COMPLEX GOVERNANCE NETWORKS

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Why “Complex Governance Networks”? 

• This is the conceptual basis of the new journal my colleagues and I have launched:

Aim:
To contribute to the philosophical, theoretical, methodological, and empirical developments in complexity, governance, and network studies in public administration, public policy, politics, and non-governmental organizations.

Editorial Board:
Scholars form the US and Europe.

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ASPA SCNS
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Journal Website:
http://www.cgnj.info/
Three Conceptual Roots of “Complex Governance Networks”

- Governance studies
- Network studies/analyses
- Complexity theory
Governance Studies

Key observations:

- Societies have become **multi-centered** (Castells, 1996; Jessop, 1990).

- The **role of governments** in policy processes has **diminished**, or **changed** (Kettl, 2002; Koliba, Meek, & Zia, 2010; Rhodes, 1997; Salamon, 2002; Torfing, Peters, Pierre & Sørensen, 2012).
Governance Studies

Key observations (cont.):

– In today’s world no governmental or private actor has the capacity to solve the increasingly complex and dynamic problems of societies (Kooiman, 1993).

– The fragmentation of political and administrative authority creates institutional collective action dilemmas (Feiock, 2013).

– This fragmentation makes governance inherently complex (Feiock & Scholz, 2010).
Governance Studies

The concept of governance is important and insightful, but it has not been defined specifically.

The World Bank popularized the concept, but defined it loosely:

Governance is the process “by which authority is conferred on rulers, by which they make the rules, and by which those rules are enforced and modified” (World Bank, undated).
Governance Studies

There are **multiple** and **overlapping definitions** of **governance** in different **contexts** (Provan & Kenis, 2007):

**Private corporations**: Governance is about the **roles of boards of directors** in representing and protecting the interests of shareholders of corporations.

**Nonprofit organizations**: It is about the **roles of board of trustees** in protecting the rights of community members or politically important constituencies.

**Public management**: Governance refers to the **funding and oversight roles of government agencies** over organizations that have been contracted to provide public services.
In my view, as well as many others’:

**Governance** refers to the complex processes of **public policy making** and **public service delivery**.

Despite the lack of clarity in its conceptualization, governance is a valuable concept.

The concepts connotes that there are **multiple actors** in policymaking and public service delivery processes.

The **power relations among actors, their resources, and worldviews** should be studied.
Governance Studies

Governance studies have some relations with the established theories in political economy and policy studies:


- Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993)
Network Studies/Analyses

The roots:

**Sociometric** studies of Moreno and others in the 1930s

Today:

**Social network analyses** (SNA):

- An increasingly sophisticated and popular tool
- Some of the recent advances:

Network Studies/Analyses

A particularly important conceptualization:

**Governance networks**

Governance networks “challenged the conventional wisdom that the market is the only efficient system of nonhierarchical coordination” (Provan & Kenis, 2007).

Key observations about governance networks:

- They are **self-organizing** (no sovereign authority).
- Network **members** are **interdependent**.
- They are **dynamic**.
Complexity Theory

In both governance and network studies, there is a common theme/concept:

**Complexity**

Then, *what is complexity?*

Does **understanding complexity in public policymaking** and **public service delivery** matter?
Does Understanding Complexity Matter?


Title of the second chapter of the book:

“Why We Have Not Had More TMI’s— but Will Soon”

- Three Mile Island (1979)
- Chernobyl (1986)
- Fukushima Daiichi (2011)
“Normal Accidents”

Charles Perrow’s argument:

*Accidents* with some *high-risk technologies*, like *nuclear power plants*, are *inevitable*.

They are “*normal accidents*.”

Why are these accidents inevitable (“normal”)?
Because these are *complex systems*.

Perrow: The President’s “Kemeny Commission” on the TMI accident tried to *single out who was responsible* and failed.
Deep Water Horizon: A More Recent Example

In April – May 2010 a massive oil leak occurred in the Gulf of Mexico.

Two investigative reports were issued on this accident:

• BP’s report
• The report by the President’s commission
BP’s Report (September 2010)
An Example of Simplification

The main **conclusion** of the report:

“The accident resulted from a **series of technical problems.**”

(i.e., it was a **simple, linear problem**)

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The accident on April 20, 2010, involved a well integrity failure, followed by a loss of hydrostatic control of the well. This was followed by a failure to control the flow from the well with the BOP equipment, which allowed the release and subsequent ignition of hydrocarbons. Ultimately, the BOP emergency functions failed to seal the well after the initial explosions.
Report by the President’s Commission:
An Example of Understanding Complexity

“National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling”

The main **conclusion** of the report:

The **accident was not the result of a single failure.**

“**Complex Systems Almost Always Fail in Complex Ways.**”
Complexity Theory

• Complexity theorist have made advances in understanding complex systems in recent decades.

For example, what is complexity?

• It is not a residual category!

• Complexity can be conceptualized and understood in terms of
  - Large numbers
  - Multiple types of relationships among elements
  - Nonlinearity
Complexity Theory

The theory poses **conceptual challenges to our traditional ways of thinking:**

- It challenges some of the traditional epistemological and methodological assumptions in science.
  - Post-Newtonian
  - Postpositivistic (?)
  - Suggests **phenomenology (?)**

(Morçöl, 2002)


» Morçöl, G. (2001). *What is complexity science: Postmodernist or postpositivist?* *Emergence*

Complexity Theory

The implications of complexity theory should be refined and applied in areas of study.

In my recent book (Morçöl, 2012), I demonstrated:

• How complexity theory concepts and methods can be applied in policy studies

Key concepts:
Complexity
Nonlinearity
Self-organization
Emergence
Co-evolution

Primary Methods:
Social network analyses
Agent-based simulations
Qualitative case studies
Complexity Theory

A problem in complexity theory applications:

How to conceptualize governance/policy/public management systems/networks?

Two emerging theoretical frameworks in the literature:

1. The micro–macro conceptualization
   - My 2012 book and more recent articles and presentations

2. The socio-ecological systems conceptualization
   - Perrow’s book; works of Zia, Koliba, & Kauffman (U. Vermont); works of Gerrits (Erasmus U.)
Complexity Theory

Goals for future studies:

• To refine the micro-macro conceptualization/framework
  – Possibly synthesize the two frameworks

• Demonstrate the applicability of the micro–macro framework

• The implications of the complexity of governance networks
Complexity of Metropolitan/Urban Governance

An element of metropolitan complex governance networks:

**Business improvement districts (BIDs)**

They are micro local governmental entities that illustrate the complexity of urban/metropolitan governance networks.

A sample of studies on BIDs:


Democratic Governance

An area of concern:

*implications of complex governance networks for democracy.*

Governance may be inevitable, but *democratic governance should be constructed* (Torfing, Peters, Pierre & Sørensen, 2012).
Democratic Governance

There are numerous *challenges for democratic governance* in the US, other Western countries, and the rest of the world.

In a recent book I co-edited, the authors address some of these issues.


References


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