

EUROPEAN MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE: CONTRASTING IMAGES IN NATIONAL RESEARCH

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Introduction

This very interesting and comprehensive book should be found at the bookshelves of the scholars dealing with governance or European politics, or at least those of their assistants, students, think-tank leaders, and all others who are somehow connected with European governance.

The book offers a wide and fairly deep view at governance research in Europe. The authors of individual chapters lead us through the development of interests in the area of European governance over the last ten years from the perspective of concrete European countries. Actually, the content of this book is based upon the results of the project CONNEX (“Connecting Excellence on European Governance”) funded by the EU under the 6th Framework Programme. The project started in July 2004 and finished in June 2008.

Ones of the main outputs of the CONNEX are two databases (GOVDATA and GOVLIT). Records in these databases represent the main information resource for the individual chapters describing governance research situation in different parts of Europe. The GOVDATA database contains data about recent and ongoing academic research projects in EU member states and Norway, Switzerland, Russia, and former Yugoslavia. GOVLIT complements GOVDATA with

a bibliographic resource for research on EU governance. More about the GOVDATA and GOVLIT databases can be found in detailed notes (part of each chapter). It is good to know that the GOVLIT database is connected with a lot of other databases (SSCI, IBSS, Google Scholar, British Library). I hope that both of these systems will be functional even after 2010 (the authors only guarantee to run the databases until this year), because it is a very helpful resource for discovering what other scholars already published concerning that topic. The databases are currently available at the following internet addresses: www.connex-network.org/govdata, www.connex-network.org/govlit.

I view the above-mentioned fundament as the strongest and the weakest point of the book at the same time. The book reveals that the databases were filled by project partners from individual countries. 42 partner institutions from about 20 countries were members of the consortium. The ways to identify appropriate records in the individual countries were not the same because each country has its own system of publishing research results. On one hand, it appears very easy to find almost all PhD theses in some countries (Spain, Poland) thanks to central register of those theses, while on the other hand, almost 50 % of the research results are not published in countries like Austria. Due to these differences it is very difficult to compare the development of research in the individual countries only based on the number of records collected by individual members of consortium, which the authors of some chapters do. This database may be very helpful for all scholars in their research but a very problematic dataset for general judgments.

In spite of this small inaccuracy, there is no doubt that the description of situation in individual regions is valid and authentic. Thus, what interesting can we learn from this book?

Part I

At the very beginning of the book, European Commission official Jérôme Vignon (director of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities) gives a European overview of the topic of governance. His expectation goes along with official policies of the EU as formed in concrete directives of the EC:

- importance of national communication filters,
- relevance of the role of national political parties and discourses, and
- strengthening the accountability of the participatory mechanisms themselves.

After that we can find how Beate Kohler-Koch and Fabrice Larat see the EU governance research. The discussion whether governance is a universal ap-

proach is interesting. In a very problematic statement, they argue that the impact of scholars from Romance and Slavic language speaking countries on the conceptual debate may not be the same or bigger than the impact of traditional Anglo-American thinking. Certainly there are some language barriers and some research capacity gaps, but as we can see from the history and even from the present time, in spite of the above-mentioned handicaps, there have been persons in those regions who shaping European and even global thinking¹. I find it very dangerous to see some regions as better/more important than others (e.g., in knowledge and understanding). Such thinking builds walls in people's minds and hampers the creativeness of independent persons and teams throughout Europe.

Different characteristics of EU governance, its legitimacy, concepts, and accountability are described in the following chapter. This may be very helpful to students of public policy and others interested in this topic. The research is not unified according to authors, but rather differentiated by individual country/research traditions/priorities. The focus of this research also changes over time and with individual countries' development. The form of sharing these points is formal descriptive, which is adequate for this kind of book. But another more attractive view is also possible. E.g., the CESES² uses a very attractive graphics (charts, tables)³ for describing different levels of strategic governance in its publications.

