MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE AS A POLITICAL MODEL AND ITS INFLUENCE AT THE LEVEL OF EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract: The main aim of this essay is to define the concept of multilevel governance as a political model and to identify the effects that this concept has if it is implemented at the level of European Union. Firstly, I will talk about the concept of multilevel governance and what it means in practice. Secondly, I will analyze the multilevel governance concept in the context of European Union. Thirdly, I will show what this concept brings new to the public management, both at national and supranational level.

MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE AS A POLITICAL MODEL

Governance is identified by the American scholars Hooghe and Marks (2003), as being the binding decision-making at the level of public sphere and analyzed in its various forms. There are new forms of governance and dispersion of decision-making that goes away from the central states and that gained the attention of numerous political sciences scholars. It is a period when centralized authority, command and control, has few advocates, but the modern way of governance gains more and more supporters.

Multilevel governance is a model that is well described by the scholars of politics and public administration. Governance signifies a change in the meaning of government to the new process of governing. In fact, the scholars (Rhodes 2000,) identify more definitions of the concept of governance, as a tool for reforming public administration. The first - governance as corporate behavior, means more efficiency in this sector, by recommending openness, integrity and completeness and also accountability with the clear allocation of roles and individual accountability (CIPFA, 1994:6 in Szczerski, 2004). The second is governance as New Public Management means the use of corporate management and marketing at the level of public administration, at key levels. The third is governance as good governance and it was born at the World Bank level, and it tries to mix the previous idea with the idea of liberal democracy standards, meaning “efficient, open, accountable and audited public service” (World Bank 1992: 611). This aim should be achieved through reducing over-staffing, introducing budgetary discipline, decentralization and more usage of non-governmental organization. The fourth definition – governance as a socio-cybernetic system, shows the limits of the state-centric approach of governing, by introducing terms of interactive political administrative polycentric system, where government is no longer a single sovereign authority. The fifth definition – governance as New Political Economy shows the interrelations of the state with the economy and the role of the state as coordinator of economic activities.
The sixth and seventh meaning of governance are the most important for our analysis. One refers to governing through and with networks, employing shorthand. Rhodes describes these policy networks as organizations clustered around a major government or department. Networks have a distinct coordinating mechanism, that is separate from markets and hierarchies. It is based on shared values and norms and also on trust, that is essential for corporate behavior, and implicitly for the existence of network. In fact, governance leads to fragmentation of public activities, by building new networks, but also increases the membership of existing networks, incorporating both the private and voluntary sectors. The government changed direct for indirect control, but it can set its limits to network actions, trough funds, legal and operational frameworks.

The last approach of governance is characterized by the meaning of international interdependence, putting into the centre of debate the questions of “hollowing out” and “multilevel governance”. The thesis of hollowing out (Held 1991, Pierre, Peters, 2000 in Szczerski, 2004) argues that the state authority is eroding trough internationalization of production and financial transactions, internationally regulated trade, international organizations, international binding law, hegemonic powers and power blocks. The challenge comes from transnational and self-government policy networks emerging the EU. In fact, there are three displacement of control and state power: upwards, towards international actors and organizations, downward, towards regions, cities and communities, and outward, to institutions operating under considerable discretion from the state (Pierre, Peters, 2000).

There is an interesting debate between “consolidationists” and “fragmentationists” in the local American government. There is a general agreement between in the literature that decisions on a variety of services such as fire protection, policing, schooling, transport are better taken locally. The real problem is how is this authority over such services is organized. The problem is if the number of jurisdictions for each urban area should be limited, or reduced to a single unit, in order to produce economies in the local service delivery and also to focus political responsibility. Or, by the contrary, the urban area should have numerous overlapping special-purpose local jurisdictions to increase choice and flexibility (Keating 1995, Lowery 2000, Ostrom 1972, in Hooghe and Marks 2003).

