1 | *Introduction: Democracy, Conflict and Participation in Decentred Governance*

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The Shift from Government to Governance?

New canonical beliefs in government enter our collective understandings through compelling narratives of inescapable pressures for social, political and economic change. These narratives typically speak of 'ruptures with the past'. While they list the failings of traditional policy instruments to address new complexities, they extol the promise of new organisational forms and strategic approaches. They give policymakers and practitioners assurances of solutions and 'road maps' through which they can navigate the confusing events that are deemed to frustrate their everyday activities. Of course, any new claims of orthodoxy are inevitably open to charges of simplification and the undue aggregation of complex and distinct practices. The struggle to impose such dominant narratives arguably rests on the capacity of their proponents to construct credible claims to uniformity across diverse practices and contexts. However, accusations of simplification and alike should not detract from recognition of how far new ideas held in 'good currency' are inevitably tied to the work of government. For, as Rose (1999, 8) notes, the practices of government are 'both made possible by and constrained by what can be thought at any particular moment in our history. To analyse the history of government, then, requires attention to the conditions under which it becomes possible to consider certain things to be true – and hence to say and do certain things'.

Recognising this intertwining of the activities of thought and government, we suggest that we are now faced with a new orthodoxy encapsulated in the narrative of the 'shift from government to governance' (Frederickson 2007; Chhotray and Stoker 2009; Bellamy and Palumbo 2010). This governance narrative has become an indispensable point of departure for many inquiries into the contemporary

practices of policymaking. At the same time, it has attracted substantive praise for its analytical move away from the 'narrow' confines of government to the 'broader' concerns of governance interactions (Rhodes 2000), 60–1, with Guy Peters going so far as to suggest that a focus on governance rather than government obliges 'the discipline of political science to recapture some of its roots by focusing more explicitly on how the public sector, in conjunction with private sector actors or alone, is capable of providing direction and control to society and economy' (Peters 2011, 63).

Here, so the story goes, in the absence of both a 'formal chain of command' and any explicit directive role for public agencies, government itself has become 'merely one amongst many actors' who populate shifting networks of more or less collaborative or competitive stakeholders, who come together to define and work towards a shared public purpose (Sørensen and Torfing 2004, 7–8; see also Klijn and Koppenjan 2012; Lewis 2011). We now inhabit, it is claimed, a 'networked polity' in which the blurred boundaries between state and civil society have produced new processes of horizontal decision making and collaborative modes of governing between public, private, voluntary and community actors (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003). Accordingly the art of government has become that of 'steering not rowing', recast in terms of 'regulation', 'enabling', 'facilitation' or indeed 'network management' and 'metagovernance'. Policymaking, it is alleged, is best characterised as the processes of 'negotiated social governance' (Hirst 2000), 'societal governance' (Kooiman 2000), 'interactive governance' (Edelenbos 2005; Torfing et al. 2012), 'network governance' (Marcussen and Torfing 2007) or 'new public governance' (Osbourne 2010). In fact, Klijn (2008a) ultimately claims that 'governance is more or less the new consensus' (p. 11), marking the 'transition … from a situation where public actors handle problems mostly through vertical steering … to a situation of horizontal steering, where policy outcomes are, sometimes perforce, realised in cooperation with a large variety of public, private and semi-private organisations' (pp. 9–10).

As we have suggested, orthodoxies are by definition broad caricatures or 'ways of seeing'. Indeed, the very popularity of 'governance' owes much to its ambiguity (Peters 2011, 63). Too often it has come to operate as a 'nebulous catch-all' (Dean 2007, 1) or 'useful substitute and analogue' (Rose 1999, 16) for the bewildering and often contradictory range of strategies and tactics deployed in regulating,

