

Key Note Speech 2

The European Debate on Governance by Networks: Towards a New Paradigm?

Professor Jacob Torfing and Professor Eva Sørensen

Center for Democratic Network Governance
Department of Society and Globalisation
Roskilde University, Denmark
E-mail address for correspondence: jtor@ruc.dk

1. Introduction

This paper aims to take stock of the European debate on public governance by focussing on how governance is produced in and by different kinds of networks. The ambition is to assess whether the academic debate on public governance by networks is developing into a new political science paradigm based on clear concepts, sound theories and methods, and an expansive research agenda. Before proceeding, it should be noted that, despite ongoing economic and political integration processes, Europe is a divided social and political territory with striking differences between North and South as well as between East and West. Indeed, the uneven impact of the global fiscal crisis, and the different political and public responses it has engendered, has further contributed to the deepening of the existing divisions in Europe. Therefore, any talk about a special 'European' debate on governance should be treated with caution. Nevertheless, when comparing Europe with North and South America and with South-East Asia and the African continent, there is much more that unites than divides the European countries in terms of political cultures and

institutional legacies. Hence, the presence of relatively strong welfare states, well-consolidated democracies and long traditions for involvement of civil society actors in public governance provides favourable conditions for interactive governance through networks. Moreover, in the field of academia, conferences convened by the European Consortium of Political Research and the European Group of Public Administration together with a growing number of European journals have spurred European-wide debates on new trends in governance that go beyond the traditional ways of governing through the formal institutions of government. As such, it is warranted to speak about a distinctive European debate on governance.

The European governance debate emerged in the beginning of the 1990s.¹⁾ The new focus on 'governance' – a new term which is difficult to translate across European languages – was triggered by the problematization of traditional forms of government. The idea that society and the economy were – and indeed should be – governed solely through a 'chain of government' connecting voters, parliaments, ministers and public bureaucracy was criticized of being too formalistic, narrow-minded, exclusive, conservative, inflexible, uncoordinated, undemocratic and, more importantly, out of step with reality. Through a simple inversion of these criticisms, the term 'governance' was associated with a formal as well as informal interaction between public and private actors, competent and knowledge-based decision making, creative problem solving and innovative policy solutions, flexible and well-coordinated policy implementation, the realization of democratic ideals about inclusion, empowerment and ownership, and a more realistic account of the actual forms of governing society and the economy. As such, many people seem to have made a Faustian bargain, where they only see the positive aspects of the deal

1) Jan Kooiman's edited volume *Modern Governance* (1993), Rod Rhodes' book *Understanding Governance* (1997), Jon Pierre's edited volume *Debating Governance* (2000) and the EU Commission's whitepaper on *European Governance* (2001) were important landmarks in the rise of the governance debate. Beate Kohler-Koch and Fabrice Larat's edited volume *European Multi-level Governance* (2009) provides an overview of the EU-related governance debate in different parts of Europe.

and ignore the darker and more problematic aspects of governance (Pierre and Peters, 2004: 76).

The discovery and embrace of governance is not only founded on a critique of the *modus operandi* of traditional forms of government. Governance is also conceived as a response to a more fundamental problematization of the role of the State. Hence, as Bob Jessop (2002) succinctly puts it, we are witnessing a three-fold development that involves 'the denationalization of statehood', 'the de-statification of politics', and 'the internationalization of policy making'. Processes of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation are weakening the link between state and nation. Old and new state powers are displaced upwards to international and transnational organisations; downwards to local governments, public service institutions and user boards; and outwards to emerging cross-border regions and global city networks. Consequently, state power is exercised at a variety of different and tangled scales. At the same time, the State is gradually loosing its monopoly on public policy making as an increasing number of private stakeholders such as interest organisations, NGOs, citizen groups, consultancy firms and business firms become involved in the formulation and implementation of public policy. Last but not least, the national space for making and amending public policy is transgressed as policies are increasingly being uploaded to and downloaded from international policy arenas through complex processes of policy learning and policy diffusion.

The problematization of traditional forms of government and State has given rise to the widespread, but frequently contested, assertion that we are witnessing 'a *shift from government to governance*'. Numerous books and journal articles begin by making this claim that clearly has a strong signalling value as it urges us to look for processes of public governance rather than for the role of the formal institutions of government. However, the implicit dangers of the assertion of a shift from government to governance is that it creates a far too simplistic image of a unified past and future and that it invokes the idea of a zero-sum game, according to which governance is necessarily expanding at the

expense of government. Moreover, it also tends to obfuscate the role of government and state by nurturing the belief that these are being 'hollowed out'. In order to avoid these unfortunate problems and mistakes we should rather see governance as a '*new perspective on an emerging reality*' (Torfing *et al.*, 2012).

Today, it is commonly accepted that public governing is not congruent with the formal institutions of government. In some areas and at some levels there is still considerable room for *unilateral action* on the part of the State and particular government agencies, and most public services and transfer payments are still handled by large-scale public bureaucracies, although increasingly in partnership with private firms and associations. Nevertheless, *multilateral action* through which a plethora of public and/or private actors collaborate in order to pool or exchange their resources and competences is becoming a more and more frequent response to the growing fragmentation, complexity and dynamism of our present societies (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2004; Sabel and Zeitlin, 2008).

The new and emerging reality tends to render the traditional pluralist model of spontaneous interest articulation obsolete. Pluralist theory is by no means blind to the proactive role of private organisations and lobbyists in shaping public policies. However, it tends to view non-governmental actors as independent pressure groups competing over political influence on public policy and it portrays government as a neutral and relatively insulated mechanism for aggregating the plurality of demands and translating them into legitimate policy outputs and effective policy outcomes (Hunter and Dahl, 1962). The implicit idea of a strict separation of the public and private realms fails to capture the mutual dependency, interorganizational collaboration and institutional intertwining of public and private actors. Moreover, the idea that policy interaction involves a mixture of open competition and interest aggregation fails to capture the institutionalization of the negotiated interaction among public and private actors that tends to give some private actors a privileged access to the central policy arenas and foster a high degree of

political integration and policy learning. The limits of classical pluralism have prompted the search for a new analytical paradigm that can make sense of the new and emerging reality of pluricentric and interactive governance.

