

PUBLIC GOVERNANCE: RESEARCH AND OPERATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

In the past two decades of public administration reform, the "governance" term has gained ground both in the academic debate and in the political and managerial rhetoric, often at the expense of the "government" term or as a fightback from New Public Management ideas.

The key of success arises from its conceptual vagueness and interpretative flexibility. However, these assets may well be its Achilles' heel, since a growing use of the term is perceived to go hand-to-hand with a loss of conceptual accuracy. A theoretical reference is often missed which, beyond the conceptual clarification, provides a context for the development of methodological approaches for governance research.

This research addresses the above mentioned call for a shared definition of public governance, and its building blocks, able for the term to become a reference point in the theory and practice of public administration. It recognizes the existence of linguistic barriers exacerbated by different cultural and scientific paths, which have developed around the governance term. These have complicated the consolidation of common methodological approaches in governance research. Nonetheless, the hypothesis adopted in this paper is that common ground as well as main differences, which exist between different geographical research clusters, allow assembling a public governance model. The aim is to make a theoretical contribution, extending public governance theory, and to explore operational implications.

The first step of the research involved an exploratory review of the international literature aimed at highlighting the different aspects of public governance covered, in terms of empirical or theoretical research and in terms of disciplines involved. The synoptic literature review followed covering both substantive and methodological material. The paper includes both a descriptive and an evaluative part of the review.

Different public governance research clusters have been compared: Anglo-Saxon, Dutch, German, Scandinavian and Italian literature. Important differences, either with reference to the contents or related to the research approaches in use, are found to exist between and within these clusters. Nonetheless, some common elements are included in the "public governance" concept. The findings have important implications, both operational and for future research.

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1. The growing use of the “governance” term in public sector modernisation processes

The term “governance” has old etymological origins identified by several authors with terms such as the Latin “gubernare” and the Greek “kybernân” or “kubernetes”, which were referred to ancient skippers (Barrett, 2001, 2002; O’Grady, 2002; Rosenau, 2000). The word “kybernetes” was also used by Plato as the art of steering or governing (Schneider, 2002a).

In modern times, governance has become something more than steering, a multidimensional concept, for which it is not easy to find a shared and widely-accepted definition. This term has expanded and nowadays it is found in different fields such as with reference to private firms (corporate governance), public administrations (public governance), and international institutions and their policies and recommendations to member countries (global governance)¹.

Beyond context, the governance concept has been so expansively employed in the last ten years that some authors point at an “industry” of the governance term². Nonetheless, it is almost impossible to find in this rich literature an agreement on the building parts of this concept or a consensual definition³. As a consequence, public governance remains an imprecise and blurred model. For some authors, the secret of its success is owed to this conceptual vagueness and to the interpretative flexibility (Schneider, 2002a). Pierre and Peters (2000), however, link its popularity to its utility⁴. Others, however, notice that its diffusion and growing use goes hand-in-hand with a loss of conceptual accuracy (Jachtenfuchs and Kohler-Koch, 2003).

2. Research aims and methodology

This research addresses the above mentioned call for a shared definition of public governance, and its building blocks, able to become a reference point for the theory and practice of public sector modernisation. It recognizes the existence of linguistic barriers exacerbated by different cultural and scientific paths, which have developed around the governance term⁵. These have complicated the consolidation of common methodological approaches for governance research.

Nonetheless, the hypothesis adopted in this paper is that common ground as well as main differences, which exist between different geographical research clusters, allow to assemble a public governance model. The aim is to make a theoretical contribution, extending public governance theory, and to explore operational implications.

The paper is of a theoretical nature and based on literature review (Berkeley Thomas, 2004, pp. 72-76). The first step involved an exploratory review of the international literature aimed at highlighting the

¹ The term emerges in these three contexts as a reaction to similar crises. The reference is to Enron, Tyco e Vivendi for private firms, to the stop of negotiations at the WTO, financial crises in 1997-98, misadministration at the EU in 1999, for international institutions, etc. Similar legitimacy crises in the public sector are demonstrated by the results of several opinion polls on trust in government institutions (such as those of the World Economic Forum in 2002), corruption scandals and unethical behaviour (the Nolan and Neill committees in UK are an example). Fiscal crises are also found to be related to the lack of trust in government. Cf. Mussari (1990, p. 34).