The authors give an interesting example on this – the organization of public transit in the San Francisco Bay Area. They described the situation there in the1970s, when public rail and bus service was fragmented into seven overlapping jurisdictions. Four of these, the Alameda Contra Costa County Transit District, Santa Clara County Transit District, the San Mateo County Transit District and the Bay Area Rapid Transit District are special-purpose jurisdictions created by the California State legislation. The first three were activated by voters, and all except the San Mateo County Transit District have directly elected Boards of Directors. A fifth jurisdiction was incorporated under California legislation to operate the Golden Gate and its approaches, with a 19-member board appointed by six surrounding counties. The sixth, the Muni, is a division of the Public Utilities Commission of San Francisco. Finally, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission encompasses the entire Bay Area, and is also empowered by the state legislature to review budgets, coordinate long-term planning and vet applications for financial assistance. The example is considered a “success story”, with all its complex patterns of interdependence, formal institutions and informal networks that characterize the whole system.
MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Similar issue arise in the context of European integration. Centralized national authority in a European super-state is not on the agenda, but sharply different jurisdictional designs are an offer. Federalists support a coherent system of nested governments, stretching up to a unified European level. These national governments, and with them also nested the regional and local governments for the policies at lower territorial scales. There are specialists that does not agree that Europeans would be better served by the overlapping and even competing jurisdictions, in a “variable geometry” at the European level.

The scholars in political science share a basic postulate, that the dispersion of governance across multiple jurisdictions is more flexible then the concentration of governance in one single jurisdiction (Hooghe and Marks, 2003). Territorially extensive jurisdictions exploit economies of scale in the provision of public goods, internalizing policy externalities, and because of this allowing a more efficient taxation, facilitating more efficient redistribution and not for last, enlarging the territorial scope of security and market exchange. The problem of large jurisdictions is when they impose a single policy on diverse populations with diverse ecological systems or that are territorially heterogeneous. In fact the problem is that centralized government is not very sensitive in varying scale efficiencies from a different policy to the other. In fact, efficiency requires that a policy’s full effects, both positive and negative should be internalized in the decision-making process. Under multilevel-governance, jurisdictions can be designed with this variation in mind.

Developments at the European Union level over the last decades have shown us that the debate over the consequences of European integration for the autonomy and authority of member states in Europe. Over the years, the scope and depth of policy-making has dramatically increased. The EU is in the process of fully completing its reforms. It has completed the internal market and has absorbed the reforms proposed by the Single European Act (1986), The Maastricht Treaty to those proposed by the Nice Treaty. In fact, we should analyze the impact of the treaty reforms over the political architecture of Europe, will this strengthen or weaken this.

The scholars (Marks, Hooghe, Blank, 1996) identify two ways of governance, the state centric governance and the multilevel type of governance. There is a core presumption of the state centric concept that European Integration does not challenge the autonomy of member states. They sustain that state sovereignty is preserved or even strengthened by the EU membership. Their argument is that European integration is based on the bargains between the member states governments, and that they do not want to integrate more, because these bargains are the lowest denominator of their participation to the Union. This model identifies the supranational actors as those actors that are there to aid the member states, by providing information, otherwise not so easy o achieve. The policy outcomes reflects the interests and the relative power of the member states executives. Supranational actors exercise in this situation little independent effect.

The alternative to this is that the European integration is a polity creating process, in which authority and policy-making influence is shared across the multiple levels of governments – sub-national, national and supra-national. This view shows that while national governments are formidable participants to the EU policy making process, control has slipped away from them to the supranational actors. The states have lost some of their authoritative control over individuals in their respective territories showing that the locus of political control has changed. The individual state sovereignty is diluted in the EU by collective decision-making, among the national governments and by the autonomous role of the three
main institutions that are decision-makers in the EU, the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Court of Justice.

The state centric model does not maintain that the policy making is determined at the state level, but just the overall direction of the policy-making is at the state control. The state can be well served by creating for example a judiciary, in order to enforce collective agreements, or a bureaucracy to implement those agreements, even if this institutions are not autonomous supranational agents. They have rather limited powers, oriented principally in achieving collective goods that are state-oriented.

The main problem of the state-centric model is the weakness of the decision-making process. This is the situation when there is the lowest common denominator among the state executive position. The member states executives decide together, but they are not compelled to agree policies they find unacceptable, due to the fact that decision making process on important issues operates on the base of unanimity, allowing the member states to maintain both individual and collective control over outcomes. In fact, this way, while some governments are not able to integrate as much as they wish, at the same time they are not forced to collaborate deeper than they really want.

State decision-making is something that in this model does not exist in a political vacuum. In this model, state executives are located in domestic political arena, and their negotiating positions are influenced by domestic political interests, but this, only in the situation that political arenas are discrete. The core of this model is that policy-making in the EU is primarily influenced by state executives constrained by political interests, nested within autonomous state arenas that connect sub national groups on European affairs.

