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## Governance puzzles

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## Governance Puzzles

John Clarke

**Chapter for Leslie Budd and Lisa Harris: *eGovernance: Managing or Governing?*  
Routledge.**

This chapter focuses primarily on puzzles about changing forms and practices of governance and then addresses the ways in which issues of e-governance are implicated in these puzzles. Governance has emerged as a key concern of studies of changing relations between state and society or government and people in the last two decades (see, *inter alia*, Cooper, 1998; Kooiman, 1993; Newman, 2001 and 2005; Pierre, 2000; Rhodes, 1997). Despite – or possibly even because of – this growing attention, it remains a somewhat blurred and elusive term, bearing a range of different meanings and interpretations, and carrying the imprint of different theoretical perspectives. Nevertheless, most positions seem to treat governance as a defining feature of the modern/contemporary world – for example, expressed in the claim that we have moved ‘from government to governance’ (Rhodes, 1997). For others, however, governance refers to a still emergent set of institutional forms, arrangements and practices involved in the coordination of the public realm and its unsettled and uncertain relations with other domains – the private, the domestic and the transnational (Newman, 2005). An alternative view of governance challenges the ‘grand narrative’ of the shift from government to governance and addresses new governance processes as disorganised and disorganising (Bode, 2006; Clarke, 2006).

In this chapter, I draw on a diverse field of work about governance that ranges from studies of British public service reform to the processes and politics of governing a new social, political and economic space – South Eastern Europe. One end of this range – British public service reform – appears as a ‘classic case’ of governance studies: the move away from direct government to first ‘markets’, and then ‘networks’ as modes of governing the public realm (Rhodes, 1997). While it might be marked by new dimensions of ‘multi-level governance’ (with levels ranging from the supra-national agencies such as the European Union and the World Trade Organization to sub-national levels of regional and local governance), it is still framed by a spatial conception of a ‘mature democracy’, adapting to new governing dynamics. In the process, Britain represents a leading example of new models that may be exported to others (from the New Public Management to Public Private Partnerships).

In contrast, the other end of this range – the governance of an emergent regional space – looks more unsettled. There are problems of defining, much less governing, South Eastern Europe (Syrri and Stubbs, 2005). Political and institutional arrangements have been profoundly unsettled, and national spaces and their institutionalizations and interrelationships are still in process of being worked out. Here, governance and the

subjects and objects of governing are in process of simultaneous and mutual invention or constitution (Lendvai and Stubbs, 2006). However, I will suggest that studies of governance might learn more from such emergent processes than from a focus of 'leading examples'. Indeed, the processes of governance emerging in 'marginal' locations might illuminate what is going on in British governance arrangements. This orientation focuses my attention on 'governance puzzles' – the peculiar and unpredictable dynamics associated with emergent governance arrangements.<sup>1</sup>

The chapter explores two particular 'puzzles': the multi-ness of governance; and the problem of making governance popular. Both of these puzzles are linked to issues about the emergent dynamics of governance and each of them is tied to the rise of e-governance in distinctive ways.

### **The Multi-ness of Governance.**

In political science, it has become commonplace to refer to the rise of 'multi-level governance', indicating the multiplicity of levels, scales, or tiers of governance bodies or processes that may be nested together (e.g., Bache and Flinders, 2004). Such levels or tiers involve differentiated but overlapping (and possibly even integrated) authority over, and claims on, particular governance issues and governable places. Multi-level governance is associated with what Rhodes (1997) called the 'hollowing out of the state' as nation states are subjected to the authority of superordinate tiers and to processes of devolution or decentralization to sub-national levels. Processes of both globalization and Europeanization have proved fertile terrain for the investigation and elaboration of such concepts (see, *inter alia*, Beyeler, 2003; Ferrera, 2005). There are problems about the concept of level, and about the assumption that it has a corresponding spatial character (see, for example, Allen, 2003). So we are invited to think of levels nested within increasingly larger spaces (from the neighbourhood to the global level). Contemporary approaches in geography suggest that space is not ordered in such tidy and orderly formations (Massey, 2004). We might want to think about the ways in which the 'multi-ness' of governance brings new spaces into being, or makes new framings of space visible. We may see this in governance projects that aim to bring new regions such as 'South East Europe' into being; that construct neighbourhoods as a site of governing or new governance arrangements for primary health care that claim to address and develop the 'local health economy' (Aldred, 2007; Cochrane, 2006; Lendvai and Stubbs, 2006). In the last case, the 'local' is not a fixed or given category: indeed, the localness of different public services and their governance arrangements may vary