² Van Kersbergen and Van Waarden (2004) have registered a growing number of articles (respectively 24, 510 and 603 in 1990, 1999 and 2000) and books sold in the Netherlands (23, 154 and 119 in 1990, 1999 and 2000), which include the term governance in their title.

³ Jan Kooiman (1993), for many years a researcher of governance, has stated: “for a few years now, governance as a concept has been a catchword in many corners of the social science disciplines [...] apparently there is a need for such a concept, although we cannot deny that there has been some form of a bandwagon effect”. Also Björk and Johansson (1999) acknowledge that “there are almost as many ideas of governance as there are researchers in the field”. Rhodes (1997) has counted six different uses of the term, while a couple of years later Kooiman (1999) has almost doubled this result, listing a dozen of different definitions.

⁴ “A key reason for the popularity of this concept is its capacity – unlike that of the narrower term ‘government’ – to cover the whole range of institutions and relationships involved in the process of governing”. According to Lynn, Heinrich and Hill, (2001), “because the term has strong intuitive appeal, precise definitions are seldom thought to be necessary by those who use it”.

⁵ Theoretical roots of governance have been identified by Stoker (1998) in institutional economics, international relations, organisational studies, development studies, political science, public administration, and Foucauldian-inspired theorists”.

different aspects of public governance covered, in terms of empirical or theoretical research and in terms of disciplines involved. The synoptic literature review followed covering both substantive and methodological material. The descriptive part of this review is summarized in paragraph 3, while the evaluative part is found in paragraph 4.

Regarding literature sources, the field of research has first been restricted to include only literature referring to the economical, political and social sciences. Most of the contributions analysed are, however, characterized for adopting a multidisciplinary approach such as public management and public administration studies. A further restriction has limited the review to the literature referring the governance term to public administrations, leaving out for the moment corporate and global governance concepts⁶.

Three main sources of literature have been analysed, including articles in specialised journals, monographies and papers presented in the main research networks on public administration.

The selection criteria were based on the disciplinary fields, as explained above. In a second stage of selection of articles among the chosen journals, only articles referring to public governance have been explored. A further selection was based on the title of the article (including the governance term or related terms⁷) and on the author (previous researches on public governance).

120 specialised journals, of which 49 Italian, since 1995 have been reviewed. Only 28 out of 120 have noteworthy contributed to the theoretical interpretative framework (see table 1 for a list of these journals, number of articles in brackets).

Table 1: Selected literature: journals

Administration & Society (1)	Public Management Review (1)
Australian Journal of Public Administration (1)	Public Money & Management (1)
Azienda Pubblica (3)	Public Organization Review (1)
Economy and Society (1)	Public Policy (1)
European Journal of Political Research (1)	Regional and federal studies (1)
Governance (2)	Review of International Political Economy (1)
International Review of Administrative Sciences (2)	Review of Public Administration (1)
International Social Science Journal (3)	Rivista Italiana di Ragioneria e di Economia Aziendale (1)
Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory (3)	Rivista italiana di scienza della politica (1)
OECD Journal on Budgeting (2)	Scandinavian Political Studies (1)
Organization studies (1)	Social Sciences (1)
Political Studies (1)	Sociologia urbana e rurale (2)
Public Administration (10)	Teaching and Research Review (1)
Public Administration Review (3)	The Tocqueville Review (1)
	West European Politics (1)

A second source of literature (monographies) has included books addressing the public governance issue or interrelated topics⁸.

As a third type of resource, researches presented in scientific workshops and conferences organised by the most influential international networks such as the IPMN (International Public Management Network), the IRSPM (International Research Symposium on Public Management), the EGPA (European Group of Public Administration), etc. on public governance have been considered. This source of documentation is particularly useful to gather important contributions on governance research which have still to find a collocation in scientific journals or become monographies.

Finally, all the literature selected this way, has been classified in different clusters – Anglo-Saxon, Dutch, German-speaking countries, Scandinavian and Italian – representing different geographical and cultural similarities and analogous reforms paths.

The analysis of the literature has been made in a broad way that acknowledges differences within the different clusters.

⁶ In this difficult choice, only publications referring corporate governance to the public sector have been taken into consideration. Global governance has been addressed by a second research, now in press, reviewing the main international institutions' activities on governance.

⁷ Articles on issues such as network management, innovation, modernisation and reform processes in the public sector, governability, etc. have been reviewed. The focus has been on those studies explicitly concerned with governance.

⁸ See the previous note.

