opening ceremony of a monument erected in Jambul to the ‘brave son of Turkic peoples Turor Riskulov who during his entire life dedicated himself to struggling for freedom and unity of the peoples of Turkestan’ (Sharif, 1995. The quote is my translation from Russian). Interpreting these meetings of the stans, Tolipov mentioned that at that stage of integration
the stans decided to introduce some symbolic, representational attributes, including the leaf of the plane tree (its leaf has five sharp angles) as a symbol of Central Asia as well as a journal “Central Asia: problems of integration” (Tolipov, 2005, 88–89).

Following the signature of a Treaty on Eternal Friendship between Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek on May 30, 1996, three presidents again met in December, 1997, in Akmola (later renamed Astana, the present capital of Kazakhstan). The heads of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan discussed the process of implementing the Agreement on a Common Economic Space as well as the issue of establishing three consortiums in the region: water, food, and raw-mineral resources consortiums (quoted in Boboev, 1997). Besides, three leaders announced that Tajikistan had declared about its wish to become a member of the Central Asian economic space. This membership of Tajikistan was later approved by the leaders of three stans when they again met in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, on 5–6 January 1998 (Tolipov, 2005, 89). Even though Turkmenistan never joined this integration scheme of the four stans due to its neutrality policy, it is always imagined as a part of this Central Asian cognitive space within the five stans discourse (at least for the historico-cultural reasons).

During the Tashkent summit, held in December 2001, the leaders of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan decided to reorganize the Central Asian Economic Space (CAES) into the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO). The joint document, adopted as a result of this Tashkent summit, stated that (my translation from Russian):

... with the purpose of further promotion and diversification of a political dialogue, of improving the form and mechanisms of regional economic integration, of deepening a mutual understanding with regard to the formation of the common security space, of elaborating joint actions in terms of securing peace and stability in the region, the leaders of the states talked on the subject of intensifying multilateral cooperation ... and decided to reorganize the CAES into the CACO. (quoted in Tashkentskoe zaiaavljenie, 2001)

As is clear from the quote, the transformation of the CAES into the CACO asserted the importance of expanding and diversifying the political dialog among different actors in the region of Central Asia. One of such actors was Russia. Russia became a member of the CACO in 2004. Within knowing-that, there are several explanations why this was the case. First, it is a geopolitical question. Tolipov asserts that this move is connected with the intensification of geopolitical processes centered on the heartland Central Asian space (Tolipov, 2005, 90). However, these geopolitical reasons still could not explain why Kazakhstan in 1994 constructed its Eurasian identity (when it introduced Eurasianism), which considers Russia as the Self rather than the Other. Maybe, there is a practical reasoning behind this move of Kazakhstan? To understand this move one should go beyond the knowing-that five stans spatial discourse, that is, to read, for example, Kazakhstan in terms of its practical knowledge rather than putting the country into a single imaginative formation (i.e. the five stans discourse).

The second explanation is connected with the term ‘pragmatism’. The pragmatism of these five stans in the post-Soviet period was that of entering into the international community, creating a good image of the five stans, attracting foreign investments and new technologies for the economic development of the Soviet-old economies in the region. Dadabaev asserts that “although the discourse of integration in Central Asian region is mostly supported in these [five stans] republics, paradoxically the domestic and foreign policies of these states favor dealing with most of the issues either unilaterally or bilaterally at best” (Dadabaev, 2010, 25–26). Like Tolipov, Dadabaev follows the idea of geopolitics, that is, the representational practice. He explains that regional integration in Central Asia is an objective phenomenon that draws upon the idea of Turkestanism. But, how these five stans deal with other actors, such as Russia, is justified by pragmatism which is paradoxical. Nothing is paradoxical in terms of the social reality. Only the five stans discourse limits our understanding on how these states exist practically in the globalized world; the world of institutionalized sectors, the world of institutionalized standards.