administering and managing organisations, localities, nation states and international organisations (Rose 1999, 15–16; see also Hirst, 2000, 14–19). Microeconomic narratives have for example interwoven explanations of governance into neoliberal accounts of public sector reform, in which allegedly irresistible pressures for change – be it globalisation, escalating competition between states or 'global cities' (Sassen 2001), the growing mobility of capital and finance, mounting critiques of bureaucratic inefficiencies, and, lately, the need to reduce mounting budget deficits – compel states to subject their public sector to principles of market rationality (Bevir 2003, 201). Typically in such accounts, governance, Bevir (2003) suggests, becomes associated with the efficiencies of marketisation, competition, contracting out and budgetary rationalisation as judgements of 'good' or 'bad' governance rest heavily on the adoption of new public management strategies which emulate the alleged rationality and efficiency of corporate management (Rose 1999, 16). Framed as such, governance becomes the expression of a neoliberal political rationality which extends market-inspired forms of political-economic governance into social relations (Larner 2000).

In fact, in his critical assessment of the concept of governance, Offe asks whether governance is best understood as an empty signifier, suggesting that its 'unresolved polysemy' permits 'its protagonists to connect it to all kinds of positive adjectives and to embed it in a harmonizing rhetoric' (2009, 557). Echoing such concerns, we do not seek therefore to impose any rigid uniformity or consistency on what we have characterised as a governance orthodoxy. Governance narratives draw on overlapping and distinct traditions, often conflating work on policy networks, inter-organisational service delivery and implementation, and network management (Klijn and Koppenjan 2012, 588–89).[1] They have evolved over time, opening up avenues for analytically distinguishing ever more refined variants and 'generations' of approaches to governance (Sørensen and Torfing 2007). Indeed, in the field of network governance, Lewis argues that despite the development of more or less 'coherent definitions' in recent critical assessments of the field, there 'remains less agreement on whether it is merely useful as a metaphor, a method, an analytical tool, or a theory' (Lewis 2011, 1221).

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[1] For a discussion of the critical distinctions between the literature on policy networks and governance networks, see Blanco, Lowndes and Pratchett (2011).

However, while we recognise that many different perspectives on the practices of governance exist, it is difficult to deny the 'broad consensus' which surrounds the alleged benefits of governance as a new process or mode of governing across advanced liberal democratic societies, one which involves complex processes of co-operative horizontal decision making and engages large numbers of interactive stakeholders in bottom-up participative networks (Brugnoli and Colombo 2012, ix; Klijn 2008b). New ethical politics and value pluralism, a general discontent among citizens with the institutions of representative democracy, the increasing prevalence of 'wicked issues' facing policymakers, and the fragmentation and weakened control of state institutions (in part a result of the devolution of control to local and societal actors) have, it is widely accepted, all conspired to produce new demands, new spaces of politics and new challenges for government. The privileged 'solution' to such challenges lies in the recognition by government of its interdependency with other actors, not least its reliance on the mobilisation of resources at the disposal of others (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003). Networks and collaborative decision making, it thus follows, promise a practice of social and political co-ordination that is both more participatory and inclusive of multiple stakeholders, and more co-operative and negotiated than hierarchical or market alternatives (Jessop 2003, 101; Koppenjan and Klijn 2004, 9). Indeed, the patterns of mutual dependency that incite collaboration mean that policymaking becomes 'an issue of interaction where the actors with a stake in the problem must manage to co-ordinate their perceptions, activities and institutional arrangements' (Koppenjan and Klijn 2004, 9).

Such normative and managerial appeals increasingly exercise a particular hold on the minds and practices of policymakers, with public managers interpreting networks not only as a tool to advance their short-term policy goals but also often as a means to address the limits of representative democracy (Jeffares and Skelcher 2011). Take for example the rhetoric of a 2005 policy report from a large municipal agency in the Dutch city of The Hague, representative of countless such policy statements from local and national administrations in Western Europe. The report, which announces the introduction of 'area-based governance' across the city, reproduces the underlying narrative of the shift to governance, recognising the constraints on hierarchical government in its assertions that 'as the acceptance of government as

