

# GOBERNANZA: PROPUESTAS, LÍMITES Y PERSPECTIVAS

FRANCISCO PORRAS SÁNCHEZ (2016)

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The governance concept it is found by its very first time in the Spanish dictionary in 1803, in that moment is the ancient way of ruling, subsequently the first meaning of ruling will be reserved: action and effect of ruling or governing. Nowadays the dictionary defines ruling as art or a way of governing. With the peculiarity that such art promotes a healthy balance among state, civil society and economic market, and the meaning of action and effect of governing is denied. Thus defined, governance establishes that there are ways to govern, continuing the idea would say that there are at least two ways, a traditional evoked by the word government, and a modern, driven by the debates of governance, which means the probability of a displacement from the former to the latter in contexts of complexity and change.

“Governance: proposals, limits and perspectives” it is a book dedicated in its entirety to elucidating the multifaceted and polysemic character of the word governance. Porras analyzes the multiple uses of the expression in the academic circles, criticizing their indiscriminate use in common language and politicians specially, without paying attention to the fact that the concept is loaded with meliorative connotations, government is usually linked at present to discredit or disaffected by the governmental institutions, government has derogatory evocations: verticality, bureaucracy, unilateral decisions, paternalism, etc. The path taken by Porras goes through the criticism and searching of exits to the “Babylonian multiplicity” of governance.

But Porras is interested in the predominant presence of the concept in the Anglo-Saxon world, hence starting his book by saying that governance is the “most accepted Spanish translation of the English term governance. He speaks of “Babylonian multiplicity” (the reader will have to be very patient by insisting on this phrase) to emphasize the vast amount of definitions he finds in governance. It is positioned halfway between “two extremes”: an eclectic

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one that sometimes opts for a common component to the different definitions –or simply adheres to a conceptual proposal– and submits it to verification in the empirical investigation; at the other extreme would be researchers who do not find the introduction of a new concept justifiable or recognize the contributions of theoretical, empirical and methodological studies of governance: “The middle path proposes to consider that the governance has a partial utility, in process of development and consolidation. It starts from considering that polysemy is a constitutive attribute of governance that, although without possibilities of being eliminated, can certainly be reduced” (Porrás, 2016, p. 14). Thus, governance is an umbrella term that welcomes theories, styles of government, projects and social change.

The task carried by Porrás consists, first, in identifying the governance definitions, then look for common elements between definitions and from them elaborates four sets which he calls them: 1) stipulations; 2) generals; 3) multiple definitions with familiar similarities; and 4) adjustment and withdrawal of some definitions. They are abbreviated with four words: suggesting, proposing, synthesizing, considering the specific and refining. He points out that the problem is that there is not dialogue between these conceptual approaches of governance. Finally he reflects on some ways to evaluate the theoretical and empirical contribution of the different approaches.

This path is taken in five different chapters. The first one identifies 61 governance definitions, a special section is dedicated to criticizing “governance as fashion” and reflects on the causes of the emergence of the concept, to conclude rescuing the attributes most frequently referred to in the literature. The combination of attributes would suggest that: “governance is a new modality of collective steering that consists of intersectoral coordination for the achievement of common objectives” (Porrás, 2001, p. 65), however, the author is concerned that the texts attribute the concept governance to different realities, analysis to which the second chapter devotes. The idea is that among the definitions found are subsets according to the ontological substrate.

The first ontological substrate would be the *hermeneutic*, governance as an approach or lens that understands reality as a network of networks, the very same that demands to be multi and interdisciplinary observed to be able to face twisted problems (wicked problems). The second contemplates governance as a theory in *sensu lato*, in process, which has not reached an advanced level of systematization, so its propositions would still be “conditional on empirical verification”. In a broad sense, there are definitions of governance as an organizational framework, an analytical framework, a bridge between theories, of which Porrás detaches twelve irreducible themes from each other and in some cases contradictory.

Among these twelve topics can be mentioned here the T9 that establishes “the need to combine government with networks and markets”, the T2 “intra or interorganizational networks”, or the T3 “combined steering capacity with accountability” (Porrás, 2016, pp. 77-78). In each of theme, different authors and different hypotheses are included, for example, in T3, one hypothesis found in Kjaer is that “central concerns in governance are how to steer and how to improve accountability”; another hypothesis is that “governance is a macro theory built on empirical evidence”, this is clear from the authors Bjórk and Johansson; one more, is presented in Peters and Pierre, raises the need for a hierarchy with accountability in the process of selecting coherent common objectives (Porrás, 2016, pp. 74-77). Another ontological substrate of governance has to do with the attribution of new meanings to government and the management of networks, including the differentiation between governance and governance, as well as its assimilation to the new public policy instruments of those contemplated in the literature of the participatory and deliberative democracy.