The concept of multi-level-governance (MLG) was developed by Marks in 1993 and 1996. He defined it as a *"system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers"*. It means decisions are taken at different national and *"supranational"* levels, rather than by one monopolized authority. Hooghe and Marks in 2001 went farther and saw multi-level governance as dynamic networks involving both public authorities and private actors operating at different territorial levels: local, regional, national, supranational. The interdependence of these actors is significant for MLG.

Other research smoothly moved to the topic of democratic representation and accountability of EU governance, one that we can see in a lot of studies of different scholars in 2006–2009. Another actual point is effects of EU governance on member state systems due to EU enlargement and European integration.

1 E.g., John Hus (rector of Charles University in 1409–1410), Comenius (founder of the modern education system), or Maria Curie-Skłodowska (holder of two Nobel prizes, originally from Poland).

2 Center for Social and Economic Strategies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic.

3 See e.g., Potůček, M. et al. 2005. *Jak jsme na tom. A co dál? Strategický audit České republiky* [How Are We Standing and What Next? A Strategic Audit of the Czech Republic]. Prague: SLON.

We can read about historic concepts of the term "governance" in the second chapter, "Travelling Concepts: EU Governance in the Social Sciences Literature". This chapter is a good example of content analysis.

It is significant that the International Bibliography for the Social Sciences (IBSS)—the largest on-line social-scientific bibliographic collection in the world—shows 76 uses of the word "governance" in book or journal titles during 1958–1988 and 6,498 uses during the years 1990–2007. An increase of interest in the governance topic over the last decades is evident. A lot of tables and charts showing the changing importance of related keywords are presented at this chapter, which may be interesting for those who need to go deeper in this field.

Part II

The second part of the book is already focused on individual European countries and regions. Project members from these countries prepared these chapters, and therefore, the views go deeply into the background of the particular countries.

One may notice that the biggest number of scholars and publications on the topic of "EU governance" exist in Great Britain and Ireland. It is because of these countries' traditions and well-established institutions. Scholars in this region mostly focus on EU's legitimacy, democratic accountability, and the related concept of citizenship. The work of the European Parliament and the influence of private sector on EU policies are also at the forefront of scholarly interest in these countries.

After Great Britain and Ireland, we move to Germany, the country which currently has along with Great Britain the biggest influence on the problem presented. There are a lot of well-established universities and research centres in Germany with dozens of years of research experience. At the beginning, law was the leading discipline in European studies in this country. Broader issues were adopted during the 90s such as the future of the EU, EU enlargement, polity, and governance. We see one weak point of German research implementation in the decentralized approach of the Priority Programmes and the fact that projects are located at the respective departments of different universities, which makes multi-disciplinary cooperation insufficient. Nevertheless, some signs of interesting discourse among lawyers and public policy scholars are seen. Governance needs a government and since there is no regular government in the EU, the EU governance research is out of sense, according to lawyers. Otherwise a lot of noticeable results about legal opinions concerning the

EU were published in Germany, but mostly in German language law journals, and therefore, they are not as visible as those of some other nations. Another interesting discourse appeared among problem and theory oriented researchers. German research has come up with also some interested paradoxes. The capacity of national governments to solve the problems has been strengthened in the last years and, at the same time, the autonomy at their decision-making has been restricted.

An interesting contrast is shown in chapters on The Netherlands and Norway. The Netherlands is one of the founders of the EU, while Norway is not an EU member to this date. But strong research in the field of EU governance exists in both of these countries. There is developed influential institutional background in The Netherlands which catalyze the amount of research in this country.

Even if the inhabitants of Norway said no to EU membership in two referenda, the number of research theses on EU governance has been growing since the 1990s. One quarter of doctoral degrees are awarded to candidates who address their work to European integration and governance. The Norwegian research is strongly influenced by the legacy of Stein Rokkan and his work about the emergence of the nation state system in Europe. A strong background in organizational and institutional theory is seen in most Norwegian studies on EU governance as well.