This paper aims to assess the extent to which the European debate on governance by networks has succeeded to develop a new and viable paradigm. The *second section* provides a brief sketch of the political and institutional conditions for the emergence of the European governance debate. The *third section* considers the various attempts to define governance and offers a generic definition of governance as the process of steering society and the economy in accordance with common objectives. In order to make the assessment of the paradigmatic quality of the governance debate more manageable, the focus is narrowed down to a discussion of network-types of governance. Hence, the *fourth section* defines governance networks and assesses their empirical significance at different levels of governing. In the *fifth section*, the empirical assessment of network governance is followed by a presentation and comparison of the main European theories of network governance that tend to draw on different strands of institutional theory. The theoretical approaches seem to offer crucial insights into the dynamic processes of institutionalisation and de-institutionalization, the production of virtuous and vicious circles, and the trade-off between stability and flexibility. The *sixth section* highlights some of the new and emerging research questions within the second generation of governance network research and also points out some areas of neglect. The conclusion makes a final verdict on the paradigmatic status of the European governance debate.

2. The rise of the European governance debate

The rise of the European governance debate can be traced back to the Trilateral Commission (Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki, 1975) which in the mid-1970s initiated a world-wide discussion about the 'overload of government', resulting from the mounting expectations of the citizens and the limited

capacities of public bureaucracies, and 'the ungovernability of society', allegedly caused by the decline of public-spirited values and a growing individualism. This bleak diagnosis was particularly troublesome for the Western European governments that had strong faith in the ability of public welfare systems to meet the citizens' rising demands for more and better welfare and also had high ambitions with regard to the ability of the State to govern society and the economy in ways that ensured growth, prosperity and democratic legitimacy. The economic crisis of the early 1970s further contributed to what was generally known as 'the legitimacy crisis of the modern welfare state', which revealed itself in and through a growing distrust in elected governments that were accused of being unable to govern the satisfaction of the people.

The economic and political crisis in the 1970s paved the way for neoliberal governments and policies that aimed to solve the problem of 'government overload' by means of privatizing public enterprises, contracting-out public services, and commercializing the remaining public sector. In line with neoliberal ideology, New Public Management reforms sought to limit the role of elected government to the formulation of overall policy objectives and to place the responsibility for the production and delivery of public services in the hands of private contractors and special-purpose public agencies operating on the basis of contracts and economic agreements with government agencies. In response to the increasing 'ungovernability of society', New Public Management reforms aimed to deregulate society in order to enhance the reliance on the self-regulating capacity of private markets. It also sought to enhance the exit and voice options for the users of public services by giving them a free consumer choice between public and private providers and by prescribing a more systematic use of user satisfaction surveys. The citizens were supposed to act as consumers in public-private service markets and in order to cope with the competitive pressures from private providers and regulate the new service markets, public managers should import a number of management techniques from the private sector and learn to exercise strategic leadership through a

combination of stick, carrots and sermons (Hood, 1991). The new managerialism was predicated on increased devolution. New Public Management wanted to 'let the managers manage' in decentralized agencies subjected to an intensified performance measurement.

With the UK and Finland as the epicentres, New Public Management reforms spread throughout Europe in consecutive waves (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). In the countries where New Public Management caught on, the emphasis on contracting out, agentification and devolution resulted in an increasingly fragmented public sector, which in turn stimulated the need for institutional mechanisms that could provide horizontal coordination in order to avoid duplication of efforts and create synergies (Rhodes, 1997). At the same time, an increasing number of traditional policy problems such as physical planning, regional development and environmental protection were re-described as 'wicked problems' and a series of new crosscutting policy problems such as preventive health care, public safety and the enhancement of the employability of the unemployed came to the fore (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2004). This development further strengthened the call for horizontal coordination through institutionalized interaction among relevant public and private actors. New forms of joined-up government, relational contracts between public purchasers and private providers, public private partnerships and governance networks were typical responses to the call for crosscutting coordination and multilateral action (Rhodes, 2000).

In the European Union (EU), the problem was perceived differently as there was a growing concern for the 'democratic deficit' of the EU. In order to remedy this problem, the European Commission (2001) and influential academic commentators (Scharpf, 1999) recommended the creation of governance networks, partnerships and other forms of participatory governance. The argument was that the involvement of private stakeholders would help to enhance input- and output-legitimacy (Skelcher and Torfing, 2010).

The political and administrative interest in new forms of interactive governance was strengthened and supported by new developments in European political science (Kenis and Schneider, 1991). The research on steering and control conducted at the Max Planck Institute in Cologne (Marin and Mayntz, 1991; Mayntz, 1993a, 1993b) and at the Center for Interdisciplinary Research in Bielefeld (Héritier, Knill and Mingus, 1996) emphasised the systemic limitations of both hierarchies and markets. The inherent problems of hierarchies and markets as governing mechanisms necessitate the development of new modes of governance based on negotiated interaction among interdependent policy actors. Jan Kooiman (1993) summarized the new insights in the claim that no single actor, public or private, has the knowledge and capacity to solve complex, dynamic and diversified problems. Kooiman and many of his Dutch colleagues perceived the formation of complex networks as the solution to this challenge (Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan, 1997), while other researchers favoured contract-based partnerships between public and private actors as the way ahead (Hodge and Greve, 2005). The focus on networks and partnerships resonated well with the work of British scholars who had been criticizing the classical notions of corporatism and neo-corporatism for their narrow focus on the tight cooperation among public authorities, trade unions and business organisations and developed a more open and flexible notion of policy networks that both covered relatively tight and exclusive policy communities and relatively loose and inclusive issue networks (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992; Rhodes, 1997; Marsh, 1998). The new focus on policy networks as mechanisms of governance also gained a foothold in France (Le Galés and Thatcher, 1995).

