

The Concept of the Neo-Weberian State Confronted by the Multi-Dimensional Concept of Governance

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Introduction

The Centre for Social and Economic Strategies (CESES) applied the multidimensional concept of governance in an empirical analysis of the development of the Czech Republic after 1989. The research focused on strategic qualities and capacities of governance. (Potůček et al. 2007, Potůček 2008). Having been invited to participate in the First NISPAcee-EGPA Trans-European Dialogue (Tallinn, January 2008), I thought we ought to confront this concept with that of the Neo-Weberian State. Why? Neither states nor public administration rules and agendas develop in a vacuum; we are witnessing rapid and profound societal, cultural, economic, and political changes, which create a cognitive challenge to both concepts. Even more so in the post-communist countries, with their return to democratic principles, replacement of the old cadres by new (sometimes poorly educated) administrative elites, the mass-scale and fast privatization, newly acquired national sovereignty, etc. Thus, I hoped that juxtaposing two streams of theoretical reasoning and the empirical evidence acquired by them might bring some interesting and hopefully inspiring results.

This paper offers the result of such experimentation. It starts with the presentation of the multi-dimensional concept of governance, and, in its second part, it confronts that with the neo-Weberian concept of state (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004, Drechsler 2005, Pollitt 2008). The Central and Eastern European region's development after 1989 serves as a source of empirical evidence for the clarification of neuralgic points and tensions between the applications of both concepts.

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1. The Multi-Dimensional Concept of Governance

I refer to three rather general approaches to the conceptualization of the term. According to Dror (2001: xi), governance means the "... collective capacity to influence the future for the better." Salamon (2002: 19) defines governance by identifiable methods through which collective action is structured to address a public problem, i.e. 'tools of public action.' Yet another definition suggests to understand governance as "... a system of values, policies and institutions by which a society manages its economic, political and social affairs through interactions within and among the state, civil society and private sector. It operates at every level of human enterprise." (Governance 2000, quoted in UNDP (2002: 1))

Given its relational nature, the notion of governance is "...unlikely ever to be defined in ways which are so general that they will have universal validity". (Bovaird 2005: 220)

A brief overview of the available literature already reveals certain preconditions of a sound analysis that are shared by most theoreticians: namely that governance is a holistic, multidimensional concept. At the same time, many add, it is also foggy and fuzzy.

The holistic approach is certainly much easier declared than applied in research practice. There is a necessary second step of its application – defining the components of the whole to be studied.

The multidimensional approach makes it possible to identify all relevant aspects of the complex phenomenon studied, and to decide later, which of them should be taken into consideration when approaching a specific cognitive problem in a rigorous scholarly manner.

The three lowest common denominators identified in various definitions of governance, which I will develop further, are: vertical layers of governance, three regulators (market, state and civic sector) interacting with each other, and actors' networks and networking. (Potůček et al. 2007, Potůček et al. in print)²

1.1 Vertical Layers of Governance

The age of sovereign nation-states is over, at least in Europe (if indeed there ever was one at all). Governance is still to a large extent executed at the national level. Nevertheless, its increasing shares go either upward to the supra-national level (especially to the level of the European Union – e.g. the rule of law) or downward to the sub-national (especially regional) level. (Zürn and Leibfried 2005: 25; Pierre and Peters 2000) The need to cope with the increasing complexity of policy-making processes gives rise to the concept of multi-level governance (MLG). (Bovaird 2005:

² We have also identified other, more specific, resources and qualities of governance. As they are associated with its strategic parameters, I will not consider them for the purpose of this paper.

219) Veselý (2004: 16) adds up the global level of governance that is still in statu nascendi. (Dror 2001)

The trends of this development are not clear. It is not possible to identify a standard development for the

(nation-)state, although one is moving toward a situation of structural uncertainty. The term 'post-national' defines a new constellation only in the negative sense, as something that has ceased to exist. (Zürn and Leibfried 2005: 26) At most, there is the broad concept of devolution of the nation-state as a whole, proceeding on to a mediated 'state without sovereignty', similar to the federal subunits in the U.S. (states) or Germany (*Länder*) in the 19th century. (Stolleis 2004: 26)

The recent transitions of public administration in the Central and Eastern European countries, which have shifted considerable responsibilities from the central to regional and municipal levels of public administration, and the EU's enlargement, which shifted certain parts of sovereignty of the new Member States to Brussels, is a good example of this tendency.