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter could not have been written without the work of, and conversations with, Rachel Aldred, Stephen Ball, Lavinia Bifulco, Vando Borghi, Allan Cochrane, Wendy Larner, Noémi Lendvai, Morag McDermont, Nick Mahony, Jeff Maskovsky, Janet Newman, Paul Stubbs and Janine Wedel. I am grateful to them all, but they are not responsible for what has emerged.

substantially, while the 'health economy' has to be constructed and developed, rather than discovered. Similarly, South East Europe has to be imagined, mapped, and brought into being – made into a reality – by the very governance arrangements that name themselves as governing the area, just as 'Europe' has to be defined and reconstructed in the process of its governance through the EU (Walters, 2004). Put simply, the object of governance is constructed in the process of governance – whether this object is a space, a group or an institution. And through governance arrangements, claims are established about who has the authority to govern, the bases of such authority, and the means by which it may be exercised.

This more dynamic understanding of the interrelationship between governance processes and spatial formations re-opens the concept of levels (Stubbs, 2002). Where multi-level governance treats the organisation of scale and space as vertical, we can think about governance relationships as multiple, multi-dimensional and overlaid in complicated figures. Some of those relationships are hierarchical and vertical, involving claims about forms of sovereignty and authority, and structured around principles of decentralization and devolution. But some are horizontal, such as networks within and across national borders. For example, Hansen and Salskov-Iversen use the idea of 'globalizing webs' to analyse the transnational articulation of e-government, arguing that they 'can be seen as one organizational instantiation of how social processes are increasingly unhindered by territorial and jurisdictional barriers and enhance the spread of trans-border practices in economic, political and social domains' (Hansen and Salskov-Iversen, 2005: 230). Other governance relationships may work vertically, but leap over intervening levels (connecting individuals or localities to supra-national agencies) or mix up levels (local partnerships with transnational corporations as one partner). In this way, a spatial perspective alerts us to the ways in which ideas, agents and practices flow in multiple directions.

In this context I am interested in taking the 'multi' of multi-level governance as a pointer to the many 'multi-s' that might be at stake in these new arrangements of governing. For example, governance arrangements that are multi-level are also often multi-national, multi-agency, and multi-ethnic or multi-cultural. I think these different 'multi-s' and their intersections form one central governance puzzle: how to analyse governance arrangements that are both multiple and mobile.

Governance processes are increasingly engaged by the **multi-national** – in terms of dealing with multiple and overlapping national sovereignties, with cross-border spaces, and with transnational processes taking place both between and within particular national spaces (flows of objects, money and people for example). The increasing significance of such transnational processes, relations and organisations has given many aspects of governance a distinctively multi-national character. This may merely imply that governance arrangements link several national spaces in networks, webs or partnerships. But multi-national governance may require forms of cross-border working or the creation of partnerships that 'transcend' national identification – for example, the

economic or social development of 'regions' that cross borders cannot be allocated to a singular national sovereignty claim, Indeed, the region being brought into being may acquire its own powers and capacities beyond singular national sovereignty claims (the European Union, Mercosur and other 'economic' regions embodied in governance entities). As a result, governance arrangements both negotiate and modulate the sovereignty associated with nations as bounded spaces, even as – in some cases – the 'nations' themselves are in the process of being invented, redefined or recreated. This applies equally to the reconfigurations of the countries of the former Yugoslavia as it does to the countries of the increasingly dis-united Kingdom (involving differentiated forms of 'national/regional' devolution).

Governance is, almost by definition, **multi-agency**: both in the narrow sense of engaging multiple agencies in some common project or concern and in the wider sense of drawing upon different sorts of agents (individuals, groups, organisations) to engage in the business of governing. Governance arrangements, or what Stephen Ball (2006) has called the 'new architecture of governance', require multiple agents because specific projects or objectives are not the sole property of a single entity (government or a government department) but the shared concern of different agents and interests. This understanding of the multi-agentic character of governance links very different theoretical perspectives: the governance narrative of UK scholars; the dynamic systems view of views of governance as co-steering; and even post-Foucauldian conceptions of governing at a distance (Rhodes, 1997; Kooiman, 2000; Rose, 1999). Governance moves analytic attention beyond the state – opening up questions of its disaggregation (Slaughter, 2004); its decentring (McDonald and Marston, 2006) or its dispersal (Clarke and Newman, 1997). These terms are rather different from some of the epochal claims about the disappearance or even death of the state, insisting that the state persists, albeit in new formations, relationships and assemblages (Sharma and Gupta, 2006).