The call for new mechanisms of governance was embraced by both researchers and practitioners, and from the mid-1990s onwards, there has been a notable surge in pluricentric types of governance throughout Western Europe (Heffen, Kickert and Thomassen, 2000; Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003; Marcussen and Torfing, 2007). The growth of interactive forms of governance in Europe can be explained by the favourable conditions for collaboration between public

and private actors. Despite national and regional differences, the Western European countries are generally characterized by the presence of strong, unified and legitimate states that are capable of forming and managing complex networks and partnerships and of preventing them from being captured by private business interests. At the same time, most European countries have strong democratic traditions and well-organized civil societies with highly professional and resourceful interest organisations, NGOs and citizen groups that are perfectly capable of engaging in institutionalised cooperation with government agencies. In many European countries corporatist arrangements have played a key role in bridging the gulf between the strong states and the strong civil societies, and this seems to have created a relatively high level of mutual trust that has been conducive for the surge of interactive forms of governance that seem to be particularly well developed in countries with a corporatist heritage.

3. Defining governance

With more than 2 million hits in a Google Scholar search, 'governance' is today one of the most fashionable political science terms in the world. Part of the attraction is that the notion of 'governance' signals a weakening of the state-centric view of power and societal steering that has been problematized by recent empirical and ideological developments. Another and related part of the attraction is that 'governance' perceives private market and civil society actors as resources and instruments for public policy making, instead of seeing them as passive targets and subjects of public regulation. This view chimes well with the neo-liberalist individualism and the post-modern de-centring of society that both tend to subscribe to the idea of 'regulated self-regulation', which encourages individual and collective actors to interact in self-regulated arenas that are facilitated and regulated by public authorities aiming to govern at a distance (Sørensen and Triantafillou, 2009).

Governance is a popular, but notoriously slippery term. This is evidenced by

the fact that governance is often used in conjunction with a particular prefix. 'Good governance' refers to the recent endeavour of international organisations such as the United Nations and the World Bank to assess and measure the quality of the governing institutions and practices in developing countries in terms of their stability, interaction, transparency, responsiveness, procedural fairness, effectiveness and adherence to the rule of law. 'Global governance' refers to attempts to devise regulatory policies in response to global problems such as AIDS, poverty and global warming in the absence of an overarching political authority. 'Corporate governance' refers to the institutionalized interaction among the many players – including shareholders, management, the board of directors, employees, customers, financial institutions, regulators and the community at large – involved in the process of directing and controlling private business firms. Last but not least, it should be mentioned that 'new governance' has been a buzzword in public sector reforms inspired by New Public Management. The governance literature contains many other conceptual constellations that further expand the application of the notion of governance. However, adding a particular pre-fix to the notion of governance does not help us in defining what governance *per se* means. As such, we need a generic definition of governance that can subsequently be used in radial categorizations of different kinds of governance.

Some contemporary commentators have defined governance in terms of either the formation of a collective will out of a diversity of interests (politics); a system of rules shaping the actions of social and political actors (polity); or a political steering of social and economic relations based on soft, cooperative policy instruments such as persuasion, voluntary coordination, and procedures for benchmarking of public performance (policy) (for an overview see Treib, Bähr and Falkner, 2005). However, these different definitions do not really capture the distinctiveness of governance, because they fail to show what governance adds to the more traditional political science notions of politics, polity or policy.

Let us, therefore, briefly consider some of the alternative definitional strategies that have been advocated by leading scholars in the field of governance studies. First, the World Bank (2007) defines governance in terms of the process of selecting those in authority; the capacity of the government to effectively manage its resources and implement sound policies; and the respect of citizens and governments for the institutions governing the interactions between them. The obvious problem with this definitional strategy is that it betrays the fundamental idea that governance implies a problematization of the role and nature of unicentric forms of government. Although it does make a reference to institutionalized forms of interaction, the World Bank definition of governance is primarily focussed on the institutions and procedures of government.

Second, Jessop (1998, 2002) defines governance as 'the heterarchy of reflexive self-organisation'. This definition tends to associate governance with self-organized processes in civil society. The problem with this definitional strategy is that it gives rise to an unwarranted normativism as it is often assumed that governance is more consensual, egalitarian, trust-based and deliberative than governing produced by State and markets because it reproduces the intrinsic values of civil society.

Third, Kooiman (1993), Mayntz (1993a, 1993b), Scharpf (1994), and Klijn (2008) equate governance with network forms of governance that are either defined as a hybrid of hierarchy and market or as a distinctive mode of governing supplementing hierarchies and markets. Although networks are clearly an integral part of governance, the conflation of governance and networks creates a far too narrow definition of governance that excludes those forms of steering, control and coordination that are not provided by stable, horizontal networks.

Finally, Bevir and Rhodes (2003) see governance as a new neoliberal language game that leads to different interpretations and institutionalizations in

different political and cultural contexts. This post-foundationalist makes it difficult to put bounds on governance. Governance becomes everything and, thus, nothing.

The problem with the available definitional strategies is that they either define governance too narrowly or leave the definition open for an endless number of contextual interpretations. To avoid these pitfalls, we shall here *define governance generically as the process of steering society and the economy through collective action and in accordance with common goals* (Torfing *et al.*, 2012). This definition resonates with Meuleman's definition of governance as any pattern of ordered rule (Meuleman, 2008), but is more precise as it tells us what is governed and how it is governed.

In the field of public policy making, governance has typically been associated with formal and legal steering processes orchestrated and controlled by public agencies at different levels, but in the new and emerging reality in Europe unilateral action is increasingly supplemented and supplanted by new forms of multilateral action. This has triggered a growing interest in what is generally known as '*interactive forms of governance*' (Kooiman, 1993), which we shall define as *the complex process through which a plurality of social and political actors with diverging interests interact in order to formulate, promote and realize common objectives by means of mobilizing, exchanging and deploying a range of ideas, rules and resources* (Torfing *et al.*, 2012).

This definition of interactive governance captures an array of interactive governance arrangements that play an increasing role in the formulation and implementation of public policy. In Europe the typical forms of interactive governance include second generation quasi-markets, public-private partnerships and governance networks. *Quasi-markets* aim to respond to problems associated with public monopolies by enhancing public-private competition in the area of public service delivery, but the contracting-out of public services to private providers has to an increasing extent been regulated

by relational contracts based on ongoing negotiations between the public purchaser and the private providers, and thus takes the form of interactive governance (Denters *et al.*, 2003). *Public-private partnerships* aim to mobilize private resources and entrepreneurship in joint venture projects that are often found in the field of public transport and infrastructure provision (Hodge and Greve, 2005). Whereas in the beginning public-private partnerships were primarily seen as a new kind of funding instruments, they are increasingly viewed as an attempt to provide better, more efficient and more innovative public solutions by means of exploiting matching resources while sharing gains and risks. Finally, *governance networks* aim to respond to complex, conflict-ridden and ill-defined policy problems by facilitating negotiated collaboration among public and private stakeholders on the basis of interdependency (Marcussen and Torfing, 2007). Combinations of these three forms of interactive governance are frequent and tend to produce hybrid forms of governance.