WHAT DOES MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE BRING NEW?

The multilevel governance model does not reject this view that the state executives and state arenas are important and that they remain the most important pieces of the European puzzle. This concept shows that the state does not longer monopolizes the domestic interest, because a very different polity comes into focus. First, according to this model, decision-making are shared by different actors at different levels, rather than being monopolized by the state executives. The European institutions, the supranational actors have independent influence in the policy-making process that cannot be derived from their role as agents of state executives. This multilevel-governance theory shows that not only the state should play its role on the European arena, but also, the other supranational actors.

Secondly, collective decision-making among the states involves a significant loss of control for the member states executives. The lowest common denominator is set at the level of just one type of decisions, those mainly regarding the European integration. Other type of decisions, for example those concerning the rules that have to be enforced across the EU have a zero sum character, because they involve both gains and losses.

Thirdly, the political arenas are more interconnected than nested. While national arenas remain important for developing the state executive preferences, the multilevel model it rejects the fact that the sub-national actors are exclusively nested with them, because they operate both on national and also supranational arenas, creating transnational associations. For this concept of governance, the states are among the actors contesting decisions made at a variety of levels. Complex interrelationships in domestic politics do not stop at the nation-state level, but extend also to the European level. The demarcation line between this levels that is the core of the state-centric model is argued by the multilevel governance model. In fact, even if the states are an important part of the EU, they are no longer the single interface
between sub-national and supranational arenas, and they share, rather than monopolize the control function in their respective territories.

The European union is described by the notion of “new governance” in the sense of “multilevel, non-hierarchical, deliberative and apolitical governance, via a complex of public/private networks and quasi-autonomous agencies” (Hix, 1998: 54). The idea of EU as multilevel governance system it is based on the existence of overlapping competencies among the multiple levels of government, and the interaction of the political actors present at that level. The member states, powerful in the state-centric approach, are now just among the many actors on the European scene. The EU as multilevel governance manifests a tendency of ambiguity as political space, as the EU is a sui-generis political system that makes binding decisions in the policy areas in that areas where the powers of the traditional state arrived rather late and is much weaker in the area where the state showed its ability to use coercive power.

In fact, the point of view of the EU (represented by the Commission) shows that the networks are seen as assets rather than impediments, because they are deliberately created by the Commission, in order to implement policy in a more effective way, to increase awareness of certain problems at the national level, or to give a “European” dimension to a problem that is still in the policy competence of national governments (Sbargia, 2000). The bare existence of the networks is combined with the semi-administrative autonomy of the Commission. From one perspective, this can be seen as the nucleus of an emerging regulatory regime, where the separation is efficiency oriented. On the other hand, the Commission is already embedded in plural networks of interest and intermediation and that is dependent in its action on the existence of national administrations (Ludlow, 2001).

One of the key issues arising in this area is the “Europeanisation” of the public administration that means more than homogenization and adjustment. It means the growing of a two ways reliance between the national and EU bureaucracies. This process is developed trough several channels (Page, 2003). The first of this channels is a coercive mechanism, that results from the fact the EU is able to issue orders, and this is the reason for the fact that the EU is the source of initiatives that have the force of law and produces homogeneity. The second channel is an imitation model that result from the EU policy transfer. Initiatives that might be at EU level, individual national practices, syntheses of different national practices are imitated by the other member states. This exchange between national authorities it is driven those national authorities that share common concerns about solving policy problems and also causal understandings and technical expertise. For this reason, we can consider the multilevel approach a pro-active one. The third proposed channel is referring to an adjustment model, based on the fact that member states react similarly to the conditions created by the European Union. The fourth channel is a polydiffusion model, that is executed by a variety of actors who transfer ideas and practices in different ways.

CONCLUSIONS

Multilevel governance is a modern concept that allows to all stakeholders to express their needs and problems at both supranational and sub-national levels, but also to find solution for those problems. It is a modern method of governance, where the political component is not on the first place, because this is a deliberative way of societal management. There is a continuous communication at the level of component networks of the system. This type of communication, trough different channels encourages the spreading of “best
practices” at the level of regions, allowing them to implement the best ways of solving the regions problems.

REFERENCES