3. The international literature on public governance

Table 2 classifies the selected literature and gives evidence of the richness and multiplicity of the current international debate on public sector governance⁹.

Table 2: Selected literature

Anglo-Saxon literature	Barrett (2001, 2002); Bevir, Rhodes (2001, 2003); Bevir, Rhodes, Weller (2003a, 2003b); Bovaird, Löffler (2001, 2002, 2003); Considine (2002); Considine, Lewis (1999, 2003); Finer (1970); Healey, Robinson (1992); Hirst (2000); Hodges, Wright, Keasey (1996); Jessop (1995, 1997, 1998); Kettl (1993, 2000a, 2000b, 2002); Leach, Percy-Smith (2001); Lord Nolan Committee (1997); Lynn (2003); Hill, Lynn (2003); Lynn, Heinrich (2000); Lynn, Heinrich, Hill (2000, 2001); Pierre, Peters (1998; 2000); Rhodes (1992, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000); Schick (2003); Stillman II (2003); Stoker (1998, 2000); Wanna, Weller (2003).
Dutch literature	Bekke, Kickert, Kooiman (1995); Bundesregierung (1999); Jachtenfuchs, Kohler-Koch (2003); Kickert (1993a, 1993b, 1997a, 1997b, 2000, 2003, 2004); Kickert, Koppenjan (1997); Kooiman (1993, 1999, 2000, 2003); Kooiman, van Vliet (1993); Kooiman, van Vliet, Jentoft (1999); Nelissen (2002); van Heffen, Kickert, Thomassen (2000); Van Kersbergen, Van Waarden (2004).
German-speaking countries literature	Döhler, Jann (2002); Goetz (1993); Helms (2000); Héritier (2002); Jann (1998, 2003); Johnson (1983); König (1993, 2000); Mayntz (1993, 1998, 1999, 2003); Reichard (2001); Reichard, Wegener (1998); Schedler (1998, 2003); Schneider (2002a, 2002b); Seibel (1992).
Scandinavian literature	Björk, Johansson (1999, 2001); Bogason, Toonen (1998); Christensen (1995, 2003); Christiansen (1998); Christiansen, Jørgensen (2000); Edlund (2001); Elander (2002); Greve (1997); Jensen (1998); Jørgensen, Hansen (1995); Knudsen (1991, 1999); Oecd (1993); Pedersen, Sørensen, Vestergaard (1997).
Italian literature	Airoldi (1998); Airoldi, Amatori, Invernizzi (1995); Borgonovi (2002); Cavalieri (2002); Cepiku, Meneguzzo (2004); Del Vecchio (2001); Meneguzzo (1990, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2004); Mussari (1990); Rebora (1999).

3.1. The Anglo-Saxon literature

The Anglo-Saxon literature is one of the richest on public governance and many continental European researchers refer to it, although sometimes highlighting limitations of its application in differing socio-political contexts.

One of the most prominent authors is Rhodes (Rhodes, 1992, 1996, 1997, 1998, 2000), whose position on public governance can be summed up in three salient points¹⁰. First of all, he considers governance as a concept wider than the government one, with the maxim “from government to governance” summarising the transition from a unitary bureaucracy to a fragmented service delivery and policy making context in which different actors (and not a dominant one) share responsibility¹¹.

Secondly, governance is identified with the process of “hollowing out of the state” as a consequence of the delegation of power and functions upwards to international institutions, downwards to local and regional governments and horizontally to regulatory authorities and executive agencies and to private firms and non-profit organisations through contracting out and public-private partnerships.

Finally, a third distinctive characteristic of Rhodes’ definition of public governance (2000) refers to the central role played by networks, in which interdependent public and private organizations exchange different kinds of resources and share objectives.

The causal link between the existence of networks on one hand, and the hollowing of government and the futility of central steering on the other, is an issue which deserves further investigation.

Bovaird and Löffler (2001, 2002) have also documented an “emergence of the governance wave”, which they define as “the way in which multiple stakeholders interact with each other in order to influence their quality of life” (Bovaird and Löffler, 2003). The authors compare it to the New Public

⁹ A widely accepted distinction on research approaches in the public sector has been introduced by Kickert (1997b, 2004), distinguishing between Anglo-Saxon and European managerialism. See also Meneguzzo (1990) for a content analysis at the international level, which links geographical context characteristics to research approaches employed by the scientific community.