4. Governance networks

In Europe there are many examples of the construction of quasi-markets and the formation of public private partnerships – especially in the UK which seems to have pioneered the development of many of the New Public Management inspired governance arrangements. The long-lasting tradition for corporatist involvement of private interest organisations in public policy making means that governance networks are also well developed in Europe – especially in Austria and the North-Western European countries where tripartite systems have been particularly strong. Governance networks exist at all levels and in most policy areas. They play a significant role in all phases of the policy process and the EU strongly advocates for the formation of governance networks with civil society actors in order to enhance democratic ownership to public policy (The EU Commission, 2001). The broad relevance of governance networks for understanding governance in the European context makes it particularly interesting to focus on network types of governance and this is exactly what we intend to do in the remaining part of this article.

Defining governance networks

Whereas there are competing definitions of governance, there seems to be much more agreement about how to define governance networks. Hence, governance networks are commonly defined as: 1) *a relatively stable horizontal articulation of interdependent, but operationally autonomous actors from the public and/or private sector*; 2) *who interact with one another through ongoing negotiations*; 3) *which take place within a relative institutionalized framework with regulative, normative, cognitive and imaginary elements*; 4) *facilitate self-regulation in the shadow of hierarchy (a kind of 'bounded autonomy')*; and 5) *contribute to the production of public purpose in the broad sense of public values, visions, plans, standards, regulations and concrete decisions* (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007). Other defining features might be added, but this definition captures the essence of that which is commonly referred to by the notion of governance networks and constitutive aspects are re-found empirical studies (Marcussen and Torfing, 2007).

Governance networks, as defined above, may have *different functions*. Some governance networks merely contribute to the exchange of knowledge, information and ideas in order to facilitate well-informed and knowledge-based decision making, while other networks aim to coordinate actions of the participants in order to prevent the duplication of efforts and create synergies. More ambitious governance networks might even attempt to develop a common understanding of emerging policy problems and to formulate and implement joint solutions. Governance networks may also take *different forms* as they might be either self-grown from below or initiated from above; intra-organizational or interorganizational; open and loosely connected or closed and highly integrated; short-lived or relatively permanent; and sector-specific or society-wide. Last but not least, governance networks carry many *different labels* as they are frequently referred to as think tanks, strategic alliances, task forces, public boards and committees, commissions, collaborative arenas, planning cells, etc. The different labels, forms and functions of governance networks attest to the broad relevance of the concept for describing the

contemporary forms of interactive governance.

Some caveats

Having defined governance networks and emphasised their empirical variability, it is necessary to advance a few caveats in order to avoid some common misunderstandings. The first caveat is that the proliferation of interactive forms of network governance is not, as some scholars have suggested (Rhodes, 1994, 2007; Milward and Provan, 2000), resulting in a 'hollowing out of the State'. The growth of interactive forms of governance in the shape of networks and partnerships is not mitigating the role and impact of the State. The State may have lost its privileged position in public policy making, but many of the former state powers remain in place and new capacities are developed as central and local state agencies take on the task of metagoverning governance networks at different levels (Jessop, 2002). As such, state power is not reduced, but transformed and exercised in new and subtle ways (Pierre and Peters, 2000).

The second caveat is that governance networks, despite their recent proliferation and the surge of scholarly attention, are by no means a new phenomenon. In many countries and policy areas there are long-lasting traditions for the corporatist involvement of the social partners (i.e. trade unions and employers associations) and other relevant actors in the formulation and implementation of public policy. As a matter of fact, interaction between public and private actors is a key feature of modern government and a constitutive trait of liberal democracy. What *is* new, however, is that central decision makers and political theorists increasingly perceive governance networks as efficient and legitimate mechanisms of public governance. This is evidenced by the increasing reliance on governance networks at all levels of government (Marcussen and Torfing, 2007).

The last caveat is that governance networks are no universal remedy. When it comes to the exercise of public authority (e.g. tax collection, removing at-risk

children from their home, and issuing building permits), there are good reasons for placing this task in the hands of public bureaucracies that can be held accountable for their action and inaction. Likewise, when it comes to the production and delivery of fairly standardized public goods and services (e.g. food delivery to elderly people, the construction of public roads and energy supply), private providers operating in public quasi-markets might give us good value for public money. Governance networks have little to offer in relation to these public tasks, but have their relative strength in relation to the growing number of 'wicked problems' in public governance. Hence, the only way to solve complex and ill-defined problems in the face of conflicting demands and objectives is by bringing together the relevant and affected actors and facilitate a process of collaborative problem-solving that encourages mutual learning and fosters joint ownership to new and bold solutions (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2004).

The empirical significance of governance networks

Although we should be cautious not to talk in sweeping and totalizing terms about the emergence of a network society (Castells, 1996), governance networks are ubiquitous and seem to be proliferating to an astonishing extent. However, governance networks are spreading unevenly throughout Europe and across different levels. Dark networks associated with organised crime seem to foster a somewhat reluctant approach to the inclusion of citizens and organised interests through governance networks in some of the Southern European countries. Likewise, the relative weakness of civil society and the lack of experiences with plural democracy in Central and Eastern Europe tend to make the formation of governance networks an up-hill struggle. By contrast, Northern and Western Europe seem to be swamped by governance networks that link fragmented public agencies and bring together public and private actors.

There are no systematic, European-wide studies of the scope and impact of governance networks at various levels. However, there are some indications suggesting that networks – for entirely different reasons – have become a common and increasingly important governance mechanism at the local,

regional and transnational levels, whereas the national level has experienced a decline in the use of interactive forms of governance, at least when we talk about formalized, government initiated networks such as policy preparing commissions.

