Editorial introduction to the Symposium

TRANSFORMATIONS TOWARDS NEW PUBLIC GOVERNANCE: CAN THE NEW PARADIGM HANDLE COMPLEXITY?

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New public governance (NPM) has been proclaimed as an alternative governance paradigm, with some suggesting that it replaces classical public administration (CPA) and new public management (NPM). The CPA and NPM approaches are said to be unable to deal with the growing complexities facing a globalizing, networked society (e.g., Osborne 2006, 2010). It is now widely recognized that public policy making and public service delivery develop increasingly within multilevel, cross-border settings, in which former demarcations of policy fields become blurred, with a high level of individualization, pluriformity of values, information density and dynamics, and mediatization (Castells 1996; Bauman 2005, Hjarvard 2008, Sørenson and Torfing 2007). These trends lead to the proliferation of nonlinear dynamics, strategic surprises, and emergent vulnerabilities and risks (Beck, 1992; Taleb, 2006; Longstaff 2005). As a result, society is increasingly dealing with wicked problems that require the expansion of knowledge and a problem-solving capacity that cannot be provided by any single entity operating alone (Rittel and Webber, 1976; Head 2008). Pollitt et al. (2004), and Bouckaert et al. (2010) further argue that during the last decades, classical public administration and new public management have contributed to fragmentation of governance capacity, while greater coordination and collaboration seem to be required.

Due to the financial crisis, and failures and scandals in public service delivery, the ideology of neoliberalism that fueled new public management is under closer scrutiny. New public governance (NPG), based on ideas of network governance, is suggested as an alternative paradigm (e.g., Salamon 2002; Osborne 2010). Critics see transformations in governance that provide different answers to the complexities faced by governments: emerging forms of trust-based, networked structures of collaboration and coordination,

and the use of policy tools to shape network structures and functions. Although these practices are not new, they have gained momentum and make up part of the governance landscape alongside classical public bureaucracy and NPM. Public administration and policy science theories and methodologies have been developed that provide the theoretical and normative underpinning of network governance (Agranoff and McGuire 2003; Mandell 2001; Provan and Milward 1995; Kickert et al. 1997; Koppenjan and Klijn 2004; Sørensen and Torfing 2007; Koliba et al. 2010).

In this edited volume, a series of prominent network theorists and researchers provide their assessments regarding the nature and status of the transformation towards the new public governance paradigm. The question that underlies these practical and theoretical explorations is the following: Given the complexities governments have to deal with, is the new public governance paradigm—both as governance practice and as scientific theory—able to accommodate and even harness complexity?

During a workshop focusing on "Complexity and the New Public Governance" convened at the 8th TransAtlantic Dialogue conference in the Netherlands in 2012, a number of critical questions for the field emerged. 1) It is not quite clear what the transformation towards new public governance in practice implies, and the claims of added public value may be overstated. NPG may be an umbrella concept under which a large variety of governance innovations are assigned that may have little in common. 2) Furthermore, it is far from clear that emergent forms of governance will replace existing arrangements. Rather, it may be hypothesized that they will mix with bureaucracy and new public management arrangements, thus resulting in hybrid forms of governance (Koliba et al. 2010; Koppenjan 2012). These hybrid governance arrangements give rise to new practical and theoretical challenges, as various contributions in this symposium suggest (e.g., Torfing and Trantiantafillou; Van der Elst and De Rynck).

In line with the need for conceptual clarification of what new public governance is about, questions arise around which theories are available to conceptualize and analyze these governance practices. Studies on networks in the public sector have a long history, with regard to both empirical research and theory development (Gage and Mandell 1990; Rhodes 1997; Kickert et al. 1999). Various traditions within network theory can be identified, and although consensus exists with regard to generic principles that guide networks, network processes, and network governance, a common conceptual framework has yet to fully emerge. Some may complain about theoretical pluriformity and see this as a lack of scientific progress and even speak of regress (Börzal 1998; Keast et al. 2013). However, we can also observe some convergence due to some theoretical approaches gaining authoritativeness (e.g., the model of Provan and Milward 1995; Provan and Kenis 2007; see various contributions in this symposium). On the other hand, new approaches towards complexity are recognized, such as complexity theory, which introduces new conceptual and theoretical complexity to the field, challenging the current state of the art (Teisman et al. 2009, Morcol 2012; Gerrits 2012; Koliba et al.

2010). Scientific progress can also be measured by methodological development. Increased methodological variety may reflect the maturing of network governance theory. A development can be seen from single-N studies to multiple-N studies, and from either qualitative or quantitative approaches, to mixed-method approaches and computer simulations (Brandes et al. 2006; Klijn et al. 2010; Meier and O'Toole 2007; Koliba et al. 2011b).

With these developments, the question then becomes: To what extent do these theoretical approaches and methodologies succeed in dealing with the complexities that characterize network governance in practice? Answers to this question may be pursued by taking a number of different directions. Some deny the generic applicability of theoretical frameworks and methods, thus calling for a typology of network settings that emphasize the contingencies of theories and practices. Certainly the idea of multi-causality and configurationalism, the existence of specific configurations of causal patterns, is interesting and deserves attention and consideration (Verweij et al. 2013). Yet others embrace an interpretative approach, declining the ambition to explain given nonlinearity and reflexivity (Bevir and Rhodes 2003), but still giving rich context to practical contingencies.

