THE NEW PUBLIC GOVERNANCE? EMERGING PERSPECTIVES ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF PUBLIC GOVERNANCE

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When a book is published framing its title in the form of a question it means, in the majority of cases, that there are real or methodological doubts on the validity of certain approaches or concepts accounting for some social or natural realities. Therefore is logical for the authors to begin analyzing the concept's contents with the goal of testing the consistency and precision of its meaning, and secondly to prove its empirical validity, identifying whether the concept accurately describes the reality it claims to portray and if its origin, structure, function and scope are clearly explained. This book inquires on the New Public Governance (NPG).

Within the book some authors still debate the definition of governance and aim to provide a precise concept, giving order to a manifold of its earlier denotations (Hughes), while others query if new governance actually exists and is really a different, "new" process of governing (Lynn). Another group ponders more recent questions such as meta-governance (Peters), the relationship between governance and governability (Kooiman), innovations in governance (Moore and Hartley), global perspectives (Kennett), and others focus on explaining and analyzing the distinctive essential components, subjects and activities of NPG, like governance networks (Klijn, O'Toole and Meier, Martin), policy networks and governance of policy networks (Jung, Huys and Koppenjan, Acevedo and Common), organizational partnerships (Mcquaid, Greve and Hodge, Vangen and Huxman), contractual relationships (Kettl, Farneti and Padovani), third-sector opportunities (Pestoff and Brandsen, Smith and Smyth), etcetera. In sum, the book offers an interesting outlook on the current theoretical approaches of the new governance, its workings, distinctive elements, problems, agenda, but the book nonetheless has its flaws and debatable propositions as well.

The term governance began to appear in some Latin American countries during the early twenty-first century and was employed to describe the ongoing changes emerging in the process of governing, given that some governments started to address several public issues through partnerships with economic agents or governmental-social networks. It was also used as a reference to demand a new way of governing, better suited, responsive and effective to meet the new social conditions and problems. However, in Latin-American countries, the concept of governability is more familiar and used more frequently, due in part to the concern that recent democratic governments could be overran by the many problems, needs and conflicts distressing society, and it could be ill equipped or incapable to respond properly and steer society towards better levels of living. In spite of the traditional Latin American inclination towards a big state and a protagonist government, the concept and political relevance of NPG has been taking hold and making progress due to the fact that ingovernability is considered a likely political scenario if the pattern of the authoritarian old governance is reiterated by the practices of several new democratic governments.

The meaning and relevance of the governance concept, at least in Mexico, derived from Europe and more specifically from the Netherlands, with Jan Kooiman as its founding thinker (*Modern Governance: New Government — Society Interactions*, 1993), rather than from the Anglo-American school of thought which incorporated the governance approach years later, despite the fact that ideas from R.A.W. Rhodes (by the way, questioned several times in the book) and G. Stoker (1998) have been inspiring and influential.

In Mexico the concept of new governance has been recently institutionalized when the General Public-Private Partnerships Act (*Ley General de Asociaciones Público-Privadas*) was approved in 2012 and revised in 2014. Such legislation recognized the government's insufficiency to properly and successfully address some critical public problems and social strategic projects and, hence, acknowledged the relevance of adding-on private and social resources to existing public ones in order to strengthen the society and government's capacities to tackle critical problems and promote relevant projects.

My comments will center on the first part of the book, focused on developing some theoretical points on NPM, rather than on Parts II, III, IV and V, which focus on analyzing NPG's specific issues, both conceptual and practical. My first commentary on the book, edited by Prof. Stephen P. Osborne, points to the Introduction and some articles from Part I, "*Theoretical Perspectives on Public Governance*", which tend, from the Anglo-American perspective, to standardize the account of the institutional

and theoretical history of public administration by placing the New Public Governance as the latest chapter in such history. It assumes that the modern Public Administration (legal-rational-bureaucratic), distinctive of the nineteenth and twentieth century state, is the starting point and years later, during the eighties, New Public Management (NPM) emerges and is established to correct the flaws and inefficiencies of the traditional public administration, attributable (supposedly or with certainty) to its over-regulatory, hierarchical, self-contained arrangement. The step forward is therefore the New Public Governance (NPG), introduced to correct the conceptual assumptions and practical flaws of NPM, which was just "a transitory stage in the evolution from traditional Public Administration to what is here called The New Public Governance" (p. 1). This linear and sequential interpretation of public administration history, divided in three stages, must be discussed, as well as to rebuff the too critical judgments made against the NPM throughout some papers in the book, in addition to the idea that the NPG is the last link in the evolution of public administration or of the public policy-making process and public services delivery.