At the local level, where there are often many public agencies with overlapping jurisdictions, a high degree of institutional fragmentation and a large number of competent organisations and user groups, it is extremely difficult to formulate and implement public policy without facilitating a network-based interaction among the relevant and affected actors. As soon as the local authorities begin to think in terms of policy problems instead of policy programs, it becomes clear that they must interact with and actively involve other public and private actors in order to get results, and in countries where political power and the provision of welfare services are devolved to local governments, the private actors are eager to gain influence.

At the regional level, there is a growing emphasis on the enhancement of the structural competitiveness of the regional economies in the face of global challenges. This endeavour calls for cross-sectoral collaboration through the formation of strategic growth alliances, territorial pacts and other kinds of networks. Coordination between regional authorities, local governments and private stakeholders in the field of infrastructural development, climate change mitigation, health care and other typical regional tasks also requires networked coordination and collaboration.

Finally, at the transnational level, the absence of majority rule and the lack of a clear conception of the common good has turned the European Union into a networked polity in which negotiated interaction is a key feature of the decision making process (Kohler-Koch and Eising, 1999). Hence, there are a host of policy networks in and around the EU committees, transnational networks are responsible for formulating norms and guidelines within the Open Method of Coordination, and the construction of local and regional partnerships is a

precondition for receiving Structural Fund money (Esmark, 2007). Furthermore, the growing concern for the democratic deficit of the European Union has spurred attempts to consult with stakeholders and involve civil society actors in the development of the European Union and its policies.

At the national level, however, the situation is more complex and ambiguous. On the one hand, corporatist involvement of the social partners have failed to materialize in some European countries and in countries where tripartite relations have been relatively entrenched there has been a weakening of the corporatist structures (Gobeyn and Johnpoll, 1993; Ferner and Hyman, 1998). There are also reports that the use of formal bodies for consulting with key stakeholders in the preparation of new policies is in decline (Christiansen and Nørgaard, 2003). As such, national governments are increasingly trying to keep interest organisations at an arms length in order to enhance the room of political manoeuvring at a time where the sovereignty of nation states is under pressure. On the other hand, there are examples that formal consultations with relevant stakeholders are replaced with more informal consultations (Ferner and Hyman, 1998) and in most EU member states governance networks seem to be formed in relation to questions about the Europeanization of national legislation (Kassim, Peters and Wright, 2000). In sum, we seem to be witnessing a relative decline in corporatist network governance at the national level, but also some important counter-tendencies in terms of the rise of informal coordination and consultation that leaves the final decisions in the hands of government.

5. Theories of network governance

There is no commonly accepted theory of interactive governance and many of the key arguments in the European governance debate are based on empirical observations and generalisations rather than theoretical assumptions and predictions. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a number of theoretical contributions that inform and structure the conceptualization and empirical study of interactive governance. When looking at the theoretical approaches to

understanding the different forms of interactive governance, there is a striking disparity between the theoretical underpinning of the studies of quasi-markets and public private partnerships and the theoretical foundation of the studies of governance networks. Quasi-markets and public private partnerships are often analysed from within a rationalistic perspective drawing on principal-agent theory and game theory (Le Grand and Bartlett, 1993; McQuaid, 2000), whereas governance networks are more often studied from within an institutionalist perspective (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007; Torfing *et al.*, 2012).

The prevalence of an institutionalist approach to the study of interactive forms of governance might seem a bit strange considering that the concept of interactive governance and, in particular, the notion of governance networks urge us to study complex interaction processes rather than formal institutions. Governance networks cannot be defined as institutions in the strict sense of well-integrated systems of negotiation and joint action that are regulated by formal rules, norms and procedures, which shared by all the actors and enforced by a legitimate authority. At least, when a network is initially formed, there are no commonly accepted rules that predetermine how legitimate decisions are made and the horizontal interaction precludes the presence a top-down enforcement of rules and norms (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005). However, over time, social and political interaction in networked arenas might be stabilized through the formation of sedimented patterns of exchange supported by formal and informal rules, norms, habits and cognitive schemes. As such, governance networks are subject to ongoing processes of institutionalisation, but the absence of a sovereign power capable of enforcing the emerging rules of the game and the periodic contestation and renegotiation of the form and functioning of governance networks ensures the ambiguity and openness of the institutional framework and tends to trigger on-going processes of de-institutionalisation (Torfing *et al.*, 2012). Whereas the old constitutional institutionalism was unable to capture the partial, contingent and dynamic institutionalisation and de-institutionalisation of governance networks, the new institutionalism broadens the notion of institutions to include less formal

institutionalisations of the patterns of interaction, for example, through the emergence of cultural codes, cognitive frameworks, symbolic structures, etc. (Rhodes, 1995: 54; Peters, 1999: 18). As such, the rise of the new institutionalism paves the way for an institutionalist perspective on the study of interactive governance and governance networks.

The new institutionalism is a broad church emphasising the regulative, normative, cognitive and/or imaginary conditions for action. As argued elsewhere (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007), we can identify four different institutionalist approaches to the study of governance networks. Let us briefly consider the different theoretical approaches in turn, beginning with interdependence theory and governability theory that are the two main approaches in the study of governance networks. Both theories tend to view social action as driven by institutionally conditioned calculations of rational actors, but they differ in their view on the prospect for overcoming conflicts and facilitating collaboration among multiple stakeholders.

Interdependence theory is firmly anchored in historical institutionalism (Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan, 1997; Rhodes, 1997; Jessop, 1998). It defines governance networks as an interorganizational medium for interest mediation between interdependent – but conflicting – actors, each of whom has a role and resource base of their own. Governance networks are formed as a result of strategic calculations of self-interested collective actors who choose to interact because of the presence of mutual resource dependencies makes it rational to exchange resources. The formation of governance networks enables the actors to find joint solutions to joint problems and counteracts the institutional fragmentation caused by New Public Management reforms that prevents the actors from benefitting from resources exchange and resource pooling. Governance networks are formed through incremental bottom-up processes, but are often recruited as vehicles of public policy-making by public authorities. The network actors pursue different interests through internal political conflicts and power struggles, but the actors are held together by their mutual

interdependence and the gradual development of common norms, values and perceptions, which permit negotiation, learning and compromise formation and tend to modify and transform the interests and objectives of the public and private actors. The codification of the 'rules of the game' and the transformation of interests helps to contain and regulate conflicts between the actors, but does not eliminate them.