The book offers much more information about institutional systems and research specifics in individual countries. There is no space in this review to mention all of them. The complementarity of different countries in one chapter is not always predictable, but it is rather logical and justifiable. Different small countries are put together in the next chapter: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Switzerland. We can see the old concept of the authors' thinking. Even after 20 years of democracy in the "post-communist" countries, during which a lot of gaps were already removed, the authors separate "the West" from "the East". Therefore, another group of small countries like the Czech Republic and Hungary has its own chapter.

Two groups of senior researchers in the "post-communist" countries are recognized by the author of the chapter. One group consists of former Marxists who changed their focus to EU issues and operate in free democratic institutions. The second group is comprised of those who do not have a Marxist background but have been isolated from Western intellectual life for decades. It is good the authors of this chapter did not finish by this and also explained that a lot of new young researchers emerged throughout the region during the last 20 years. Most of them have longer or shorter experience in study abroad

and bring new views, new ideas, and new concepts freely. They can contribute even to the topic of multi-level governance⁴.

I am not sure if the studies on the theme of EU governance in Central and Eastern Europe are really influenced by available grants more than in other countries, as the authors mentioned. As we could read in the previous chapters of the book, a lot of money is routed for this kind of research in Germany, Great Britain, etc. Even special institutions for carrying out research in this field are established in some countries. What are researchers from some other countries doing wrong by using the available possibilities?

One chapter is dedicated to southern countries, despite many differences among them and the lack of a single main common research stream on the issue of EU governance. But certainly we can find historical, social, and cultural similarities. Even though counting France among the southern countries is very unusual. As the authors of this chapter write, EU governance research in these countries is not as developed as in the countries mentioned in the previous chapters. But does a lower number of records in the GOVDATA database mean the research is less developed? The impact of these countries on EU governance in the area of constitutional law, state theory, and political philosophy is beyond doubt.

The last chapter of this part of the book is dedicated to the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, Italy. Most of the best researchers from all Europe have spent some time in this international research institution. Therefore, I find it may play an important role in building connections between different research networks. It may help break the isolation of individual research teams, which is one of the research problems we can see in Europe these days.

Part III

The last part of the book outlines the methodology applied in the CONNEX project and makes sense of all this research. I can only repeat the doubt whether the method used for collecting data into the GOVDATA database can really produce representative results. But the authors of the book have awareness of this weak point and declare openly the data collected and numbers presented do not cover all research work in Europe. The authors inform us that research studies are mostly isolated, focused on national priorities. Few re-

4 E.g., Fiala, P. And Strmiska, M. (eds.) 2005. *Víceúrovňové vládnutí: teorie, přístupy, metody* [Multi-level governance: Theories, approaches, methods]. Brno: Institute for Comparative Political Research & Democracy and Culture Studies Centre.

searchers meet regularly at international conferences. No broad knowledge exchange is organized. Most projects also do not make their results available online when they are finished. It is then very difficult to find information about concrete project results. The results are mostly published in final reports, which are not easily available. This leads us to thinking about the efficiency of resources used for these studies.

500 research projects on the topic of EU governance ran simultaneously in Europe during the years 2000–2002. The question is how many of these projects were duplicated? And how many other duplicate research projects (not found by CONNEX) ran during this time? How much money and human resources were wasted because of insufficient sharing of project results? The last chapter gives an answer to questions: How are the results of all these studies used practically? Do politicians care about this relevant information? This chapter describes four impediments in the practical use of research results: a conceptual morass, inconclusive evidence, ousting the ghost of “the state”, and a tyranny of dichotomies. Each of these impediments is shortly described.

Conclusion

If we understand the ambition of the book to be an overview of governance research in the individual European countries, rather than to be a textbook on EU governance, we can be very satisfied with the authors' achievement. I have not read any other book which gives such a wide multinational overview of this topic in a single publication.

Obviously, even though hundreds of different research studies on the topic of EU governance already took place, some areas are not yet fully described. It looks like democracy is the topic currently on the table: *“The Union's system of governance does not live up to the democratic normative standards. ... Future studies have to ask what is the relevance of formally organised institutions of governance compared to informal networks.”* (page 198)