self-evident authority declines … government increasingly runs into the limits of what it can or cannot regulate and influence'. Indeed, the authors of the report invoke a number of 'steering principles which [they] also want to employ with all relevant actors in the city and the region' (Gemeente Den Haag 2005, 5).[2] In so doing, they articulate mechanisms of network governance, invoking 'steering principles' such as 'giving space to citizens and organisations', 'effective partnerships' and 'deconcentration and integrality'. What is fascinating about this report is that it is not about substantive problems, such as housing, education or crime, but about the introduction of a new mode of governing to allegedly better tackle such substantive issues. As such, it reproduces the overriding normative appeal of governance that suggests that disputes and bargaining over resource allocation will be mediated best in networks by recognising the ties of mutual dependency that unite stakeholders and that underpin an effective politics of exchange (Koppenjan and Klijn 2004).

This particular governance orthodoxy thus offers both analytical and normative anchors in its claims that policy is made and ultimately should be made within self-organising networks of interdependent policy actors 'based on continuing dialogue and resource-sharing to develop mutually beneficial joint projects and to manage the contradictions and dilemmas inevitably involved in such situations' (Jessop 2003, 101). Yet, with the boundaries between state and civil society said to be increasingly blurred, more dystopic versions of networked governance raise the spectre of a 'hollowed out' state (Rhodes 1994; Stoker 2011). This dispersion of government acts as a bridge to microeconomic narratives of governance. The microeconomic or neoliberal doctrine, as we suggest earlier in this chapter, implies the delegating of a wide array of governing tasks to a host of societal actors, although it continues to proffer centrally orchestrated prescription and advice to guide the conduct of individual citizens (Rose and Miller 1992; Dean 1999). Similarly, network governance privileges the co-ordination of collective activities through the interactions of more or less self-governing groups of public and private actors (Rhodes 1996, 2000; Peters and Pierre 2000; Sørensen and Torfing 2009).

In fact, the explanatory capacity and normative connotations of orthodox governance accounts of policy-making are increasingly

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[2] The report is titled, characteristically, 'People Make the City'.

contested (Hysing 2009). Such contestations bring out the inherent
tension between the logic of control and the logic of collaboration
which resides in the two faces of governance. One significant line of
critique charges the governance literature (of the collaborative stripe)
with wrongly directing our attention away from the continued role of
the state and government (Dean 2007, 1), a charge that also emanates
from those governance scholars who seek to maintain state-centric
interpretations of network management (Peters and Pierre 2000). The
hierarchical state, it is argued, has not disappeared but has merely
changed tactics (Marsh et al. 2003; Bell and Hindmoor 2009). Instead
of centralised steering through vast, sectorally organised state bureau-
cracies, it now regulates indirectly through audit regimes, partner-
ships and networks, and market mechanisms (Moran 2003; Fuller
and Geddes 2008; Griggs and Sullivan 2012). For example, Davies
characterises partnership working in the United Kingdom as a mode
of government through hierarchies of collaboration. Indeed, he argues
that the ideology of network governance represents a key element of
neoliberalism, while drawing attention to the continued presence of a
hierarchical and coercive state (Davies 2002, 2007, 2011). Similarly,
Lowndes and Sullivan (2004) label community participation and
stakeholder dialogue as the 'new corporatism', fuelling concerns that
networks and practices of participation are ridden with power imbal-
ances (Griggs and Howarth 2007). Governance thus masks in these
perspectives new technologies, practices and rules of governmentality,
including centrally orchestrated prescription and advice, active citizen-
ship, and co-production which guide the conduct of individual citizens
(Rose and Miller 1992; Dean 1999, 2007; Rose 1999). These latter
critiques point towards a regime of 'culture governance' which privi-
leges rule through capacities of self-government (Dean 2003, 117; see
also Bang 2003, 2004). As the critique goes, in neoliberal societies
even citizens who choose to engage in democratic participation cannot
escape being co-opted by a dominating state.