'Partnership' might be one defining motif of the new governance. Partnership implies the displacement of the (nation) state as the sovereign authority, such that governance involves co-steering between different types of authority, rather than merely being (contingently) devolved authority from the state. Partnership as a mode of governance draws attention to the co-existence of, and possible collaboration between, different sources of authority – the public power of the state and varieties of 'private authority' (corporations, communities, consumers, for example, see Hansen and Salskov-Iversen, forthcoming). In practice, of course, partnerships vary as formations of power and authority. Some enrol multiple sources of authority into new projects; others look more like virtual partnerships or shells for the pursuit of one set of interests (the recurrent criticism levelled at the Private Finance Initiative and its successor form Public Private Partnerships in the UK, where 'corporate welfare' appears to be the main outcome, e.g., Pollock, 2004). Others look like 'compulsory partnerships' where the power of the state is used to enforce partnership between agents and agencies who might not otherwise have sought collaboration (see Glendinning, Powell and Rummery, 2002, on New Labour's approach to partnership making in the UK).

This compulsory/coercive approach to partnership as a mode of governance makes visible what Jessop (and others) have called the relationship between governance and 'meta-governance'. For Jessop 'meta-governance' is one of the ways in which the state may have been displaced, engaging in new roles and relationships – rather than disappearing. Within the complex of new governance mechanisms, the state 'reserves to itself the right to open, close, juggle and re-articulate governance arrangements, not only terms of particular functions, but also from the viewpoint of partisan and overall political advantage' (Jessop 2000, p.19).

There are two other dynamics about the multi-agency character of governance that are worth some attention. First, new governance arrangements may have to discover, or even create, the agents that they need to do the business of governing. For example, finding governors, trustees or representatives for particular interests (parents in education governance; tenants in social housing governance) is a task of governance. Such people have to be discovered, groomed and developed to take up their governance roles. They have to possess or acquire the relevant 'expertise' to govern. In a similar way, governance arrangements often need the objects of governance to be 'represented' (embodied in persons who can 'speak for them'). Neighbourhoods, communities, service users, regions, or specified socio-demographic groups have to be 'brought to voice' in governance. In the following section, I will explore some of the complications associated with these processes of representation.

Secondly, however, new governance bodies become agents themselves, acquiring powers, capacities and interests unique to them. However limited, transitory or even virtual such bodies are – they are nevertheless bodies. They have the capacity to enact governance – to make the principles, models and schemas of governance materialise in practice. We cannot, or should not assume, that there are direct transitions from the principles and plans to the practices of governance. What are conventionally described as 'implementation processes' are better understood as processes of translation, in which meanings are subject to inflection, interpretation by active agents in specific locations (Newman, 2006; Lendvai, 2005; Lendvai and Stubbs, 2006, see also Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005). While translation may be true of 'implementation' in general, it has a particular resonance in relation to governance – because governance arrangements are still emergent organizational forms for which previous organizational templates may be a poor guide. Terms such as hybrids, flex organizations, public-private agencies, network governance and even 'partnership' mark out this unstable and unpredictable character of governance arrangements (see, for example, Wedel, 2005). Hansen and Salskov-Iversen draw out these distinctive properties of emergent forms in their discussion of 'globalising webs':

Globalising webs challenge conventional distinctions between the inside and outside of the nation-state ... In fact, they connect state institutions across this distinction, across local and national levels of the state and relate them to a host

of different actors, including non-state actors and hybrids, indeterminable organizational forms that do not match conventional distinctions between public and private. (2005: 230)

What does this attention to the new forms of agency associated with governance add to the governance puzzle? I think it brings three critical things into visibility. First, it highlights an important question about the forms of knowledge and expertise that are valorised in governance (and the forms that are devalued or de-mobilised). Some of these valued forms of knowledge derive from the field of what Cutler and Waine (1997) call 'generic management' – the belief that all organisations share common characteristics, and thus can be directed using a set of universal principles, knowledge and skills. Secondly, we can see how this may structure who gets to enter into governance roles, with preference being given to those who are the bearers of such 'relevant knowledge and expertise': legal and financial knowledge, business experience and so on (Ball, 2006; Cowan and McDermont, 2006). Others – such as the bearers of lay knowledge, or tacit knowledge of how a service works (from the vantage point of either workers or users) – may find themselves marginalised in the 'business of governance'. Thirdly, and perhaps most strikingly, new governance arrangements create the conditions in which new knowledges, skills and roles may flourish – ones that emphasise cross-boundary working. Transacting, translating, mediating and brokering characterise these new ways of working that are central to the forms of governance as partnerships, networks and collaborations (Lendvai and Stubbs, 2006; Larner and Craig, 2005; Wedel, 2001; 2005). Crossing borders, sectors, cultures, and languages forms a critical element of how governance is being 'made up' in practice.