The fourth theoretical object pointed out is the *changing or investigation project*, that finds its most clear expression in the *good governance*, which contemplates guarantees on transparency, accountability, rule of law and new mechanisms for access to information, among others. The last governance approach *the shift towards social networks*. Porrás confirms that “this approach to governance is the most basic and, in a strict sense, is the one with the greatest degree of subsistence” (2016, p. 101), however, the author argues that there is an empirical evidence that questions the turn to the networks (p. 105).

As can be seen, the first two chapters of Governance are devoted to trying to organize and systematize the author’s definitions in the literature, the most frequent themes and the hypotheses that emerge. It concludes this theoretical inquiry by proposing a map of four components under which to try to integrate the different authors and the multiple ways of understanding the governance and its theoretical objects, with this would form a matrix of 61 definitions crossed by the four components or ontological substrates.

But starts chapter three by adding one more layer to its convoluted unclear construct, now he talks about strategies to build maps, he considers that there are at least four strategies “to address the essence of governance” what can be better understood as governance conceptualizations: stipulative, general definitions, congregation of concept families, and adjustments or identification of common elements in definitions: “These four ways of making maps can jointly help to highlight and develop the ultimate utility of governance literatures, which consists on indicating the fundamental problems facing any

socially driven effort in the contemporary world (p. 117). Such strategies are understood as maps “to navigate the Babylonian multiplicity”.

Before analyzing the four strategies, Porra presents a Venn diagram (which he names it “Map of maps of governance literatures”) *with fourteen sets or combinations of governance notions* conglomerated according common concerns, an image that reflects interlocking sets. The sets with greater capacity of dialogue or penetration in other sets would be the one of *networks* and the one with high degree of abstraction. The only set distorted is the one with the *critical visions*, which only finds a communicative vessel through the whole evolution of literature bodies. From this aggregation of concepts exercise and search of relations between them, Porras risks a synthesis when he says: “it seems that the great majority of the theoretical governance contributions share a concern to understand it with a certain degree of generalization, realting it to networks and their implications in the State and government managing capacities” (p. 128).

The *map of maps* previously mentioned, according to the author, lacks the capacity to explain the relations between the different sets. A “true map of maps” requires the identification of a common conceptual structure, and in the face of the impossibility of finding the essential element of governance, the author analyzes the four strategies in search of such common structure, the search for fundamental problems presupposed in the different approaches to governance.

The two final chapters the author reduces the scope of his analysis and presents them as notes: “The notes consider the possible theoretical and empirical utility of what the literature of governance proposes, which confronts us with some immediate problems” (p. 160). The first problem is the meaning of “useful”, which partially is solved considering: 1) before doing empirical research it is necessary to identify its fundamental problems; 2) recognize that governance as a change project (as a practice) has made “more substantive contributions” than theories, which encourages research to be compared with a fundamental problem approach; and 3) greater contributions to the complications of measurement.

The book describes five of the fundamental problems presented in literature: cooperation, self-organization, accountability, effective guidance and interdisciplinarity. The note to evaluate the empirical governance contribution are developed from several master’s and doctorate thesis from Mora Institute, FLACSO México, and a particularity interesting one from the UAM-Xochimilco, in which conditions are suggested to favor the achievement of governance promises, in a few words: installed agency capacity, creation of mechanisms to generate and disseminate information, discussion and decision

making space, and the possibility of integrating in the process to decision-makers actors who are usually excluded (Porras, 2016, p. 184).

The book ends with the usual conclusions, which in this case are more a summary of the five chapters without making an incursion in the reflections that come from a set of contents, although the work is consummated by proposing questions for a research agenda that generates dialogue among the literature sections Porras identified in his theoretical research.

## **FROM “BABYLONIAN CONCEPTUAL DISPERSION” TO ONE OF THE MANY POSSIBLE THEORETICAL ARTICULATIONS**

With this book Porras seems to close a period of his own process of educating the concept that has motivated his studies. Before he sought for himself in specific cases a governance theoretical object, in a few words the network one proposed by Rhodes, convinced by the theoretical and empirical governance problems as network, but also of “its utility as a general interpretation frame-work” (Porras, 2012, p. 16). Now he takes a step back and watches in perspective that it is necessary to identify in the first place the fundamental problems and focus on the measurement conditions and implications. In this aspect he just dares to present as a rough draft (notes) a clump of orientations that any governance scholar can use to integrate into the research project.