Another development in network governance theory concerns the greater emphasis on performance and success (see e.g., Provan and Kenis 2007; Turrini et al. 2010). In governance practice it proves hard to realize a consensus on which measures can be utilized. This complexity may ultimately be fueled by a range of conflicts and complementarities around shared mental models. Conflicts may make it difficult for network actors to agree upon goals and other expectations around performance and accountability that often underlie policies aimed at addressing wicked problems. Some network theories move to the task of explaining success, often defined in terms of effectiveness and performance. Those writing about network performance suggest that competing definitions of success and failure are often at work (Radin 2006), calling for greater normative, conceptual, and methodological clarification and empirical scrutiny. Nevertheless, frameworks have been developed that succeed in assessing the performance of network governance that go beyond a simple, one-dimensional emphasis on goal attainment and efficiency as is dominant in CPA and NPM approaches. The contributions in this symposium apply a number of different, but complementary, frameworks to inform our understanding of the relationship between network governance (and its complexity), shared notions of common managerial and political norms and values, and how performance measures and management systems may be used to guide new public governance practices.

Network failure has received relatively little attention within network governance theory, save in such contexts as emergency management (Comfort 2007; Kapucu 2006; Koliba et al. 2011a). The failure to collaborate within network settings has been well documented. Collaboration as a concept often has a positive connotation, which may

have resulted in a somewhat uncritical assessment of practices that are brought under this label. Transaction costs and problems of inclusion, representativeness, and power have received even less attention, as have opportunity costs of collaboration.

One form of network failure probably deserves specific attention: the role of irrational behavior and rent-seeking in collaborative settings. Often trust and collaboration are assumed in network processes. Strategic behavior is associated with new public management type of arrangements in which actors game numbers in order to manipulate performance management (Ten Heuvelhof et al. 2009; Hughes 2012). Instead of being the solution, network governance may enhance these problems. It is far from certain that actors (regardless of their sector) participating in networks are able and willing to act in a trustworthy, collaborative way. Nor can it be assumed that collaboration and trust between two or more agents will always generate public value and other indicators of effective performance and success. The informal nature of network processes may instead enhance rent-seeking, or forms of noncollaboration, while collaborations between network actors may also be the result of such phenomena as regulatory capture, groupthink, dark networks, and crime syndicates. Complexities within any social system will be generated out of the behavior and the (hybrid) institutional conditions that shape and constrain governance network structures and functions. This gives rise to the study of behavior in networks and the enviable dysfunctions and drawbacks of networks that emerge from complexity (see contribution of Koolma in this symposium).

In this symposium these questions are addressed in more depth in the contributions of the authors.

1. Torfing and Triantafillou seek to conceptually clarify the nature of new public governance, contrasting this governance mode with CPA and NPM by using Easton's system theory as a heuristic tool. They identify challenges for policy making and public management regarding the input, throughput, output, and feedback functions of the political-administrative system that result from the rise of collaborative governance practices, which they understand to be the essence of new public governance. They suggest metagovernance as an important way to manage new public governance practices and to deal with hybrid governance modes that may also emerge.

2. Vander Elst and De Rynck provide us with an analytical framework to assess network performance. Their contribution advances our understanding of assessing network success and failure. They also acknowledge the mixed nature of governance within governance networks, suggesting that the use of hierarchy and mandates is an important factor influencing the successful operation of networks. Keast and Mandell engage in a comparative, multiple-N case study, analyzing the success of network governance processes, connecting ideas on motivations underlying networks with forms of networks (coordination and collaboration) and network performance. Their findings suggest that no one best network form exists, but that the alignment between purpose of collaboration and network form is crucial. This alignment is not always

established up front, but evolves during processes. This relationship is intermediated by agency, the willingness of people to act for or against the network goal. The exact effects of this intermediary role warrant further research.

3. Koolma draws our attention to the role of behavior and informal processes as explanations for network failure. He explores sociological and institutional theories on informal structures, group processes, rent-seeking, in order to build a conceptual framework that may help network theory to investigate the role of behavior in networks.

We believe that the overall lesson to be drawn from these contributions might be phrased as follows. Despite the proliferation of terms such as governance and networks in academic literature, in practice this new governance mode may have less penetration than has been suggested. Also, network governance practices are not without problems, requiring considerable governance skills on the part of governments, and may even lead to serious failures. What is more, these practices emerge in the context of older governance modes, resulting in complex, hybrid practices. Conceptualizations of these hybrid practices have been framed as "mixed-form administrative authorities" involving combinations of vertical and horizontal ties shaped by complex combinations of democratic and market forces (Koliba et al. 2010; Koppenjan 2012). These developments provide ample research challenges for complexity and network theorists. They also call for a critical attitude towards these phenomena, since network governance may not only be the solution to the problem of complexity, but might well become part of the problem. We do not need a new set of one-size-fits-all solutions as provided by new public management; we do need a new paradigm that helps to handle the complexity and hybridity of the governance challenges that face our current network society.

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