Returning to the multi-ness of governance, many new forms of governance also have a **multi-ethnic or multi-cultural** character. In one sense, this reflects the collapse of the imagined geographies that linked 'race and place' in apparently stable or sedimented forms. Such imagined alignments ranged from national to local spaces (where dense conceptions of attachment, belonging and ownership are condensed). This can be viewed as the general character of European modernity (see, for example, Kooiman's conception of governance as related to the complexity, diversity and dynamics of modern societies, 1993). But it can also be seen as the emergence of governmental strategies for governing populations where formations of ethnic/cultural differentiation have become intensely politicised in transnational, national and local forms (Hesse, 2001; Lewis, 2000; Modood, 2005; Parekh, 2000). New governance arrangements that are structured by this multi-ness aim to accommodate or contain potential social and political antagonisms. Multi-ethnic/cultural governance creates zones of containment that may also be the site of accommodating differences or producing practices of cohabitation or conviviality (Gilroy, 2005). I have deliberately run multi-cultural and multi-ethnic together in this discussion, despite the possible differences and distinctions. The contemporary flux of differences constructed around national identities, ethnic identities and religious/faith affiliations – and the attempts to make them align with one another – marks a difficult, shifting and troubling field of conflicted

and contested identifications. In the process, histories of how 'place and race' are connected to senses of attachment and identification, ownership claims, and ideas of belonging in ways that create a distinctive field of governance problems.

The 'multi-ness' of governance is an integral feature of the rise of governance. It requires us to think about how governance arrangements work on and across categorical distinctions – between nations, levels, sectors, agencies, cultures and more. Governance works across them and reworks them in the processes of governing – borders and boundaries are remade, redrawn or rendered more permeable to some sorts of flows. Hybrid forms emerge that do not simply 'belong' to one side of a boundary or another – they work interstitially or liminally in the ambiguous spaces around boundaries. But governance arrangements do not necessarily wholly eradicate such distinctions, rather they both blur and sustain them. Nations are a condition for multi-national governance (even as national sovereignty is reworked in such processes); sectoral distinctions are important for public-private partnerships; multiple ethnicities are both contested and reproduced in 'multi-cultural' governance.

### **Making governance popular?**

Conventional accounts of the governance story (as the shift from government to governance) often identify state failure as a driving force in two different ways. One concerns the inadequacies of public agencies (usually coded as 'bureaucracies'). They stand accused of being wasteful or inefficient means of achieving public objectives. A whole era of governance innovations have been directed to resolving such state failures (the New Public Management, contractualization, marketization, privatization, public-private partnerships, the expansion of the not for profit sector in service provision and so on). But state failure is also associated with the problems of representative politics, in particular the rise of scepticism, cynicism, and alienation from the institutional processes of politics (registered in declining participation in such indices as party membership and voting, see Stoker, 2006). At the same time, there are concerns about the volatility and vulnerabilities of democratic processes. 'Democracy' is the focus of desires and fears, particularly that democratic politics may be 'captured' and 'exploited' by unrepresentative or unreasonable interests (e.g., the rise of sectarian, extreme left or right wing parties or restorationist ethno-nationalisms, see Kalb, 2005).

One dynamic of governance innovation is thus the concern to reconnect 'ordinary people' in ways that overcome or counterbalance these problems and risks of representative politics. Governance is identified as a site of possible encounters in which people can be re-engaged; the marginal or voiceless may be included; a more representative public may make its views heard; and popular legitimacy may be constructed and affirmed. We can see here the two tendencies that make up the 'crisis of representation' in representative politics (Saward, 2005; 2006). On the one hand, declining participation creates a crisis of legitimacy for political representatives – manifested in declining trust in elected governments and politicians. This is the

*institutional* crisis of representation: associated with the institutional forms of parties and governments. On the other hand, in complex societies political representatives are rarely 'representative' of the populations that they seek to represent: they tend to be male, be from majority racial or ethnic groups, be able-bodied rather than disabled and so on. This is the *social* crisis of representation. As the socio-demographics of societies become an object of contestation – as social position and social identity are understood to carry differences of interest – then social representation and representativeness become increasingly difficult terrain for the political process: 'how can they speak for us?'<sup>2</sup>