Paradoxically, as with many prevailing orthodoxies, 'governance'
is both simultaneously all-pervasive and discredited. But even those
who seek to challenge this orthodoxy too often continue to construct
their problematisations of contemporary democratic policymaking
through the well-used lens of governance. In so doing, they run the
risk, whatever their intentions, of reproducing governance-inspired a
priori assumptions about the shifting practices of government. Equally,

however, we have to be wary of simply substituting one orthodoxy
for another and, in the process, exchanging one set of constraining
assumptions for another. In this volume we argue for the pursuit of a
critical engagement with practices of government, asking 'whether the
inherited languages of description and reflection are adequate to the
task' (Tully 2008a, 19). Our critical engagement does not accept dom-
inant languages and conceptualisations of existing practices at face
value, but, drawing inspiration from the work of James Tully (2008a,
25) starts with a 'provisional language of description' that surfaces the
existing practices and problematisations of governance as a first step
towards generating alternative democratic practices and processes.
We position this volume in terms of a critical, performative approach
to politics, governance and public policy, one that takes the variety,
hybridity and dispersion of practices of governance in contemporary
society as its focus of analysis.[3]

Practices of Governance and Practices of Freedom

To develop our argument, let us take a brief aside to consider the
remarkably sophisticated, critical approach to governance advocated
by the political theorist James Tully (2008a, 2008b). His starting
point is to recognise that any critical inquiry begins with an engage-
ment with the multiple practices of governance *and* of freedom that
go beyond the traditional practices of the representative democratic
nation state, which he calls 'capital "G" Government' (2008a, 21).
Drawing on Foucault, Tully argues that as power relations are 'exer-
cised over an agent who is recognised and treated as a partner who is
free, from the perspective of the governed', practices of governance
cannot be divorced from practices of freedom. Differently put, any
exercise of governance or power – and obviously the two go hand in
hand – brings with it a diversity of potential reactions, or practices of
freedom. Relations of governance do not act on wholly 'unfree or pas-
sive bodies' and, and as such, they do not constitute subjects without
the 'mediation of their own thought and action' (2008a, 23).

   Against this background, Tully (2008a, 22–23) identifies three
characteristics of any form of government. Firstly, he focuses on the

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[3] For a discussion of the hybridity of governance practices across different
  localities, see Skelcher, Sullivan and Jeffares (2013).

language games through which governors and governed come together
as partners to coordinate activities, define problems and solutions, and
negotiate modes and practices of government. Secondly, he emphasises
the 'web of relations of power', the diverse technologies and strategies
through which individuals and groups directly or indirectly govern the
conduct of others – 'actions that aim to structure the field of the pos-
sible actions of others'. Finally, he points to the 'practical identity' of a
form of government which becomes embedded over time as governors
and the governed acquire a 'habitual way of thinking and acting within
the assignment relations and languages of reciprocal recognition'.[4]

However, as we argued earlier in this section, Tully does not posit
that being 'subject' to one particular form of government dictates 'the
self-consciousness and self-formation of the governed down to every
detail' (2008a, 23). Rather, he identifies three general cases of prac-
tices of freedom that accompany practices of governance. Individuals
and groups can co-operate and follow the 'rules' of existing practices,
although through the reproduction of existing practices they will
modify those very practices. The work of local stakeholders in The
Hague to give shape to area-based policymaking in their neighbour-
hoods is an example of this first practice of freedom (Duiveman et al.
2010). However, the governed might equally contest the existing rules
of dominant practices, but do so within existing language games and
institutional channels and procedures. The activities of youth repre-
sentatives in the young people's forums analysed in the chapter by
O'Toole and Gale in this volume are an example of this second prac-
tice of freedom. Finally, when such institutional strategies are either
not open to the governed or fail, individuals and groups can 'exit' such
relations of domination or contest them through a strategy of struggle
and transformation. Bottom-up initiatives of citizens in disadvantaged
neighbourhoods who take charge to improve long-festering problems
in their immediate environment are an example of this third practice
of freedom (Wagenaar and Specht 2010; Specht 2012).