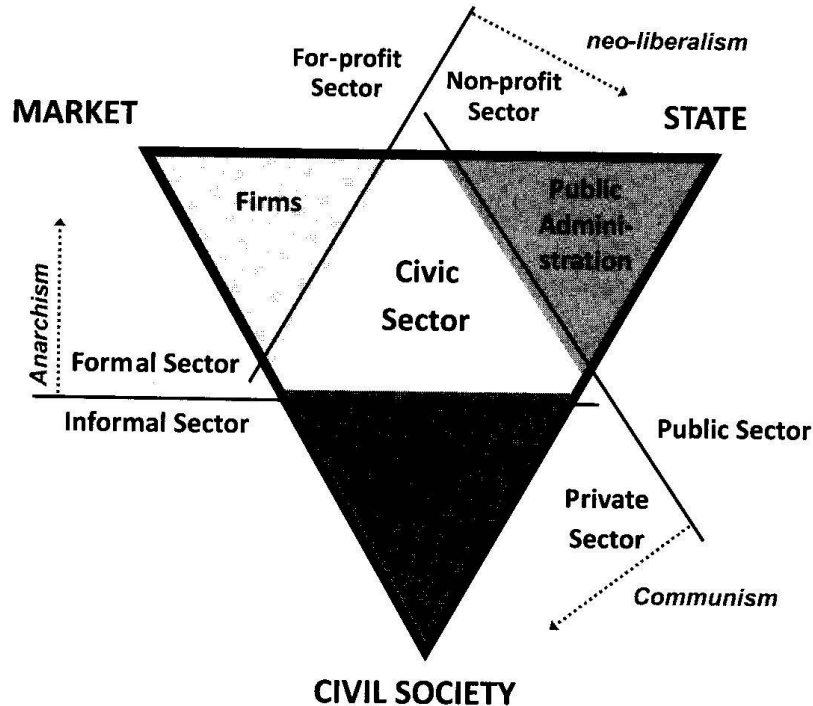
It should be noted that particular layers are not constituted by public administration only; there are other relevant actors who contribute to the content and form of governance at particular layers (e.g. European civic sector organizations as partners of the European Commission and the European parliament). Also the relationships between the layers are not necessarily based on hierarchical subordination exclusivity (e.g. the European policy of regions, sometimes interpreted as an effective strategy of the European Commission how to bypass national governments).

1.2 Three Interacting Regulators – Market, State and Civic Sector

The influence of the market, state, and civic sector on public life and the impact of their mutual interactions – sometimes synergic, sometimes contradictory – is carefully studied by social scientists. Nowadays, it is almost a *trivium* to assure that governments cannot fulfil their tasks alone without the engagement of the other two regulators in public life. The concept of governance based on such presupposition is sketched in Figure 1.

Peters (n.d.: 22) pointed out the core of this approach in the following way: "... a basic concept of governing that involves building, within the public sector, a capacity for collective goal-setting and a capacity for steering the economy and society to reach these goals. Such a concept need not, and increasingly is not, based on a hierarchical imposition of rule from the centre, but it does involve an ability to translate goals and ideas into action. Governance may be created in conjunction with individuals and organizations in the private sector and indeed may rely heavily on those instrumentalities for their success."

Figure 1
The regulators – market, state and civic sector – interacting.



Source: Abrahamson (1995); modified by author

Kooiman studies the state, market and civil society as institutions which he feels are situated in the intermediate position in societal governance. Nevertheless, he has defined a special role for the state: "...the state, the market and civil society each represent specific societal needs and capacities. As long as the state is expected to intervene where the other institutions fail, it will remain playing the 'all-round' role in representing the society in governance". (Kooiman 2003: 167) In the same context, Veselý (2004: 18) offers the concept of government with "structured interactions" within market and civic society. For similar entities, Benáček (2005) suggests the terms 'markets', 'hierarchies' and 'kinships'. Analysing the role of the state and the market and civil society in post-communist countries, I prefer here, instead of the rather all-embracing term 'institutions', a more specific term, 'regulators'. (Potůček 1999)

Peters (n.d.: 34) analyses the danger of capturing the state by either the institutional representatives of the market or the civic society: "A standard critique of most patterns of linkage between State and society is that the State, or at least some organizations within the State, become ensnared by societal interests. That can indeed be a problem but need not be if the institutions for linkage are designed carefully."