My main criticism centers exactly on the tendency to reduce the NPG to a public administrative arrangement, process or theory or to a particular governing activity, labeled as "public policy implementation and public services de-

livery" (p. 5), while governance is actually about steering and ruling the society and, as a result, about running public agencies, organizations, programs and services. Governance implies public policies and services as particular governing actions and instruments to deal with specific social demands and circumstances, but is not equal to public policy implementation or public service delivery.

Governance refers to the fundamental social steering decision-making through which government and society, within the state's institutional framework, set up society's purposes —aims, priorities, futures, goals, critical issues to solve, challenges and threats to confront, opportunities to exploit or build...— and define the specific relationships to be established between government, private and social actors in order to achieve the social goals, as well as the proper activities required for such ends. These ground steering decisions determine and frame the specific public policies and services to be designed and implemented in order to address specific social problems and deal with particular social demands and contingencies.

For these reasons, I consider debatable such a limited view of governance, meaning just a "public policy implementation and public services delivery", a "policy regime", a "policy and implementation regime", which leads to state that the NPG, the NPM and PA are three different policy and implementation regimes: "a tripar-

tite regime model." If it is questionable to reduce NPG to a "public policy implementation and public services delivery" (p. 5) or to "the dominant regime of public policy implementation and public services delivery" (p. 414), it is also inconsistent to use a second concept, "policy regime", to denote the NPG concept, even if the distinctive characteristics of such a new regime were defined. If governance is only a policy regime it loses its conceptual distinctiveness and validity, and its wording will be minimized to a synonym. Policy regime should be better understood both as a particular setting and outcome of the over-arching socio-political governance steering decisions. Simply phrased, NPG refers primarily to the socio-political dimension rather than to the administrative or managerial or policy dimension of governing, bearing in mind that the policy and delivery dimension is an essential component and instrument of NPG when implementing specific decisions to comply with public responsibilities in distinct social situations

To assert in addition that public governance "can itself be broken down into five distinct strands: socio-political governance, public policy governance, administrative governance, contract governance, network governance", does not contribute to improve the discussion, since such a division leads eventually to some misunderstanding, despite Prof. Osborne's intention to recapitulate the different Anglo-American schools of thought on the NPG. In fact, one idea is the social-political governance (Kooiman), an idea of interactive, relational, by partnerships and networks governance, that refer to the core of the NPG concept, highlighting the distinct nature of its way of ruling and steering society, and another idea is to relate the specific subjects or activities of NPG as public policy governance, public administration governance, contract governance.

On the other hand, Osborne makes a relevant and acute observation in regards to NPG that "posits both a *plural state*, where multiple interdependent actors contribute to the delivery of public services, and a *pluralist state*, where multiple processes inform the policy making system... As a consequence of these two forms of plurality, its focus is very much upon inter-organizational relationships…" Correspondingly, "the NPG is thus both a product of and response to the increasingly complex, plural and fragmented nature of public policy implementation and service delivery in the twenty-first century" (p. 9). Acknowledging the plurality and the interdependence of actors, including the governmental actor, as a main feature of today's society, has multiple implications, as it leads to ascertain that the relationships between organizations (public, private, social) are essential to achieve their own goals and to recognize that a single actor (public or private) is insufficient by itself to reach them, and hence to admit the complexity of the social

system, the political regime and of public problems, which are multi-dimensional, multifactorial, multistakeholder, multilevel, and multinational too. At its core, it means accepting that we are living under a new social order and that a novel governance process, "a new socio-political interactive governance", is demanded, and possibly a "network governance" as well.