This 'provisional language of description' brings to the surface the
existing orthodoxies within which the art of government is articulated,
enabling us to view such frames as 'one historically specific ensemble
of forms of government and practices of freedom among many, rather

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[4] So far, Tully's argument closely follows the governmentality literature (Rose and
Miler 1992; Dean 1999).

than as the comprehensive and quasi-transcendental framework' (Tully 2008a, 25). Indeed, it is armed with such a provisional language that we question and seek to explore understandings of what we call *decentred governance*. This term does not just indicate, as we earlier described, that policymaking under the influence of processes of marketisation and decentralisation is in many societal sectors distributed over a wide range of institutional actors, with state institutions no longer holding a monopoly on decision making or implementing power. Instead, it captures how the process and outcomes of collective problem solving in contemporary liberal societies are the result of the involvement of many actors, across traditional boundaries of state and civil society, who, from the informal, everyday, experiential space they occupy in society, act upon the *meaning* they ascribe to particular problems and their proposed solutions (Wagenaar 2011, 75–80). Decentredness thus points towards a larger role for contingency in understanding governance, the foregrounding of struggle and resistance (Norval 2009a), and, most importantly, a redrawing of the very category of governance as also including a wider range of expressions, such as citizen initiatives and social movements, and a wider range of issues as being part of the 'agenda'. 'The important thing', as Bevir puts it, 'is that we begin to think of governance as the contingent product of political struggles embodying competing sets of beliefs' – and practices, as we will argue (Bevir 2003, 208; Wagenaar 2012).

Understanding Decentred Governance

Accepting the notion of decentredness has a number of important implications for our understanding of contemporary governance and democracy. Firstly, and following Tully, actors introduce a wide range of beliefs, understandings, allegiances, interests, routines and action preferences into the spaces in which collective problem solving takes place. Governing is thus deeply pluralistic (Wagenaar 2011, ch. 10). This, as Gerry Stoker argues, makes both the practices of governance and our understanding of them unabashedly political. 'Politics matters', he says, 'because there are conflicts and differences of perspective in society about what to do, what resources to collect for public use and how those resources should be spent'. One cannot escape politics simply because all judgement in public affairs is inevitably partial and limited (Stoker 2006, 5). However, the notion of 'politics' has

itself different meanings. Broadly speaking we distinguish between a conventional and a radical meaning of politics. As it is more conventionally understood, politics is about settling inevitable conflicts of interest in the public domain, similar to Stoker's definition above. A radical notion of politics, however, sees politics as *constitutive* of the issues, interests and identities of its protagonists (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Connolly 1991; Wenman 2003). Politics in this sense is not the domain of specialists or restricted to moments when conflict is inevitable. Rather, the antagonisms and power differentials which define political identity are everywhere. Politics is thus potentially ubiquitous, often operating far removed from 'official' policymaking institutions.

Secondly, a theory of decentred governance emphasises its practical, situated nature. While talk and exchange of arguments are a key part of it, the whirl of organisational routines, practical judgements, subjective voices, personal histories and improvisational practices are equally important. For the countless administrators, elected officials, street-level bureaucrats, professionals, activists and ordinary citizens who are involved in struggling with collective problems, governance is, above all about 'intervening' in practice. We have barely begun to fathom what an interventionist approach to politics, governance and public policy might look like. Although Lasswell, in his original formulation, envisioned a problem-oriented policy analysis, from the very start it has defined itself in a thoroughly modernist vein (Bevir 2010) as a science of representations in the service of the reigning governing elite, and, despite its emancipatory rhetoric, embracing the economic, managerial doctrine of the times. Epistemology resonates with power here (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003, 17). For an actionable version of policy analysis we need to look elsewhere, for instance, towards dialogical and poststructuralist approaches to policy analysis and public policy mediation (Glynos and Howarth 2007; Griggs and Howarth 2012, 2013; Howarth and Griggs 2012; Wagenaar 2008; 2011, chap. 8), or to the ontological politics of material semiotics (Law 2007; Latour 2005). Leibovitz's chapter on the possibilities and contradictions of Arab activism in urban development in Haifa and Wagenaar's chapter on the citizens of Dortmund's efforts in addressing the prostitution problem in their neighbourhood, explore the articulation of political claims and conceptions of citizenship by neighbourhood groups at the local level.