Governance then appears as both a site where the 'crisis of democracy' may be overcome and a setting for new forms of 'democratic deficit'. Let us consider this paradox of governance a little further. Governance arrangements have often been directed to discovering 'civil society' and bringing people into the processes of governing. At the same time, other governance innovations have been directed to ensuring improved efficiency and effectiveness, for example in the provision of public services. These may not foreground 'participation', preferring models of governance that are 'streamlined' and 'businesslike'. Indeed, in some governance contexts, the public may be actively excluded from the business of governance, where business is conducted behind the screen of 'commercial confidentiality'. In such contexts, the agents of governance are likely to be the figures representing organisations, rather than the public or social groups: the partners, the clients and contractors, and (possibly) the regulatory agencies under whose gaze the business is to be conducted. Such representatives are expected to 'do business', although as Aldred (2007) indicates there may be important distinctions between entrepreneurial and managerial discourses of being businesslike. Such governance forms have been criticised for their exclusion of both public and political representatives – being seen as deepening the 'democratic deficit' in contemporary societies. This deficit is also associated with the role played by what John Stewart (1995) called 'the new magistracy' – the appointed, rather than elected, members of governance processes (see also Skelcher, 1998). This reinvention of the 'great and the good' and their enrolment into the architecture of governance also

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<sup>2</sup> As I was writing this piece, a controversy was taking place about who could plausibly claim to represent or speak for minority ethnic communities in the UK. The New Generation Network challenged established 'community leaders' as unrepresentative and inappropriate voices. Established faith-centred organisations (Hindu, Muslim and Sikh) asserted both their substantial social base, and their own internal democratic character, to legitimate their right to speak. Other commentators (Sivandan, *The Guardian*, 30/11/2006) challenged the critics for losing sight of racism – and the increasingly racist legislation and practices of the British state – as the key political issue. See also Loha and Malik, 2006.

demonstrates the preference for experience in the 'real world' of business and the associated 'can do' culture (Ball, 2006).

But alongside this 'efficiency drive' governance innovations have also sought to re-engage the citizen, the public and communities in governing (see Barnes et al, 2007). A variety of deliberative and participative forms of engaging publics in the process of governing have emerged in the last two decades – in the practices of 'mature democracies' just as much as in 'emerging' or 'developing' nations (Li, forthcoming). For some, such governance arrangements are superior to the imperfections of representative politics. They may be more representative (in socio-demographic terms); they may be more 'open' to multiple interests and voices; they may be more 'authentic' (engaging 'ordinary people' rather than 'professional politicians') and they may avoid the biases and distortions of parties and political machines. For others, such participatory arrangements are characterised by two more troubling dynamics. First, public participation tends to produce, as much as it reflects, 'publics'. Publics are sought out, invited, seduced and constituted in the process of participation. Second, public participation processes are themselves governed – or, perhaps more accurately managed – as part of the work of governing. They have to be staged, peopled, performed – and their consequences taken into other parts of the governing apparatus. This is not to claim that consultation, deliberation and participation are 'stage managed' or merely 'window dressing', Such processes reflect contexts in which the need to engage the public is powerfully felt. They also have consequences for both the performance and practice of governing. It is the case, however, that such consequences tend to be indeterminate. The fact of consultation may be more important than the effect of consultation.<sup>3</sup>

The recent enthusiasm for 'civil society' often involves a distinction between participation and politics, or between civil society and the state, which treats the former terms as more true, authentic or popularly grounded. In contrast, politics or state institutions tend to be seen as what Elyachar calls 'antipeople and anticommunity' (2002: 496). Civil society, then, appears as a fertile ground for renewing social and political engagement – not least because it is where people, not politics, are located. This popular conception of civil society may also be a populist one, celebrating popular voices against elites and power blocs. In the process, we may be encountering demotic, rather than democratic, modes of governing – in which speaking in the name (and sometimes voice) of 'ordinary people' becomes a political mode in itself (see, for example, Andrews, 2006 on 'postmodern populism' in Italian politics; and Frank, 2001,

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<sup>3</sup> This 'performative' character is not peculiar to participatory or consultative governance arrangements. All governance processes have dimensions of performance to them in which both the organisations and individual agents within them are expected to 'play their parts': performing 'being businesslike', 'doing listening', 'speaking for local people', or just 'being reasonable'.

on 'market populism'). Various communication technologies are bound up with these developments: popular media that claim to be vigorous defenders of the 'public interest' and address their audiences in vernacular and demotic styles; and the rise of 'polling and voting' as technologies of popular media, in both factual and entertainment modes ('You, the jury'...). One distinctive element is the growth of on-line opinion sampling and polling, promising more 'immediate' (in both temporal and socially transparent senses) access to popular/public opinion. Such popular 'voicings' might be seen as demotic, rather than democratic, being generally under-determined by systematic conceptions of representation (Clarke et al, 2007).