¹⁰ It should be mentioned that Rhodes (1996) has identified six uses of the governance term: the minimal state; corporate governance; NPM; good governance; socio-cybernetic system; self-organising networks. In particular, networks come up as a reaction to the shift from government to governance and include public administrations and private firms. They are autonomous and self-managed.

¹¹ According to Rhodes, this process has been determined by elements such as privatization, marketization, business management techniques, regulation, decentralisation and political control. For other interpretations see Schick (2003); Pollitt and Bouckaert (2000).

Management (NPM) paradigm, suggesting that “the purpose of public governance is not simply an inward-looking attempt to ensure good management, but rather a focus on those outcomes of public policy which are valued by external stakeholders”.

Stoker (1998) proposes a model of public governance based on networks, in which, similar to Rhodes, self-organization and management, and the combination of top-down with bottom-up approaches play a central role. According to Stoker some new elements introduced by the governance model give rise to new dilemmas, mostly associated to accountability (table 3).

Table 3: Stoker’s governance model

Features of governance	New dilemmas
Refers to a complex set of institutions, beside public administration	Legitimacy
Identifies the blurring of boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economical issues	Accountability
Identifies the power dependence involved in collective action	Principal – agent issues
Is about autonomous self-governing networks	Accountability
Recognises shared capacity of satisfying public needs which does not rest on the power of government to command or use its authority	Accountability

Lynn is another author whose research on public governance puts the accent on the fragmentation of the responsibility and capacity of satisfying public needs (Lynn, Heinrich and Hill, 2001; Lynn, 2003). In this setting, governance becomes a mixture of vertical and horizontal tools which enable the coordination and steering of different actors towards common goals. Governance includes the “regimes, laws, rules, judicial decisions and administrative practices that constrain, prescribe and enable the provision of publicly supported goals and services” (Lynn, Heinrich and Hill, 2001, p.7).

The governance model developed by these authors is a very broad one and “it is difficult to conceive of anything involving government, politics or administration that is not governance” (Frederickson, forthcoming, 2005, p. 8). The end product of a governance regime depends on environmental factors, client characteristics, core processes of organizations, structures, and managerial roles and actions. This analytical framework is considered to have “brought governance back to earth and oxygenated it” (Frederickson, forthcoming, 2005, p. 29).

More recently, a literature review performed by Hill and Lynn (2003) uses a state-centric definition of governance and finds out that hierarchical governance is still the primary means of governing.

Kettl (2000a; 2002) is another author whose position has several points in common with the previously analysed literature. These include the “hollowed-out” view of the state and the proliferation of networks. The author admits that traditional, vertical and hierarchical relations coexist with new horizontal ones¹².

Allen Schick (2003) also associates to governance the idiom “governing without (national) government”. The nation state has been weakened by “decentralisation, which has transferred resources and authority from the centre to local governments; by free-standing agencies that have gained operational autonomy from the state to which they are nominally subservient; by global institutions, which have made inroads in some of the most vital functions of the state including criminal justice, national defence and economic policy; by NGOs that have become purveyors of public services and often have quasi-government status at international fora; by markets, increasingly used to provide public services” (Schick, 2003, pp. 94-95). Schick distinguishes between two categories of governance researchers: some see governance merely as a broader term; others view it as a substitute for the nation-state.

Frederickson (forthcoming, 2005) proposes a governance theory in three parts: (i) vertical and horizontal inter-organizational cooperation; (ii) extension of the state by contracts or grants to third parties; and (iii) forms of non-governmental policy-making and implementation. The author suggests that the application of governance to public administration would be improved by narrowing the scope of the subject and making a fundamental distinction between public administration as the internal day-to-day management of an agency on one hand, and governance as the extended state, on the other.

Finally, Pierre (2000, pp. 3-4) identifies governance with the capacity to coordinate and make coherent actions and behaviours of a multiplicity of actors – political institutions, private firms, civil society, international institutions, etc. – which pursue different goals.

¹² This view is shared by other authors such as Kooiman (2003): “Whether the state is ‘withering away’, ‘hollowing out’, entzaubert (lost its magic) or even la fin de l’État, remains more a point of view than anything else”; and Pierre (2000, p. 3): “The emergence of governance should therefore not, prima facie, be taken as proof of the decline of the state but rather of the state’s ability to adapt to external changes”.