3.2. Knowing-that: the academic discourse on regional integration in Central Asia

The official discourse and the academic discourse on regional integration in Central Asia are mutually constitutive. Both discourses inform each other and imagine the region of Central Asia in terms of the five stans by referring to Turkestanism. Both discourses attempt to explain how better to integrate these five stans, leaving out non-representational practices of these five stans in the globalized world; non-representational practices of one of these stans, for example Kazakhstan’s, are regarded to be a myth within the five stans discourse. For example, Tolipov disputes with Kazakh Eurasianists (Nazarbaeva, 2003), who imagine Kazakhstan out of the Turanian historical imagination; they reason that Kazakhstan is a Eurasian state strongly influenced by Europe and Western values. Tolipov asserts that “Kazakhstan’s Eurasian nature is nothing but a myth or, rather, a geopolitical provocation….”. Tolipov limits Kazakhstan’s ability to cause a new behavioral pattern other than the five stans integration; Kazakhstan thus could only be imagined within the five stans discourse; any attempt to regard Kazakhstan out of this historico-cultural imagination is a myth; Eurasianism is thus a myth imposed from outside. Tolipov argues that Eurasianism is a philosophy designed to formulate the principles of Russia’s statehood. In this regard, Russia alone is a Eurasian state (Tolipov, 2006, 17–18). Tolipov says that the “Eurasian concept can be applied to the post-Soviet states only in the geographical context, it has nothing to do with the self-identification” of Kazakhstan or other CIS countries (Tolipov, 2006, 18). Tolipov asserts that historically Kazakhstan, particularly its southern part, was:

part of all kinds of Central Asian polities: the state of the Shaybanids, the state of Amir Timur, the Bukhara and Kokand khanates, the Turkestan Autonomy. The first two leaders of the latter were Kazakhs Muhammadjon Tynyshpaev and Mustafa Chokai, who thought of independence as applied to the entire Central Asian
For Tolipov, the historical imagination, for example, “the Turki toiling masses” (Turkestanism), a priori determines Kazakhstan’s integrative identity in Central Asia. What is true in terms of this historical imagination is true irrespective of what Kazakhstan’s practical knowledge is within different sectors. However, the article does not claim that Kazakhstan’s practical knowledge is tied only to its Eurasian behavior. Eurasianism, institutionalized nowadays as the Eurasian Economic Union (the EEU), is itself a discourse, through which the social reality is represented; that is, Kazakhstan’s practical knowledge should not be generalized within only Eurasianism; it is more than this Eurasianism. The studies on Eurasianism point at the representational practices of actors, through which the EEU got its boundaries and symbolism; by doing so, these studies limit Kazakhstan’s practices within different sectors and they impose on us such dogmas as geopolitics, balance of powers, hegemony, etc. For example, Kirkham (2016) tries to explain the formation of the EEU in terms of geopolitics (i.e. Russia’s disillusionment with the neoliberal rules of the West), to which Kazakhstan is attached and analyzed accordingly. If “[s]tarting in 2004, the EU, not Russia, is Kazakhstan’s main trading partner, and in 2014 the EU accounted for around 53% of Kazakhstan’s total trade turnover against Russia’s 19%” (Kirkham, 2016, 119); if this is a case, why not understand Kazakhstan’s practical knowledge out of this (Russian-led) Eurasian discourse and out of other spatial discourses to free Kazakhstan from academic dogmas and from Foucault’s power/knowledge structures (see also Mostafa, 2013, on the different types of geopolitical discourses of Eurasianism).

Gleason (2010, 26) asserts that “the term ‘Eurasia’ is merely a convenient way of referring to what had been Soviet territory.” By asking “Eurasia: What is it? Is it?”, Gleason concludes that “the unity of post-Soviet ‘Eurasia’ is fragmentary and fleeting” (2010, 31). If Kazakhstan, for example, is having more economic practices/trade turnover with the EU rather than with Russia, why then understand Kazakhstan in the framework of representational policies such as Eurasianism, trapping the actor into this a priori imagined discursive formation. The same applies to the five stans Central Asian spatial discourse, within which scholars are trapped into a priori imagined assumptions from the viewpoint of history, culture, geopolitics, etc.

For example, Rosset and Svarin (2014) discuss Central Asian regional integration in the framework of the five stans. In doing so, for these scholars, the region is imagined as the five stans, which share a common fate. Whether regional integration in Central Asia is successful or it is the failed project, the authors could not get rid of the five stans discursive imagination. The authors propose four conceptions, through which the emergence of regional integration in Central Asia is discussed. First, according to them, “regionalism can emerge as a response to the existence of an actual or potential hegemonic power”, that is, the balance of powers. “A second way hegemony can promote regionalism is as ‘an attempt to restrict the free exercise of hegemonic power.’” This type of regionalism is characterized by a “rule-constrained hegemonic order.” Third is based on the logic of balance of threats (i.e. bandwagoning). In that, “regionalism can develop as an endeavor of weaker states to accommodate the regional hegemon to benefit from the positive externalities it provides…”. Finally, the authors theorize that “regionalism can emerge under the hegemon’s conduct …, called this phenomenon ‘co-operative hegemony.’” Within this logic of theorization, “regional institutionalization is seen as typically the product of a grant strategy pursued by comparatively weak or declining big powers” (Rosset & Svarin, 2014, 248–249).