Governability theory combines rational choice institutionalism with a systems theoretical view of societal development (Mayntz, 1993a, 1993b; Scharpf, 1994; Kooiman, 2003). It defines governance networks as arenas for horizontal coordination between autonomous actors who interact in and through different negotiation games. The formation of governance networks is seen as a functional response to the increasing societal complexity, differentiation and dynamism that undermine the ability to govern society efficiently through the traditional means of hierarchy and market. Governance networks are viewed as game-like structures that facilitate horizontal coordination among sectoral and organisational systems, and they are held together by the anticipated gains from the exchange and pooling of resources and the development of mutual trust. A proactive creation of incentives structures may help to overcome collective action problems and mitigate conflicts. The result is either 'negative coordination' where the actors aim to steer free of conflicts by avoiding particular problems or issues, or 'positive coordination' based on the development of joint problem definitions and common solutions through mutual engagement and substantive discussions.

Institutional theories of normative integration and theories of governmentality also provide valuable insights into the intricacies of network governance. These theories do not focus explicitly on governance networks, but they conceive governance as a decentred process that involves a plethora of public and private actors who are caught up in different kinds of networks. While differing in their emphasis on the role of power and conflict in societal governance, both theories have an interpretative perspective on social action

that emphasizes the role of institutions and discourses in shaping the identity, perceptions and actions of social and political actors.

Institutional theories of normative integration perceive governance networks as institutionalised fields of interaction that bring together relevant and affected actors who become normatively integrated by the emerging rules, norms, values and perceptions that together define a particular logic of appropriate action (March and Olsen, 1995; Powell and DiMaggio, 1991). Governance networks are regarded as a way of organising and structuring organisational fields (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991) and as a normative response to the twin problems of totalitarian over-integration of social agency, which is typically found in bureaucratic settings, and individualistic under-integration of social agency, which often emerge in market-based environments (March and Olsen, 1995). They are formed through a bottom-up process whereby tentative and provisional contacts, which are established due to the recognition of interdependence, are positively evaluated and extended on the basis of institutional logics of appropriateness that over time are modified and integrated through mutual learning and pragmatic adjustments. The proliferation of governance networks in organisational fields may also be further accelerated by isomorphic pressures that establish network types of governances as a legitimate and 'fashionable' way of organizing resource exchange (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991). Network actors interact on the basis of a shared logic of appropriate action, but that does not preclude the rise of conflicts. However, there seems to be considerable scope for civilizing conflicts through the construction of solidarity and the formation of democratic identities (March and Olsen, 1995: 48-89).

Governmentality theory (Foucault, 1991; Rose and Miller, 1992; Dean, 1999) implicitly defines governance networks as an attempt by an increasingly reflexive, facilitating and regulatory state to govern by means of mobilizing and shaping the free actions of actors who are connected by the formation of interactive policy arenas. Citizens, community groups, NGOs, interest

organisations, private enterprises and public agencies are encouraged to regulate themselves and their mutual interaction in a particular area. However, their self-regulated governance practices take place within an institutional framework of regulatory norms, performance standards and calculative practices that ensures conformity with overall policy objectives. In this perspective governance networks can be interpreted as a political response to the failure of neo-liberalism to realize its key goal of 'less state and more market': market-based governance and service provision has grown, but so has the amount of market-enhancing and market-controlling state regulation. The problematization of neo-liberalism has led to the formulation of a new governmentality programme, associated with 'advanced liberal government' that aims to displace governmental tasks to local, regional and national networks in which the resources and energies of social and political actors are mobilized and given a particular direction in order to achieve specific policy objectives. Governance networks are constructed and framed by particular government technologies and narratives that aim to recruit social actors as vehicles of the exercise of power. However, the social actors might resist and oppose the normalizing power strategies to which they are subjected and the result is the proliferation of conflicts and struggles.

The four theoretical approaches to the study of governance networks differ in their perception of the nature of social and political action and in their view of the role of power and conflicts in public governance. However, reflecting the high degree of institutionalisation in European societies, the four institutionalist approaches all tend to emphasise the role of sedimented rules, norms, values and cognitive schemes for stabilising, structuring and framing the ongoing interaction in network types of governance.

The institutional focus in European theories of governance networks helps us to understand the dynamic processes of institutionalisation and de-institutionalisation of network governance, the production of virtuous and vicious circles, and the trade-off between flexibility and stability.

Johan P. Olsen (2009: 199) defines institutionalisation as a process that implies increasing clarity, agreement and formalisation of the content, explanation and justification of behavioural rules and the allocation, access to and control over material and immaterial resources. Consequently, de-institutionalisation implies that existing rules and resource distributions are becoming more unclear, contested and uncertain. The historical institutionalist approach informing interdependence theory explains institutionalisation of governance networks in terms of the presence of positive feedback loops that reinforce the initial pattern of interaction. The rational choice institutionalism informing governability theory recognises the limits of formal rules in ensuring compliance in network settings, and tends to view the manipulation of incentives as the principal means to attract and hold on to relevant actors. The interpretative theory of normative integration emphasises the role of institutional socialisation in creating commitment to the basic structures of interactive governance arrangements and providing stability. Finally, discourse theoretical governmentality theory emphasises the role of narratives and storylines in building stable coalitions of actors and providing a joint framework for concerted action (Peters, 2007; Sørensen and Torfing, 2007).

B. Guy Peters (2007) takes a further step in trying to explain the formation of the virtuous and vicious circles in governance networks. Virtuous and vicious circles are institutional trajectories resulting from cumulative causalities that provide either favourable or unfavourable conditions for collaborative interaction through networks. Their presence is well-established in empirical research on network governance (Geddes, 2008). Drawing on the work of Christine Oliver (1992), Peters identifies five factors contributing to the formation of a virtuous circle of successful network governance: 1) Continued supply of energy in terms of new participants, active support and available resources; 2) Efforts to stabilize and routinize interaction and clarify the benefits from the resource exchange; 3) Acceptance of established rules, values, and cognitive schemes and, if necessary, a reframing of these through mutual learning or an active leadership; 4) The formation of rule-governed practices

that are conducive to the achievement of the overall goals of the members and/or the management of their internal interaction; 5) The presence of a stable external environment with a strong tradition for networking and a receptive government. The absence or the deterioration of one or more of these factors will give rise to a vicious circle leading to governance network failure.