3.2. The Dutch literature

The Dutch contributions to the study of public governance (*besturen*) is the most conceptually advanced and also more extensive than work undertaken elsewhere. It includes very well-known authors as Walter Kickert and Jan Kooiman and encompasses many years of research on this topic.

Much of this work is underpinned by the socio-cybernetic systems theory and by the Luhmann's notion of auto-poietic systems (Sibeon, 1999, p. 13). In particular, the emphasis on the socio-cybernetic approach to governance, represented as an interactive process between many actors, none of which enjoys effective authority over the others, has played a dominant role (Pierre, 2000, p. 8). The consideration that government is invariably a weak actor in networks is considered as a reductionist tendency (Sibeon, 1999).

Kickert (1993a, 1993b, 1997a, 1997b, 2000, 2003) considers public governance as the influence that the public administration exercises on social processes inside complex networks composed of autonomous but interdependent actors, each of them following its own objectives and interests, which may, sometimes, diverge. In this context, public administration cannot employ its power in a unilateral way, although it can exercise an influence on the other actors¹³. Three features characterize this definition of governance (Kickert and Koppenjan, 1997):

- Context, comprising the external environment, from which public management cannot be kept isolated (an outside-in approach);
- Complexity, i.e. the number and nature of the system's elements and of the relations between them;
- Governance, defined as the direct influence of networks in which a dominant actor does not exist.

Lastly, Kickert (1997a) makes a distinction between the public governance and the Anglo-Saxon NPM model, market-oriented and instrumental, concluding that the first model is much more consistent with the European public management¹⁴.

Kooiman and van Vliet (1993) draw from emerging challenges such as internationalisation, environment protection, new information and communication technologies, etc. the need for a new paradigm on public administration centred on governance capabilities. The two Dutch authors do not assume a critical position with regard to NPM, but identify governance with an outside-oriented approach. They distinguish three areas of analysis: micro (a single public administration), meso (a system of interrelated administrations); macro (socio-economical environment). In this multilevel framework, no actor plays an overriding role, although the public administration is responsible for ensuring adequate performance levels. Governance corresponds to the arrangements in which public and private actors aim at solving societal problems or create societal opportunities and care for societal institutions within which these governing activities take place (Kooiman, 1993, 2003). It differs from the government function, which consists in public administration activating and coordinating different actors, in order to tackle the environmental complexity, diversity and dynamism (Kooiman, 1999; 2003)¹⁵. The most significant attribute of the model is its aptitude to coherently integrate traditional models of government with innovative approaches such as network management.

¹³ Dunsire (1996) as Kickert (1993), refers to Luhmann's (1995) theory on social systems' autopoiesis, focal point of the debate on the crises of state and on "Steuerungspessimismus". According to Dunsire "the better model is a polycentric (or centerless) network of distinct but overlapping policy communities, in each of which the state is but one group of corporate actors among many", (p. 300, *op.cit*). The author considers social systems "unregulable from any centre if not altogether ungovernable", (p. 301, *op.cit*).

¹⁴ "Public management is broader than the business-like interpretation of management and the internal running of the government's business. Public management is more than business management, client orientation and market competition. Public management is not merely a matter of effectiveness and efficiency, but it is also a matter of legality and legitimacy and of other value patterns than strictly business-like patterns. Public management is not only internal but also and primarily external management in a complex socio-political context". Cf. Kickert (1997a, p. 732).

¹⁵ The multidisciplinary model created by Kooiman suggests that the key facets of the new governance regimes are dynamism (speed of change), complexity and diversity and these lead in turn to more coordination, steering and regulation rather than instrumental intervention. The model is based on political sciences, public administration/management, sociology, international relations, institutional economics and natural sciences (systems' theory).

3.3. The German-speaking countries literature

The German literature is valuable in identifying some weaknesses of the current research on governance:

- Different disciplinary approaches and the extensive application of the term pose a limit on research, which very often highlights what governance is not (government, nation-state, NPM, etc.), instead of explaining what it represents¹⁶;
- There are hardly any researches on the failures of governance;
- Only a small number of empirical studies address the wider issue of meta-governance (or meta-steering).

The governance definitions by German-speaking researchers (see for an example Mayntz, 2003)¹⁷, are focused on collaborative relationships and inter-institutional networks, through which participation in policy making and implementation is made possible. Participation takes place through different forms ranging from the neo-corporative ones in Sweden, Austria and Germany, to public-private networks in specific sectors, to social self-regulated organizations, with which public administration does not interfere.