The representational imagination that Rosset and Svarin are proposing while interpreting regionalism in Central Asia is characterized by the knowing—that knowledge; this knowledge imposes on us the logic of hegemony. If to see regionalism in Central Asia through the lens of hegemony in the context of the five stans discourse, we have then geopolitics, the images of balancers or bandwagoners; we have then the region which gains its boundaries and symbolism through the lens of hegemony in the context of the five stans discourse only. Within this discourse hence, Russia is a hegemon, which promotes its geopolitics in Central Asia; other players such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are the regional hegemons or bandwagoners. All in all, within the framework of Rosset and Svarin, regionalism in Central Asia fits into the logic of hegemony, which answers the question why this regionalism failed between the periods of 1991 and 2004. If regionalism in Central Asia failed and, according to Rosset and Svarin, “Central Asian integration today merely functions as part of a wider Eurasian integration” (2014, 264), why then try to integrate the five stans within Eurasianism, a new discourse, which may fail again and again in the future? When there are three discursive concepts of Eurasia (Vinokurov & Libman, 2012), any attempt to fit the five stans discourse into another discourse such as Eurasianism could lead to a situation, in which Eurasianism tomorrow may function as part of the wider EU integration project. Reformulating what Vinokurov and Libman rightly say (Vinokurov & Libman, 2012, 91), this article asserts that no representational spatial discourses, in most cases these are ideologically-driven discourses, should keep monopoly rights on the interpretation of cross-border activities in different sectors in the globalized world; there is no single integration for a state, but several in different sectors.

But, for Allison (2008), Central Asia is a priori a known concept with the five stans discourse. It is these five stans’ elites that interact with Russia or China within the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), the Collective Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to promote the domestic regime security in the region. This type of integration, Allison calls, is a “protective integration”. The elites through their speech acts imagine “the significance for their foreign policies of post-Soviet macro-regional groupings” (Allison, 2008, 185), in
particular the EEU, CSTO, SCO. As Allison analyzes the elites’ speech act imaginations, he traps his analysis into the inclusion/exclusion logic of regionalism; as such the region of Central Asia is embedded in “a form of collective political solidarity with Russia against international political processes or agendas… of democracy-promotion by Western states, international organizations and donor agencies” (Allison, 2008, 186, 188). In doing so, Allison fails to see the five stans’ sectoral connectivity of these actors with Western states, international organizations and donor agencies. The same applies to Collins (2009) and Linn (2012).

Collins tries to understand regional integration in Central Asia through the lens of the five stans discourse. As such the region is a priori known, demarcated between the five stans and others (i.e. the West) based on a Huntingtonian civilizational division. This five stans space “is largely dominated by patrimonial-authoritarian regimes, and is thus distinctly different from the democratic states of Western European, North American, and Latin American regions…” (Collins, 2009, 250). According to Collins, because the five stans are the patrimonial-authoritarian regimes and they promote their personal interests, economic regionalism within these five stans has failed. On the other hand, security regionalism in Central Asia has been successful with bandwagoning behaviors of the five stans towards Russia. “… Russia’s hegemonic security role in the region was both more established and acceptable to most Central Asian states” (Collins, 2009, 261).

While reasoning on regional integration in Central Asia within the five stans discourse, Linn (2012) bases his arguments on the “Reality or Mirage” dichotomy. The scholar assumes that a long-term economic growth and political stability could be achieved through successful economic integration supported by effective regional cooperation. In so assuming, he says that regional economic integration is characterized by the “economic links formed between economic agents in different countries of a particular geographic region through trade, transport and communications, financial flows, and migration.” According to him, “[r]egional cooperation refers to the coordination of efforts by government to provide the necessary public infrastructure that supports regional economic integration and to remove barriers to regional integration that may arise from national policy regime” (Linn, 2012, 97).