Network failure is often a result of the eruption of destructive conflicts that prevent joint decision making or lead to compromises based on the 'least common denominator' (Scharpf, 1994). Governance networks are collaborative arenas in which different actors aim to manage their differences in a constructive way in order to find solutions to joint problems (Gray, 1989), but there is no guarantee that the process is not obstructed by antagonistic conflicts. The above-mentioned efforts to routinize interaction, develop common values and rules of the game, and manage the exchange of process through an active leadership may help to resolve or mediate conflicts. However, the goal is not necessarily to eliminate conflict since conflicts can trigger mutual learning and stimulate innovation (Sørensen and Torfing, 2011). Rather, the goal is to craft institutional designs of interactive forms of governance that transform 'enemies', who aim to eliminate each other, into 'adversaries', who respect each-others' right to disagree and pursue other interests (Mouffe, 2005).

The above argument seems to valorise and recommend the institutionalisation of governance networks in order to create virtuous circles. However, there is also a limit to the institutionalisation of governance networks after which further institutionalisation becomes detrimental and undesirable. Institutionalisation helps to stabilize precarious governance networks so that we can harvest the flexibility gains associated with the relatively informal forms of interactive governance (Milward and Provan, 2006: 12); but if the degree of institutionalisation becomes too high, it will tend to reduce the flexibility gains and thus undermine the *raison d'être* for network governance. Hence, public authorities and other actors capable of governing governance networks should aim to balance the forces of institutionalisation and de-institutionalisation.

6. Key issues on the European research agenda

Although the field of research is relatively new, it is possible to talk about first and second generations of governance network research (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007). The *first generation* set out to convince us that something new was going on in terms of how society and the economy is governed. As such, it was primarily preoccupied with explaining why and how governance networks are formed; how they differ from traditional forms of governance in terms of hierarchy and markets; and how they contribute to efficient governance within different policy fields and at different regulatory scales. The first generation has done an excellent job in linking the rise of network governance to new societal and historical trends, in fleshing out the distinctive features of governance networks vis-à-vis state and market, and in analysing the formation, forms and functioning of governance networks in different countries and policy areas and at different scales.

Slowly but steadily, the research agenda has moved beyond the preoccupations of the first generation of governance network research. Governance networks no longer represent something new and exotic; rather, they are an intrinsic part of modern governance that we must learn to live with and make the best of. This predicament has triggered the emergence of a series of new and yet unanswered questions that tend to define the research agenda of a *second generation* of governance network research.

The first question concerns the role of governance networks for *facilitating and enhancing democratic participation* of individual citizens and organized groups. Governance networks can be seen as institutional arenas for empowered participation of intensely affected actors and, thus, as a tool enhancing the input legitimacy of public policy (Hirst, 1994, 2000; Steffek, Kissling and Nanz, 2008). Governance networks are often captured by experts and political elites, but they may also open up for the participation of interested citizens and organized stakeholders because their input is important for solving urgent

governance problems (Warren, 2009). As such, some scholars perceive network governance as a form of participatory governance that aims to reconnect state and civil society (Grote and Gbikpi, 2002). Focussing on the participatory aspect of governance networks raises several intriguing questions about who are participating in different networks at different levels (Marcussen and Torfing, 2007), the role of institutional design in stimulating participation (Smith, 2005), and the empowerment effects arising from participating in governance networks (Sørensen and Torfing, 2003).

The second question concerns the *role of discourse and storylines* in unifying policy networks and shaping the interaction between the participants. Echoing Paul Sabatier's work on advocacy coalitions (Sabatier, 1988), Hajer (1993, 1995) has opened an interesting line of research that seeks to explore how policy actors with diverging interests are brought together in a relatively stable discourse coalition that is held together by a storyline that in a short and condensed way defines key problems and solutions. Governance networks are stabilized by policy discourses that structure the context in which problems are understood and defined, and over time a hegemonic discourse will be formed and become sedimented into concepts and institutional practices that are taken for granted by the actors. Storylines and discourses are not only unifying, structuring and stabilizing governance networks, but also play a crucial role in including and excluding actors, issues and options (Torfing, 2007). The crucial role of discourse in relation to governance networks calls for studies of how discourse and storylines are formed in a battle where situated actors advance particular arguments and aim to get acceptance of these arguments from other actors by mobilizing their ability to argue a persuasive case (*logos*), their reputation and credibility as speakers (*ethos*), and their rhetorical skills that aim to arouse particular emotions (*pathos*).

The third question concerns *the deployment of soft governance* in networked policy areas. Soft governance refers to attempts to regulate behaviour by means of legally non-binding recommendations, guidelines, norms, standards and

accords (Trubek and Trubek, 2005; Borrás and Conzelmann, 2007). The prescriptive power of soft governance tends to be low since the rules are often vague and ambiguous, adherence to the rules is voluntary, and enforcement of the prescriptions merely involves weak sanctions such as 'naming and shaming' of non-compliers. Soft governance is not necessarily tied to network governance. Governments can make use of soft governance as well. However, since ownership of voluntary standards is a crucial condition for compliance and since governance networks do not have the power to issue binding laws, there seems to be a certain affinity between governance networks and soft governance. As such, the formulation and enforcement of soft governance is frequently a result of negotiated interaction in networks. A hugely important question is whether soft governance is less effective in governing behaviour than hard governance based on binding laws. Of course, hard laws are legally binding and can be backed by severe sanctions, but shaping the logic of appropriate action by means of soft governance might prove to be very effective in the long term (March and Olsen, 1995). Another important question is how soft and hard governance interact. Last but not least, we need to know more about the contextual factors that trigger the use of soft governance.