Finally, as accurately pointed out by Prof. Osborne, the policy implementation and new service delivery regime will be interorganizational, networked, open to the social environment, involving public service users as co-producers, precisely because NPG, the ultimate political and institutional framework of policies and services, plays out in an interactive and inter-relational mode, in line with the nature of "a plural and pluralist state", portrayed correctly by Osborne.

In this regard, I consider Kooiman's sociopolitical governance definition to be appropriate, fundamental, and precise as well: "all those interactive arrangements, in which public as well as private actors participate, aimed at solving societal problems or creating social opportunities, and attending to the institutions within which these governing activities take place" and I back Rhodes' definition, which considers that such interactions set up "self-organizing interorganizational networks" or assumes at least their existence and relevance. The sociopolitical approach, based on a social change theory, leads to infer that

the government has ceased to be a self-sufficient and independent actor in setting and achieving by itself all the most important social aims and goals, reason for which it sets in place several forms of concerted partnerships with social actors to attain supplementary capabilities, resources and support.

Of much interest is Kooiman's article on *Governance and Governability*, which on one part summarizes his earlier ideas (orders, elements, modes of governance) and, on the other part, puts forward the still open question of whether and how does the governance process contribute to assure the governability of society, partly because NPG'S decisions cannot be taken for granted to guarantee a successful steering of society. To tackle the question Kooiman introduces three clear and simple distinctions: "a system-to-be-governed, a governing system and the interactions between two" (p. 72). Specifically, "governability from the point of view of the Governing System is the capacity to bring about, organize and carry out governance activities in the face of societal and natural diversity, complexity and dynamics" (p. 78). Such capabilities are determined by three types of interaction between government and society: "participatory, collaborative and policy or management interactions", which are renamed as "interferences, interplays and interventions."

The interactions between government and society taking place

in a specific social system or when dealing with a specific public issue takes the form of "self — co — and hierarchical governance", the three fundamental types of public governance, which are in the end the main sources of the governability of a specific society or of a specific social issue. The problem is on the table, but the answer requires to be reworked as it is still too generic and broad. A relevant intellectual endeavor for the future should be to pinpoint the conditions or factors that make some types of governance more suitable and effective to guarantee the governability of some social systems, affairs and circumstances.

Peters' article on *Meta-governance* is welcomed because he also puts forward a new question. For many years it was spoken of governance without carefully thinking of the fact that the NPG, due to its interactive nature which involve multiple actors with varied ideas, interests, resources and degrees of power, faces two challenges that without a proper solution will make NPG an ineffective and socially questioned ruling process. The first challenge relates to the public nature of NPG decisions in a democratic regime, while the second relates on to how to manage the plurality of the different actors taking part in society's steering decision-making. In consequence, it is logical to ask how governance has to be governed in order to safeguard the public nature of decisions and to promote understandings and agreements between participating actors in the decision-making process.

Peters correctly understands meta-governance as "the governance of governance" and particularly as "the process of steering devolved governance process", given that he posits such questioning in light of the effects of the NPM reforms which altered the structure and functioning of public sector in recent years, and allowed "to move governing out of the center of the conventional, politically driven public sector and to empower a range of actors, including senior public servants, lower-echelon public employees, and members of civil society" (p.36). Though not improper, it is debatable to frame the question of meta-governance referring only to the decentered and even fragmented effects triggered by the NPM in the public sector and not referring further to the profound changes in present day society, which imply changes of society's relationships with the government and, hence, changes in the governance process and structure. By posing the question in such a way, the necessity of meta-governance is reduced "to provide direction to the administrative system, but to do so through mechanisms that maintain the virtues that have produced by delegated and devolved forms of governing, while providing central direction and control" (p. 37).

Although Peters sometimes hints towards a balance of autonomy and control in governing and in public organizations, his

main concern in the article is that NPM "reforms have created many political problems by reducing the levels of control that political leaders can exercise over public policies". Particularly he mentions four problems with largely negative consequences – decision-making, participation, coordination and accountability– and proposes meta-governance measures to solve them (performance management, strategic management, budget control and, more advanced measures as soft law, values, trust). In consequence, his meta-governance concept means "the need to reassert political controls over the devolved governance process". Prof. Peters' meta-governance concept seems limited, partly because he emphasizes political control and appears to consider no better way to govern the new governance than through government's control, but without clarifying that his concept is not similar to the command and control measures of the old governance or without advancing an alternative concept of political control. It looks as if "the transition from government to governance" hasn't taken place.