Here we can see how the crisis of representation returns to haunt other forms of representation. On-line surveys are structured by the underlying distribution of digital access (and the possible social and political predispositions that might be associated with such inequalities). In different ways, generalising claims about 'the public' or 'ordinary people' tend to conceal or occlude distinctions and divisions that may be effective. On the other hand, the pursuit of socio-demographic specificity, often with the purpose of engaging the marginal, excluded or 'hard to reach' demographic segments may risk attributing a unified set of attributes to groups that are internally heterogeneous (women; disabled people; the young; the old; users of services; residents of a locality; minority ethnic groups and so on).

Critics of the civil society and NGO-centred modes of governance have raised a number of problems, two of which are particularly relevant here. One is that NGOs and related organisations evoke the same political ambivalence as states used to: they are both 'representative' of the people and act as a power over them, governing resources, allocating opportunities and establishing conditions of conduct. Of course, different NGOs occupy this field of multiple possibilities in particular ways (just as states vary), but there can be no simple presumption of the more authentic or organic character of the NGO form as a vehicle or site of governance (see, for example, Gardner and Lewis, 1997; Fisher, 1997). Secondly, NGOs, for some of the reasons set out above, are part of what James Ferguson (1990) called the 'antipolitics machine' of development – the processes and mechanisms that displace and disguise the conflicted political character of development policy and practice. Making things 'technical', and subject to regulation through different sorts of expertise, avoids and evades political conflict. Such neutral expertise may include the lay knowledge of 'ordinary people', as well as technical/professional experts, because ordinary people are not 'political' (see Elyachar, 2002).

This second governance puzzle centres on politics – or, more accurately, on the intersection of different aspects and meanings of politics around the forms and practices of governance. Governance stands in an angular relationship to formal or representative political processes – promising to remedy state failure and the crisis of political legitimacy, in part by creating new sites of popular engagement and participation. Governance may expand the reach of political involvement by targeting

marginalised or excluded groups, or by engaging 'civil society' groups and organisations. In such processes, governance may also revive the political problems of representation – who is allowed and invited to speak for 'ordinary people' of different kinds. But governance may also involve the drive to 'de-politicise' conflicted or potentially conflictual issues – by turning them into the concern of 'ordinary people' and 'communities' who are constructed as 'outside politics', or by making them the focus of technical knowledge, forms of expertise that are 'above politics'. We might finally note that the design of governance systems, process and organisations might itself be thought of as 'political'. Deciding what sorts of arrangements govern what issues; who is invited to take their place within governance arrangements; what sorts of representation and knowledge are valued; and the horizons of what any governance body may govern are themselves political choices (see, for example, Jessop, 2000, on 'meta-governance' and states). The rise and proliferation of governance arrangements – as well as the specific character of particular governance processes – can be viewed as political processes, rather than just a generic social trend.

#### **'There must be some way out of here'? Egovernance and governance puzzles.**

These two governance puzzles – the multi-ness of governance and making governance popular – contribute to a view of governance as a field of emergent and unfinished practices. These properties are visible at different levels of analysis in studying governance. They are characteristics of what might be called 'governance systems' – the assemblages of apparatuses, agencies, policies and practices that claim to govern particular spaces, objects or social domains. However, their profoundly unsystematic quality makes 'system' a somewhat risky term to use. They might be better described as formations, constellations or assemblages in order to emphasise their multiple elements and the contingent relationships that hold them together for periods of time. Such terms foreground the combination of instability and innovation that seems typical of governance arrangements.

The same properties can also be observed at the level of individual governance organisations. In part, this reflects the way in which specific governance forms are themselves hybrids or assemblages, bringing different agents into new configurations. But these properties are combined in complicated ways with patterns of institutionalisation, in which particular assemblages crystallise and take on the appearance of solidity and permanence. New organisational forms, valued patterns of knowledge and expertise, and condensations of power and authority become solidified or sedimented. They become 'governance' – its arrangements, its architecture, its processes and its practices.

So, what are the relationships between this difficult dynamic of flux and solidification and the rise of egovernance? In this final section I explore three views of this intersection. The first treats egovernance as the inheritor of governance logics (or as the solution to their problems). The second sees egovernance as a further paradigm shift in

the government to governance narrative. The third concentrates on the ways in which e-governance might reconfigure the management of dispersed and multiple sites of power in the processes of governing.