For the work mentioned, he organized the governance definitions found in fourteen conceptual containers that refer, e.g.: 1) the high degree of abstraction (11 out of 61 definitions); 2) the actors, institutions and social resources (7 definitions); or 3) normative approaches (3 definitions). However, the author omits to be held accountable for the criterias he followed for this conceptual classifications, which has characteristics of being a classification with certain degree of arbitrariness, e.g., five cases are grouped as “territorial circles” but includes other groups that cannot be separated without justification, e.g., “international relations” in which definitions like *global and regional governance* are included.

Not very often, specially in the first two chapters, it seems that Porras asks too much for the governance notion, observing the word in empirical and theoretical studies, on the governance of private corporations and public bodies, and on global and Local, this logically leads him to find multiple concepts of the word that seek to connect with theoretical objects specific to the field of analysis.

The empirical study demands constraint, operationalization. The theoretical documents elaborate abstract propositions, many times detached from the observation of new objects. The displacement from the abstract analysis to the concrete one necessarily entails mismatches, theory describes universes of possibility, concrete observation takes some coordinates, those that are decided are central and feasible to observe. Just the operationalization is an exercise of simplification, reduction, synthesis. Some theorists are positioned with horizon of observation of long term, which necessarily entails high abstraction and commonly a normative discourse; other approaches shorten their horizons in the medium term, an area that accepts being put into operation, and not a few are more interested in the conjunctures and conditions located at specific times and places, this claims to give more scope of expression to subjectivities.

Unfortunately, the author does not support his study in epistemological reflection, nor does he elaborate a methodological section, both of which are perfectly justified in a theoretical book. Another aspect that is missed is that he does not explain the criteria with which he chose the bibliography to analyze, specially when it is known that concepts such as networks of governance or metropolitan governance find in themselves an extensive bibliography, easily as broad as the one chosen by Porrás for the “generic” concept.

Understanding that governance is the action and the effect of governing, then, its value allows us to focus on the process and results, within the framework of social, economic and political structures in which societies are governed. In the broad sense. Governance is then constituted by structural constraints and procedural components. It alludes to the how, not to the what; we try to understand how it is governed in the complexity of contemporary societies.

The implicit premise is that the government of societies under these conditions has a new form that only exists given these conditions. And it also has an inherent hypothesis: in societies of less complexity, prior to the emergence of dense relations and links between nations, prior to the emergence of virtual communications of a density hitherto unimaginable, hierarchical government was configured as the paradigm of public action. But with the referred changes, new dynamics arise that sometimes complement the hierarchies, in others they can supplant, question or challenge. Thus, it is feasible to identify different stages in the governance process, and an intuitive one is the initial one, in which old and new dynamics coexist, traditions with roots in the old, and emergence of innovation that questions those traditions.

A weakness in the word governance, point out by Offe (2009), has to do with syntax, in fact ease its “fetishization”, of which other concepts of the sciences as social class, market, ideology, unconscious, capitalism and a long etcetera. As hypothesis, I observe that contributes to the fetishization of the



indiscriminate use of the article “the” before the governance. If the theoretical object is the concept of governance and its meanings, to speak of “governance” implies that it is the well-known governance, not the polysemic governance. However, Porras prefers the article more than eighty percent of the time it uses the word. The author also speaks of “governance processes”, “governance indexes”, “governance cases”, “governance structures”, “governance exercise”, “governance efforts” and “governance without adjectives”.

The above approach suggests that governance is not a concrete entity, just as it is not state, or power, so it does not go around looking for “governance”. One question that questions the idea is: can there be no governance, governance deficit or ungovernable? So far, little question has been raised, it seems that governance processes do not occur in traditional societies, and their emergence is complicated where “social structures” prevail. The new question would be how to generate governance in these societies? The theoretical reflections suggest the answer, recognizing that in complex environments the uni-actor solutions have less expectations of success in the common of the public problems, and by means of dense communications, new communication technologies that are widespread use and preferably generalized, incentives for the multiplication of exchanges and links between organizational and institutional actors, as well as enabling and promoting autonomy of citizen organizations. Another question arises immediately, what could encourage political actors to promote mechanisms of governance when their comfort space is the dynamics of pre-governance? Is it correct to speak of pre-cogovernance, without governance, governance, governance or old governance?

The concept of governance integrates the us and the others (in governance it is plural, inclusive, tolerant, deliberative, acting, business). As a process, governance manifests dilemmas, conflicts, negotiations, agreements, dissent and consensus. If this is correct, then “governance” does not necessarily yield desirable results, but in theory public action in the governance logic facilitates favorable collective outcomes, just by adding the interests of multiple actors to the process, who have a stake in the diagnosis, elaboration, implementation and evaluation of solutions to public problems. It could be said then that governance is the government of, in, by, and for interdependence.