This concept of governance is based on the presupposition that the sharing of ideas and information needs to go not only from civil society toward government but also the other way round. "That is, individual citizens and organizations in society are not able to participate effectively if government is not transparent and does not make enough of its information and thoughts about the direction of future policy available to citizens." (Citizens as Partners 2001, wording by Peters n.d.: 35)

The market-state-civic-sector media regulative square is at the core of the conceptual grasp of governance. It represents an enormous challenge to social scientists: "The problem of mapping influence patterns now seems even greater with the growing interest in the behaviour of 'complex adaptive systems' in which intensive and ever-changing system interactions, with non-linear characteristics, give rise to non-predictable but self-organizing outcomes (Haynes, 2003), although it is still unclear how well such models apply to decision-making in the public domain." (Bovaird 2005: 218) There is an obvious imbalance between the nation-state's embedment and the global operation of the market, the media and, to a non-negligible extent, the civic sector as well. (Thompson 1995) "The Club of Rome-esque approach emphasises alternatives in which global democracy, the global market economy, and a harmonious global civilization (instead of hierarchy of any type) form the only sustainable basis for the politics of humanity. So far these kinds of social limits have been successfully set up only on the level of the nation state and, as such, with limited results. These achievements alone have required several centuries to emerge. What would be the means and joint efforts that could hasten similar progress on global level?" (Neuvonen 2005: 18)

The Central and Eastern European countries provide fertile ground for natural experimentation within this dimension.³

1.3 Actors' Networks and Networking

The spread of democracy around the globe in the late 20th century, coupled with an upsurge in the new information and communication technologies, has inspired some scholars to develop the concept of a network society, interpreted as the embodiment of a new historical trend: "Dominant functions and processes in the information age are increasingly organized around networks. (...) The new information technology paradigm provides the material basis for (their) pervasive expansion throughout the entire social structure. (...) Presence or absence in the network and the dynamics of each network vis-à-vis others are critical sources of domination and change in our society." (Castells 2000: 469) No more are the basic units of analysis, the actors, involved in governing processes, but "...the network, made up of a variety of subjects and organizations relentlessly modified as networks, adapts to supportive environments and market structures." (ibid: 198) According to Rhodes

³ More on this concept and its application to post-communist societies can be found in Potůček 1999.

(1997: 15), inter-organizational networks can rely on interdependence, resource exchange, self-organizing, respect for the rules of the game, and significant autonomy from the state. Kooiman (2003) distinguishes networks as one type of governance (along with communicative governance, public-private partnerships and co-management).

Networking is dear to the hearts of the Central and Eastern Europeans. Networks (such as Solidarity in Poland) were the political instrument that finally destroyed the tough and rigid hierarchical structures of communist party-states. Thus, there is a good deal of understanding for the role of interactive networking in this region. (Kovač 2004: 16)

Some authors have coined the term 'policy networks' (see Bovaird 2005: 218) or prefer to speak about 'information networks.' (El Hassan 2005: 1)

Salamon (2002: 9) suggests that the network is the opposite of hierarchy and classical concepts of public administration. The network theory argues that the standard relationship among the actors involved in a network is one of interdependence. Thus, no single actor can enforce its will upon others. This is due to the four crucial attributes that commonly characterize policy networks, making the task of network management very demanding. The four attributes are:

- their pluriformity – a range of diverse organizations with limited experience cooperating with each other,
- their self-referentiality – each actor has its own interests and approaches the relationship with a different set of perspectives and incentives,
- their asymmetric interdependencies,
- their dynamism.

As a consequence, the task of securing concerted actions within networks that are composed of a plurality of actors becomes a major administrative challenge. (ibid: 13)

A better understanding of the place and role of the actors' networks in contemporary governance exposes analysts to one of the major challenges. Without it, one of its key dimensions will be overlooked. They take the form of horizontal, mostly informal ties of collaboration and concerted action; they emerge and operate around various agendas, interests and problem areas. They cannot be automatically associated with positive societal outcomes – see some examples in the following section.

2. Can the Multi-Dimensional Concept of Governance Bring some Inspiration to the Neo-Weberian Concept of State?

Are these two concepts, i.e. the multi-dimensional concept of governance and the Neo-Weberian concept of state, compatible, complementary or contradictory? Be-