For governments in particular, digital technologies seem to represent an enhanced technical capacity for the extension of current governance logics. New technologies are seen to 'go with the flow' of current trends in several ways. They provide governmental organisations with significant increases in information management capacities, in terms of the accumulation and use of data in relation to areas that have been, or emerging as, the core business of government (for example, revenue collection; policing – in both domestic and border settings - and aspects of social welfare, particularly fiscal welfare). Secondly, the enhanced 'connectivity' provided by digital systems can enable the 'multi-ness' of dispersed governance, making the transnational, translocal, cross-sector, cross-agency relationships of governance easier to conduct. Thirdly, digital technologies are understood as enabling, and even empowering, the citizen in their interactions with government and other governance agencies. ICTs can make governance popular through providing a dynamic interface between individuals and the state (and its proxies). It provides the immediate means of access to government, a means of addressing enquiries to citizens, and the means of engaging selected or targeted groups: new technologies have a 'democratising' capacity. Finally, digital technologies offer the promise of enabling the 'personalisation' of public services – the greater tailoring of provision to the individual needs, circumstances and wants of the individual. Such personalisation is a core theme in current public service reform (see, for example, Department of Health, 2006 and Leadbetter, 2004) and new technologies represent a critical resource for making the rhetorical move from 'one size fits all' to 'tailor made' services.

Such conceptions of the 'fit' between contemporary governance logics and new digital technologies both over-estimate and underestimate the 'technical' character of these technologies. They also offer a disconcertingly coherent account of governance logics. Over-estimating the technical character of ICTs involves a typically de-socialising and de-politicising sense of the 'technical': thus ICTs are treated as neutral means for achieving already established governance principles and models. As a 'technical fix', new technologies mean that governments can achieve their objectives – whether these be greater efficiency, greater public engagement, the personalisation or diversification of services, or simply the elaboration of more 'modern' systems of governance. Digital technologies permit and enable all of these.

But this 'technical fix' view of e-governance also underestimates the technical character of digital technologies in the sense of underestimating the organisational, social and political consequences that such technologies may create. A stronger view of ICTs as 'socio-technical systems' suggests that new technologies may further some existing governance tendencies, but undermine or displace others (Dunleavy et al, 2006). Such a socio-technical view might also require attention to how digital technologies might

reconfigure forms and architectures of power in and around governance. This leads to the second view of e-governance and governance puzzles. In a recent substantial study, Dunleavy et al (2006) have argued that digital technologies have the capacity to create a new governance paradigm: Digital Era Governance (DEG).

Their view links the rise of e-government to the waning influence of the New Public Management as the previous dominant governance paradigm. They suggest that the NPM both ran out of steam and produced perverse effects and governance failures, creating a set of conditions in which governance paradigm changes have become possible. While avoiding technological determinism, they suggest that the congruence of digital technologies and governance opportunities and problems forms a distinct opportunity for a new paradigm:

[G]overnment IT changes are no longer peripheral or routine aspects of contemporary public management and public policy changes, but increasingly important and determinant influences upon what is feasible. IT and information system influences are as salient in current public sector management as they are fundamental in contemporary Weberian rationalization processes. We see this influence of IT systems as having effects not in any directly technologically determined way but via a wide range of cognitive, behavioural, organizational, political, and cultural changes that are linked to information systems broadly construed ... DEG processes could achieve productivity and effectiveness improvements while simultaneously simplifying the state apparatus and expanding citizen control of their own affairs. The opportunity to secure such a 'golden mix' of objectives does not occur often in public management. (2006: 217)

Although it is not possible to examine their argument in detail here, Dunleavy and his colleagues claim that DEG involves three clusters of changes. The first, *reintegration*, indicates that digital systems can overcome the fragmentation of government associated with the New Public Management by providing the system basis for drawing functions back into the state. This is likely to be efficient in its own terms, and promises to overcome the inefficiencies and duplications resulting from NPM driven process of dispersal and proliferation. The second cluster of changes, *needs based holism*, involves reforms that 'seek to simplify and change the entire relationship between agencies and their clients ... It also stress developing a more 'agile' government that can respond speedily and flexibly to changes in the social environment' (2006: 227). The third cluster, *digitization changes*, involves IT processes and channels moving from secondary or supplementary roles to being the dominant, normal and potentially only mode of doing administration and business (2006: 228). They argue that these technological, or socio-technical developments, go 'with the grain' of current trends in governance, and state-citizen relationships:

Despite this inevitable indeterminacy, we believe that the current period holds out the promise of a potential transition to amore genuinely integrated and citizen-

orientated government, whose organizational operations are visible in detail both to the personnel operating in the fewer, broader public agencies and to citizen and civil society organizations. (2006: 248)