While criticizing knowing-that, in which Linn’s research is embedded, the present article does not want to disagree with the definition that Linn gives in terms of “regional economic integration” and “regional cooperation”. After all, knowing-how targets at sectoral functional communications such as trade, finance, migration, etc. However, what requires a critique in this regard is that all these sectors are trapped into the five stans discourse, which downgrades self-referential functional communications in different sectors. If we approach, for example, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan or Uzbekistan from a five stans perspective, we have then the imaginative imposition on the Central Asian states that “all the leaders of the newly created states of Central Asia prize their countries’ sovereignty, while some of them compete with each other for control of resources, especially water and energy (Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), and for supremacy in regional leadership (Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan)...” (Linn, 2012, 100). I do not want to say that there are no water problems in the region, which need coordination and cooperation (Dadabaev, 2004, 2010). I merely want to show that the practical knowledge of these stans does not stop at the issues of water management only and at the imaginative borders of the five stans discourse. While the sector of agriculture in Uzbekistan forces it to cooperate and coordinate its actions with Tajikistan, this coordination does not necessarily have to be interpreted and generalized to account for regional integration in Central Asia. Different sectors create different realities for the stans, and as such these stans should not be put into imaginative regional formations like Central Asian integration or Eurasian integration.

If we free our understanding from the knowing-that five stans discourse, we can go beyond the framework, in which Russia, the U.S. and China are represented as geopolitical players fighting for geopolitical supremacy and causing balance of powers and security dilemmas in the region (Azizov, 2015). Consequently, our practical interpretation is free of imaginations, like “the leading two member countries, China and Russia, do not necessarily see eye to eye on key regional economic development challenges, such as energy and trade development, with Russia concerned about China’s growing influence in the Region and its interest in maintaining control over regional oil and gas transit” (Linn, 2012, 104).

Generally, as it is clear from the discussed literature, regional integration in Central Asia so far has been explained within the framework of the knowing-that five stans discourse. In post-Soviet Central Asia both the official (the elites’ speech acts) and the academic (the scholars’ references to these speech acts within the dominant five stans discourse) practices have produced and reproduced the social reality in the region. This reality has created the structures of expectations, within which the region of Central Asia has gained its boundaries and symbolism based on the historical and cultural (the Turkic-speaking stans) features of the region. It is under this Foucault’s genealogical posture that the region has been imagined; while the Central Asian elites referred to historical events to justify the five stans discourse, the scholars who deal with Central Asia produced and reproduced this discourse by trying to fit the logic of regional integration into the five stans discourse. As such, the five stans spatial arrangement seems to be inevitably given as long as these stans’ elites/region builders as well as the scholars perceive them as inevitably given as to identify the region as the five stans space.

4. Engaging with the world practically: knowing-how beyond Central Asia

To free an analysis on regional integration in Central Asia from knowing-that means to understand region-building issues beyond the discursive inclusion/exclusion logic as well as the historical/cultural belonging of the five stans to a certain imaginative regional formation (Neumann, 1994; Walker, 1993). Within knowing-that, as I have already mentioned, regional integration in Central Asia is an imaginative process (via speech acts), through which the region
gets its boundaries and symbolism as a historically and culturally defined commonness; for example, the idea of Turkestanism, which informs a discourse on regional integration among the five states; on the other hand, knowing how conceptualizes regional integration in Central Asia, but not limited to it in the era of globalization, in terms of non-representational practices, that is “doing” in different sectors. In doing so, it assumes that such regional integration should be based on the self-referential functional connectivity of sectoral communications, within which institutionalized standards play a great role in securing the functional connectivity among actors globally.

As I have shown in the previous section, regionalism in terms of functional sectoral ties includes the network/circulation linkages (e.g. capital flow in the case of SWIFT, education in the case of “the QS Higher Education System Strength Rankings”, and business in the case of “Doing Business”); these linkages in turn create distinctive regions (Agnew, 2013, 11). Regions in this respect are not territorial entities supported by history, culture, geopolitics, ideological imaginations or speech acts; they are rather functional spaces defined by certain tasks in different sectors (Albert & Hilkermeier, 2004; Boldyre, 2013; Helmig & Kessler, 2007; Peña, 2015).

Regionalism in the sector of business is produced via such standards as, for example, the “Doing Business” project (Doing Business, 2016): the project looks into how small and medium-size companies function across national boundaries as they pursue profit through the medium of money (i.e. money as a social artifact, and not a particular national currency that divides states into distinct national identities); these companies are assessed according to the same indicators of, for example, “starting a business” or “registering property”; the assessed data on business regulation environments across economies are there to institutionalize the idea of the successful or competitive economies/Selves; these Selves are not then imagined identities in terms of history, culture, geopolitics, and speech acts, but rather they are formed in terms of concrete tasks states fulfill; for example, how many days does a business need to start its activity in this or that country? Within this “Doing Business” practice, states socialize with each other into a common functional space by fulfilling certain tasks.