The fourth question on the research agenda is the question of how to *evaluate and assess the performance and impact* of governance networks. The assessment of governance networks may invoke an entire range of normative criteria in terms of equity, democracy, goal-attainment, productivity, stability, conflict resolution, learning capacity etc. (Provan and Kenis, 2008). In recent debates there has been a particular focus on the evaluation of the effectiveness and democratic performance of governance networks (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009). Governance networks may contribute to a more effective governance of our complex, fragmented and multi-layered societies, but it is not evident how effectiveness should be measured and what measurement methods should be applied (Jessop, 2002; Klijn and Koppenjan, 2004; Provan and Kenis, 2005; Raaij and Kenis, 2005). Governance networks may contribute to a democratization of society (Sørensen and Torfing, 2005a; Benz and

Papadopoulos, 2006; Klijn and Skelcher, 2007) and they may also be evaluated in terms of their 'democratic anchorage' (Sørensen and Torfing, 2005b; Torfing, Sørensen and Fotel, 2009). Other assessment criteria might also be invoked and the big question is whether there is a trade-off between the performance and impact of governance networks in relation to different normative criteria.

A fifth question concerns the contribution of governance networks to *collaborative innovation in the public sector* (Hartley, 2005; Sørensen and Torfing, 2011). Empirical studies show that interactive governance through networks and partnerships can spur both policy and service innovation. In fact, policy and service innovation seems to increase with the diversity of the participating stakeholders and the density of the contacts and interaction among the participants (Dente, Bobbio and Spada, 2005). Governance networks bring together different values, experiences and ideas. They facilitate mutual learning that spurs the development of new and creative ideas and they promote the development of joint ownership to new ideas and initiatives that help to mitigate implementation resistance (Sørensen and Torfing, 2011). Perhaps most importantly, networks might exploit 'the strength of weak ties' (Granovetter, 1973) in order to disseminate new and innovative services and processes. A crucial challenge in the study of collaborative innovation is to shed light on the role and impact of institutional design and innovation management and to develop context-sensitive policy recommendations about how to spur networked innovation processes.

The sixth question concerns the *role of politics and power* in network governance. Grasping the political and power-ridden character of governance networks is crucial in order to understand what goes on in interactive governance arenas and to appreciate how network governance affects the wider society and traditional forms of government (Kahler *et al.*, 2009). Neither practitioners nor political science researchers should fool themselves into believing that network governance involves an unpolitical exchange of resources through a rational, consensus-seeking deliberation among policy

experts and relevant stakeholders who are merely aiming to make technical adjustments to public policy and secure a harmonious coordination of policy implementation (Moulaert and Cabaret, 2006). Governance involves complex power games and those who fail to understand this will not be able to manoeuvre successfully in the world of interactive governance. In order to advance a realistic political account of network governance, we must further explore how governance can be analysed in terms of power. Power is not only visible in the negotiated interaction among different public and private actors. Hence, in order to grasp the intrinsic link between governance and power, we must not only analyse 'power *in* governance', but also analyse 'power *of* governance', 'power *over* governance' and 'power *as* governance' (Torfing *et al.*, 2012). We need to explore all the different ways that network governance and power are related if we are to fully understand the essentially political character of governance.

The last question on the research agenda concerns the *metagovernance of governance networks*. The concept of metagovernance has become increasingly important for understanding how modern governments, and other legitimate and resourceful actors, can govern interactive forms of governance (Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan, 1997; Jessop, 2002; Kooiman, 2003; Kelly, 2006). Governance networks do not emerge spontaneously, but are often facilitated, initiated, and even designed by public authorities. In addition, they might fail to produce the effective and legitimate policy solutions that they are supposed to deliver. Finally, elected governments will feel the need to impose some degree of direction on the decentred policy interactions in order to realize their political objectives, facilitate the alignment of policies and ensure democratic accountability. The attempt of governments at multiple levels to reap the fruits of interactive governance, avoid the risk of governance failure, and shape the outputs and outcomes of decentred policy processes calls for a reflexive and strategic metagovernance. Metagovernance can be defined as the 'governance of governance' (Kooiman, 2003) as it involves deliberate attempts to facilitate, manage and direct more or less self-regulating processes of interactive

governance without reverting to traditional statist styles of government in terms of bureaucratic rule making and imperative command. The recent research on metagovernance aims to distinguish between different tools of metagovernance and it also aims to explore the dilemmas and limits of metagovernance (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009).

The questions listed above define an elaborate research agenda that reflects the institutionalized usage of governance networks in the multilayered European polity. Many of the questions are concerned with the possible effects of governance networks and how their role and impact can be improved. In this sense, we could say that the European governance debate has reached a high level of maturity. However, there is still considerable room for improvement. Not only is the study of governance networks under-theorized, but it is also underdeveloped at the level of methodology, although some efforts have been made in order to remedy this problem (see Bogason and Zølner, 2007). There is an abundance of qualitative case studies, but a profound lack of comparative and cross-national studies and a striking failure to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches in the study of governance networks.

7. Conclusion

The European governance debate offers a new perspective on an emerging reality. The governance debate has been on the rise since the early 1990s, but the question is whether the governance debate in Europe has developed into a fully fledged scientific paradigm. In order to make the assessment of the paradigmatic status of the European governance debate manageable we have analysed the attempts of European scholars to define the concept of governance and then narrowed the focus of attention to the study of network types of governance. The conclusion is that there is still considerable confusion and disagreement about the definition of governance, although there seems to be good arguments in favour of defining governance in terms of the process of steering society and the economy through collective action and in accordance

with common goals. There is more agreement when it comes to defining particular interactive governance arrangements such as governance networks. Despite the limited theoretical maturity of the growing field of governance network research, it is possible to identify a number of theoretical approaches that are drawing on different strands of institutional theory. These theoretical approaches help us to understand the dynamic processes of institutionalisation and de-institutionalisation and to realize that although a certain degree of institutionalization is required in order to stabilise precarious governance networks, a high degree of institutionalisation might undermine the flexibility gain associated with network governance.

In the last decade, the European research on network governance has raised a large number of interesting and important questions that together constitute the research agenda of a second generation of governance network research. A fairly large number of researchers work together in overlapping and often cross-national research projects in order to answer the questions on the rich and diversified research agenda. The researchers apply a relative consistent set of concepts and arguments and draw on a number of theoretical approaches, but methodologically there is considerable room for improvement as there is a lack of comparative studies and mixed method analyses.

The conclusion is that while the European governance debate as a whole is still searching for commonly agreed upon definitions and typologies of governance, the research on governance networks has developed into a new political science paradigm based on clear concepts, sound theories, and a rapidly expanding research agenda. A further effort on the methodological front will help to consolidate the new paradigm that is still in its infancy.

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