I would've personally favored a different path to address the meta-governance question and concept, pinpointing the constitutive elements of the dual dimensions of the NPG structure, the institutional and the cognitive dimensions, that are essential to guarantee the public nature and the social effectiveness of NPG decisions, as well as identifying the proper management activities leading the actors involved in the interactive governance to reach key understandings on the content of decisions. From this perspective, control is just a piece of NPG meta-governance among other coordination mechanisms, some of which are detailed further by other authors in Parts II and IV of the book.

The article "Innovations in Governance", written by M. Moore and J. Hartley, needs to be read as a description of some of the innovations that NPG has introduced on traditional hierarchical governance, since the "five ways in which these innovations are different" relate to some essential characteristics of the NPG process. Perhaps it should be emphasized that NPG is the real innovation, while the five listed innovations work as distinctive attributes of NPG. I would rather say NPG is in essence an "innovation of governance, from which stem the "innovations in governance" an expression favored by the authors who focus more on innovation theory than on governance theory. Regardless of my opinion, the five innovations listed are basically: bursting the boundary of organizations, creating network-based production systems; tapping new pools of financing, material resources and human energy; exploiting government's capacity to convene, exhort, and redefine private rights and responsibilities; redistributing the right to define and judge the value of what is being produced; evaluating the innovations in terms

of justice, fairness and community-building as well as of efficiency and effectiveness. Of value and relevance is the shift, within the study of public sector innovation, from the public administration field, devoted to study of change in norms, ways of organization, processes and products, towards the governance field, the defining framework of public administration.

Part II of the book, *Governance and interorganizational partnerships to deliver public services*, offers strong conceptual contributions of heuristic and practical value, even though public-private partnerships go beyond public services delivery, as exemplified by the articles on "Theory of Organizational Partnerships" (Mcquaid, Greve, Hodge), "Theory of Collaborative Advantage" (Vangen and Huxham), "Relational Governance" (Osborne, Mclaughlin, Chew), all of which I consider to be highly relevant in introducing new and polished elements to improve NPG as a concept and its governing process as well.

Some elements stand out: the three forms of partnership work ("facilitating, coordinating, and implementing partnerships"); the key success factors in partnership working (strategic focus and leadership, the importance of trust, capacity for cooperation and mutualism, organizational complementarity, "symbiotic interdependence"); the PPP, public-private partnerships, definition as "cooperation of some sort of durability between public and private actors in which

they jointly develop products and services and share risks, costs and resources which are connected with these products" (p. 150); the PPP challenges: the complexity (of issues, deals, contracts), the number of roles government adopts in PPP relationships, the fact that PPP is one option to choose among other NPG alternatives, the management of the agenda of private and public partners, the long-term contract ("incomplete contracts" problem) and, finally, to stress that the essential democratic aspects of PPP (participation, transparency, accountability, control) have not been institutionally resolved.

An important chapter is "Theory of Collaborative Advantage", a key contemporary issue, as well as the considerations on "Relational Capital — the heart of relationship governance", that point out the importance of Trust and Trust management, also developed by E. H. Klijn, a specialist in the field, in his article "Trust in governance networks", which puts forward the essential components of an analytical frame on the value of trust for the functioning and performing of governance networks, marking that "trust reduces transaction costs, facilitates cooperation and stability in network relations, stimulates learning, knowledge exchange, innovation" (p. 313).

I regret not reviewing other valuable articles in the book, like those making reference to contract management and the key role of the Third-Sector in NPG. Many articles of the book take us

to another level of knowledge and debate on the New Public Governance and its practical implications. The book is an obligatory reading for researchers and public interested on the vital topic of the proper and effective way to govern present day society, which is more global, plural, independent, interdependent, and possessing an advanced financial, productive, intellectual and social capital, despite the pressing challenges of poverty and inequality.