The German literature can be considered as opposite to the Anglo-Saxon one. While the latter emphasises the shift from government to governance, according to the former governance is not the triumph over the nation-state.

Reichard (2001) recognizes in governance a model of active state¹⁸, synthesis of neo-liberal positions and the welfare state, which integrates competitive dynamics, regulation and values shared by the civil society.

Regarding the Swiss literature, Schedler (2003) defines public governance as the structure and processes that ensure democratic decision-making and a reliable public administration.

3.4. The Scandinavian literature

The position taken by the Scandinavian authors rests in the middle between Anglo-Saxon and Dutch/German literature. Some authors, such as Björk and Johansson (1999), emphasize public governance elements already traced by Anglo-Saxon authors (Rhodes, 1996, 1997; Peters, 1993). In relation to these two authors, governance is a macro level theory and not normative¹⁹. On these conceptual and methodological grounds, Björk and Johansson (2001, p. 3), define governance as a coordination mode of different actors, which can be investigated either from a structural point of view (hierarchy, market and heterarchy), or focusing on processes (steering and adaptation).

A different point of view is offered by Edlund (2001), critical with regard to the application of Anglo-Saxon governance theoretical frameworks in Scandinavian countries, such as Sweden. In this country, the author observes, collaborative relations between public administration and civil society are far from new and cooperation with private firms is almost unavoidable considering the small dimension of the country. The author links governance closely to networks and partnerships, rising as a result of the shift from government to governance, but also as the research attention moves from institutions to processes.

¹⁶ See also Jessop stating that “governance theory tends to remain at the pre-theoretical stage of critique: it is much clearer what the notion of governance is against than what it is for”. Cf. Jessop (1995, p. 318).

¹⁷ Mayntz (1999, pp. 3-5) offers a three-folded definition of governance (political, economical and social) by identifying it with: a style of government different from the hierarchical control; the prevailing modality of actor coordination in economy; a form of social coordination. For the author, “the concept of governance has a distinctly normative flavour” (Mayntz, 2003, p. 6).

¹⁸ *Gewährleistungsmodel* for Germany and *Gewährleistungsstaat* for Switzerland. See also Jann (2003) and, for Swiss literature, Schedler (1998).

¹⁹ In their words, “governance is not about values, therefore it cannot be normative. To us governance theory is based on empirical observations and does not have a hidden agenda driven by normative beliefs”. Cf. Björk and Johansson (1999).

3.5. The Italian literature

The Italian literature on public administration and management has only recently, with few exceptions, become interested in the governance theme. One of the early authors researching the issue, (Meneguzzo, 1995) defines governance as the structure of the social and political system, developed as a result of the interaction and intervention of different actors. The concept represents the public administration system's relations, both horizontal and vertical. According to the author, compared with the NPM model, public governance is a different but not a conflicting concept. While the NPM is focused on the functioning conditions of each public administration (micro perspective), public governance is much more interested with the capacity of managing and steering systems and networks of public and private actors and with the development of regulatory capacities. Meneguzzo observes an evolution in public management studies, both in terms of approach and contents, focusing on:

- Interactions and relations among the actors at different levels of the political and social systems;
- Steering and coordination of complex networks;
- Outwards orientation.

Subsequent studies (Meneguzzo, 1997, 2004) highlight the evolution of governance in the Italian public administration, with particular focus on the local and regional levels and on specific sectors such as economic development, healthcare, cultural and heritage management, etc. A mixed NPM – public governance approach is found to characterize the Italian public sector modernisation. Public governance elements appear most evidently in local governments' experiences²⁰.

A micro perspective is adopted by Borgonovi (2002), investigating governance from the point of view of each public administration, which has to choose from the following alternatives:

- According to a first model (government), decision-making authority is legitimised by formal institutional rules, it is commonly exercised through top-down tools and has compulsory effects;
- A second model (governance) consists of formal and informal exercise of authority, with the aim of building consensus on specific decisions. Not compulsory requirements but incentives and conditions determine the behaviour of the different actors.

The transformation of the social and economical environment and of the institutional and political system implies that public administrations choose a governance instead of a government model. Governance enables a better consideration of the diversity of interests, through policies and decisions representing shared solutions.

Nonetheless, as stated by the author, the governance model may be adopted at the micro level (i.e. participatory organizational models); at the meso level (i.e. distributed public governance); at the macro level (i.e. in governing the relations between public, private and non-profit sector).