In the business functional task then, there are no such regional spaces as Central Asia or Eurasia, but the actors such as Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan, which act with an exact regionality shared among all parties” (Sinclair, 2001, 448).

Economies across all regions continue to streamline the formalities for registering a business. In 2014/15, 45 economies made starting a business easier by reducing the procedures, time or cost associated with the process. Some reduced or eliminated the minimum capital requirement – including Gabon, Guinea, Kuwait, Mauritania, Myanmar, Niger and Senegal. Others stopped requiring a company seal to do business – such as Azerbaijan; Hong Kong SAR, China; and Kazakhstan. And still others considerably reduced the time required to register a company, including the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Mongolia and Sweden.

The central concept in this argumentation is “economies” in a sense of countries, which are free from imaginations in terms of history, culture, geopolitics, and speech acts. 45 economies, including Kazakhstan, referred to a group of countries, which “made starting a business easier by reducing the procedures, time or cost associated with the process.” Kazakhstan’s sectoral practice, that is, what it does in the given sector, is shaped by referring to how to do better like those who ranked top 10 in the report, for example. This kind of behavior is an inarticulate, free of discursive imagination in terms of how to be part of the progressive or competitive family of states. In this regard, regionalism is a dynamic sectoral process of practicing and becoming part of this successful family of states.

Another sector, through which states are connected to each other, is finance. In this sector, global networks of capital flows have already been institutionalized as standards among states. These networks are free from manipulations and imaginations. There is no regionalization and/or globalization centered on the dichotomies of civilized Selves/uncivilized Others. All are part of the single system of capital flows; all abide by the same rules and processes of actions, even though states are different due to historical, cultural, discursive geopolitical reasons. In this sense, there is a global (technologized) region, in which all states act and socialize with each other functionally. Everyone is aware of everyone in that all follow the same rules and processes of actions which SWIFT indicates. There is a shaped sectoral structure of expectations within this system of capital flows.

SWIFT’s services nowadays are used by more than 11,000 financial institutions in more than 200 countries around the world, including the stans (SWIFT, 2016). SWIFT is the global financial communication, which provides services relating to payments, securities, treasury and trade. Since its foundation in 1973, SWIFT has standardized the messaging of payment orders and other financial transactions (SWIFT, 2016). States refer to this system, through which they get to know each other better; this standard money-flow-messaging system is a type of communication, which goes beyond the idea of nations-ness, territory, ethnicity, culture, history, and geopolitics. States practice daily this standard, and by doing so, they shape their practical identities with regard to each other. Self/Othering boundaries are drawn based on the fact that a state is either part of this system or not. SWIFT shapes the expectation of actors, including stans, by narrowing them to “a well-understood or transparent scope of thought, comprising a set of norms shared among all parties” (Sinclair, 2001, 448).

Through SWIFT, payment orders are communicated among central banks and financial institutions of the member states by using standard SWIFT codes, consisting of only letters and digits. These letters and digits ask less for discursive imaginations and speculations affected by geopolitics, balancing, bandwagoning, history, culture, etc. These codes are differentiated from the actors’ imaginative process. The coded semantics within the SWIFT space “increased autonomy of financial markets themselves […] [and changed] the way financial markets are organized, the way how
financial dynamics unfold” (Kessler, 2012, 88). The stans are part of this SWIFT, and if we start an analysis from this system (as a social phenomenon), we could have a different picture of regionalization of the stans in the contemporary world. The stans, when being understood through this SWIFT logic, are characterized by “the communities of practices which are defined as a group of like-minded people that are constituted in and through shared practices” (Adler & Barnett, 1998, 15), the practices that the SWIFT allows states to practice and know each other better.

Following SWIFT, the trade sector comes to the fore. For example, an imagination of Kazakhstan within the five stans, that is, how to integrate it with other four stans, has no meaning, if to see processes from a trade sector perspective. In 1995, 47% of Kazakhstan’s trade turnover ($4.2 billion) came from the economic practices with Russia, the first trading partner of Kazakhstan. After Russia ($4.2 billion), in 1995, Kazakhstan had the sectoral connections with Netherlands ($541 million), Germany ($367.8 million), China ($331.7 million), Switzerland ($243.8 million), Ukraine ($207.2 million), Turkey ($193.9 million), Italy ($172.7 million), Iran ($63 million), Japan ($53.6 million) and France ($37.4 million) (Statistical Agency of Kazakhstan, 2011, 127–128). These sectoral connections keep still functioning, as the figures speak for themselves.