In exploring the conditions of social and political indeterminacy for this possibility, the authors construct a set of scenarios in which it may be achieved, diminished or deflected. Although avoiding the problems of technological determinism is indeed important, for me this analysis suffers from different problems that result from an overly coherent and too narrow view of governance itself. While the NPM was important as a model for fragmenting states, especially in the domain of public services, not all of the governance reforms were driven by its centripetal logic. Some changes involved the centralization of some forms of power and authority, while others stressed engagement, participation and partnership as we have seen. Still others created 'plural provision' structured by dynamics of competition and choice around services that might prove difficult to re-integrate. The UK has built an elaborate system of planning, finding and evaluating such processes that frames individual organisations in a comparative/competitive logic (Clarke, 2004, chapter 7). Indeed, the whole field of governance changes looks considerably more heterogeneous than the New Public Management model, even if managerialism provided a distinctive connective discourse (Clarke and Newman, 1997; Newman, 2005). For me, this suggests that digital era governance might be subject to more, and more contradictory, forces and trends than Dunleavy and his co-authors allow for (Clarke, 2006).

There are three tendencies that have the potential to disrupt the optimistic reading of Digital Era Governance. They are tendencies that involve the articulation of forms of power, authority and knowledge in governance processes. Let me begin with the persistently troubled relationships between states and citizens (Clarke, 2005). Dunleavy and his colleagues read this relationship as primarily concerned with the dynamics of empowering and enabling more autonomous citizens. Bleaker views would point to the tendency of states to accumulate knowledge of, and power over, citizens as a dynamic of 'securitization' of societies (e.g., Huysmans, 2006) or the spread of a culture of control (Garland, 2001). The capacity for the reintegration, or further centralization, of knowledge and power through digital technologies expands the possibilities for state control over citizens, rather than their autonomization.

A more sceptical view of autonomised citizens is offered by other perspectives, particularly post-Foucauldian studies of governmentalities, which treat autonomisation as a conditional and managed process of 'governing at a distance' (Cruikshank, 1999; Rose, 1999). In this view citizens are being made 'responsible' in specific ways (for their financial welfare, health, work-life balance, security and so on). Such responsabilization does, of course, create 'autonomy', but it adds other dynamics too. It makes rights more conditional on the performance of responsibilities, creates new frames for of judging success and failure, and constructs new governance processes to scrutinize and evaluate

the performance of responsibility (see Bauman, 1998, for a particularly bleak view of these changes).

The second governance dynamic concerns the forms of knowledge/power knots that are condensed in governance arrangements and how these might engage with the potentials of DEG. Some of the innovative, hybrid forms of governance arrangement are not simply the effect of NPM fragmentation. The dispersal of the state and its powers was driven by other desires – to subordinate bureau-professional power in public services to better means of discipline (market and/or managerial authority); to remake the relationship between government and corporate capital (in partnerships and contracting relationships); and to engage voluntary, third sector or civil society organisations in a more plural (and cheaper) provision of public services (Clarke and Newman, 1997). What Jessop and other have called a ‘politics of scale’ points to contested *dimensions*, as well as relations, of governance arrangements (Brenner, 2004; Jessop, 2002). There is no simple rationality for re-integration – rather we encounter a whole series of political, governmental, economic and managerial calculations about the advantages of particular scales, sizes and forms of governing. While Dunleavy and his colleagues make a central feature of the ‘contracted out’ character of IT development and provision in government, they seem less attentive to the contracted out character of other aspects of the state (and the potential costs of unlocking long term contracting to enable reintegration). I do not mean to concentrate exclusively on narrow economic calculations around governance (important though they are), but it may be important to think of existing governance arrangements as the site of sunk investments of various kinds (the base for community organization, the location of distinctive forms of knowledge and power; the place of new skills and careers; the organisational form taken by the ‘local’ and so on). To these might be added Jessop’s ‘meta-governance’ calculations – of governmental, political and partisan advantage to be gained from governance arrangements. These may well incline towards reinforcing the potentials identified by Dunleavy and colleagues but they are calculations that may be framed by temporalities other than the long-term rationalization of government.

In the end, I am persuaded by the insistence on treating digital technologies as ‘socio-technical systems’, rather than technical fixes, but I think that analysing these socio-technical systems needs to be informed by a richer understanding of the social in relation to governance. Reducing governance to two simplifying paradigms misses the heterogeneous character of governance arrangements. In contrast, Governance puzzles – about the multi-ness of governance and the ambivalences involved in making governance popular – provide ways of thinking about how this heterogeneity is the product of the contested and unfinished dynamics of governance.

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