Fumagalli (2016) and Contessi (2016) are right when they read Central Asia in the context of growing trans-regional linkages within the broader Asian continent. Both scholars dedicate a section to the discussion of trade between Central Asia and, for example, Korea to show how these trade linkages between these states produce and reproduce a new social reality in terms of regionalism. However, since these scholars try to fit these linkages into the five stans spatial discourse, they, like other scholars do, are trapped into the logic of geopolitics. Consequently, Contessi (2016, 9) reads these growing linkages in the context of hegemony, through which the actors such as China, Russia, and India have the enforced images of rivalry, hegemons, etc. Fumagalli also could not get rid of such a geopolitical logic. Reading Korea’s growing ties with the Central Asian states in the light of geopolitics, the scholar concludes (2016, 47):

...the Central Asian states have openly welcomed the presence of yet another actor in the regional economic landscape. Korea’s involvement has contributed to the diversification of Central Asia’s foreign policy ties. … “far from being passive actors in the face of globalization and great power competition, Central Asian governing elites and locally connected economic actors will continue to find new ways of leveraging outsider actors”. As a result, “the rise of new external actors in the areas of trade, finance, and development assistance has further empowered these states to oppose externally enforced conditions and western calls for economic and political reforms”.

Fumagalli’s assessment reads the sector in the context of geopolitics, to which the image of Central Asia is attached within the five stans discourse; trade and finance are not read in their own right, but they are limited to geopolitics; trade and finance exist as far as they serve the purpose of producing and reproducing geopolitics within the five stans logic. While thinking in a geopolitics term, the scholar fails to explain trade linkages in their own light; the scholar misses a point that the linkages in the global world have differentiated from their environment, and they operate based on their own logic via the institutionalized standards, linking states functionally; states via these institutionalized standards fulfill sectoral tasks rather than play a geopolitical game or balance against others. The five stans can develop trade relations with states in Asia, but this does not mean they stop being connected to others in Europe or the U.S. in different sectors; that is, this does not mean they balance against Western states by developing trade relations with Asian states. For example, as I have discussed in the previous section, Kazakhstan could be close to Russia or China in terms of frequency of messaging within SWIFT to fulfill payment orders, but it may remain less close to these states in the sector of education. For example, under the Bolashak program, most Kazakh students go to U.S., the UK, France and Germany. Kazakhstan acts upon the U.S. in the sector of education, knowing that this state is the successful actor in that sector, even though in politics, that is, an art of governance, Astana tries to emulate Moscow, knowing that Washington is the Other to its practices of governance. Generalizations like presence or absence of the U.S. or Russia in Central Asia (or they counterbalance each other due to the growing trade linkages) could be misleading in terms of functional regionalization in the global world.

5. Conclusion

This article has problematized the orthodox knowing-that knowledge by introducing knowing-how in reading region building processes in Central Asia and beyond it. While doing so, the article proposed to distinguish between “talking/saying” and “doing”. “Saying” are those actions that are connected with discursive imaginations produced and reproduced via speech acts by region builders. On the other hand, “doings” are those actions that are linked to actors’ daily tasks that they fulfill in different sectors via institutionalized standards. These institutionalized standards connect actors functionally, and they are less affected by actors’ “saying” actions. When looking into integration processes through the lens of “doing” logic, we can see that there is no single integrative space, within which a state is embedded. A state in the era of globalization and sectoral standardization is a multidimensional category; it is produced and reproduced within different sectors via institutionalized functional standards, thus being part of various sectoral integrative spaces at the same time. These spaces are functional integrative spaces.

The present paper is a theoretical rather than an empirical work. It has attempted to theorize how better to understand region building processes in Central Asia and beyond it in the era of globalization and functional standardization. However, this paper lacks an empirical part since it only examines, even though not in detail, Kazakhstan; it engages into the discussion of Kazakhstan in its different sectoral contexts. Referring to Kazakhstan with some sectoral examples, the paper tries to testify how this state could have different senses of belonging to regions in the context of
experiencing various functional sectors. I hope that the discussion set forth in this paper will open up a new perspective for scholars to conduct further empirical works on region building issues in Central Asia and beyond it.

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