Another Italian author (Rebora, 1999, p. 70) interprets public governance pointing towards the reform processes of the last two decades.

Finally, a relatively rich Italian literature applies corporate governance models and principles to public administrations²¹.

²⁰ In Italy networks for policy making and programme implementation are central to the participatory planning exercises conducted across different levels of government to design and implement more integrated and effective development policies (*programmazione negoziata* or planning in partnership according to the OECD language). Cf. Cepiku and Meneguzzo (2004); IREF *et al* (2003).

²¹ In Italy, a significant application has been made by Airoldi *et al* (1995); Airoldi (1998); Del Vecchio (2001). At the international level, corporate governance studies refer to the Cadbury Committee's Report (1992), addressing American and British companies (i.e. highly dispersed shareholdings and an active stockmarket, professional management), which has been applied to public administrations by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA, 1994, p. 6), arguing for a more commercial style of government. See for other applications of corporate governance to the public sector in the UK: CIPFA (1995); Lord Nolan Committee (1997); in the USA: IFAC (2001); in the Netherlands: The Ministry of Finance (2000) and in Australia: the National Audit Office (1997, 1999).

4. Findings

Literature review and analysis on public governance indicate the high complexity of the concept and give evidence of different approaches and definitions, influenced by many variables such as the disciplinary sector, the research aims, the geographical and cultural context of the researchers, administrative traditions and reform trends.

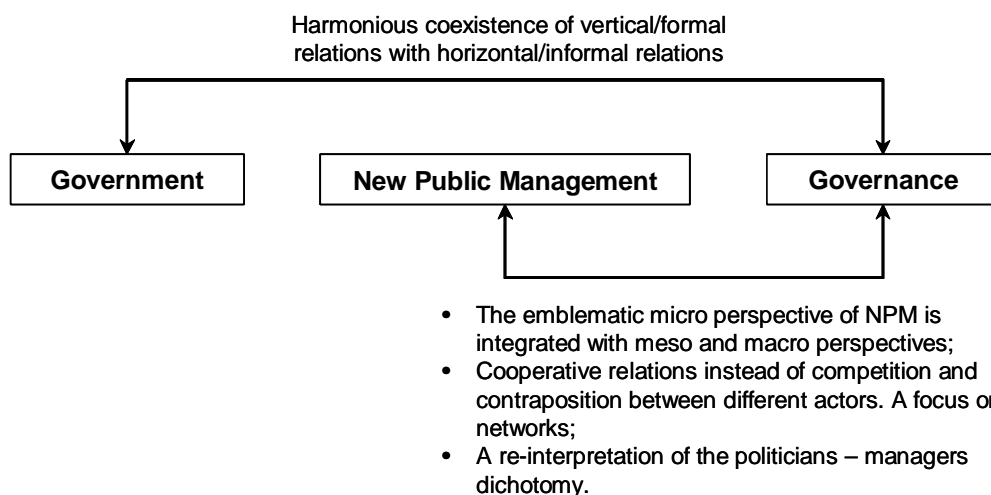
4.1. A public governance common theoretical framework

Although differences transpire more immediately, from a closer look many recurring similarities or common ground come to light.

The European literature oftentimes links the governance concept with public administration reform, and thus with change. While these kind of definitions have the advantage of being dynamic, they also tend to undervalue order, stability and predictability which are likewise central to the governance concept (Frederickson, 2005). As Frederickson (2005) observes, most elements of public governance such as networks, cooperation, partnerships and contracting out, are “forms of institutional adaptation in the face of increasing interdependence”.

However, contrasting governance with traditional and managerial government stays at the heart of many definitions of public governance offered by the international literature (figure 1).

Figure 1: Conceptualizing governance as an enlargement of “government” and NPM



The first distinguishing element of the public governance model, described in table 4, is its recognition as a concept wider than – or even substituting – government (Kooiman, Rhodes, Schick, Kooiman, van Vliet, Björk, Johansson, Borgonovi, Pierre concur with this position).

Table 4: Government versus Governance

	Government	Governance
Definition	Formal decision-making authority legitimised by formal institutional rules	Formal and informal exercise of authority with the aim of building consensus on specific decisions
Actors	A small number of participants, mainly public	A high number of participating actors, public, private and civil society
Focus	Organizational structures and institutions	Processes, policies and outcomes
Structures	Closed systems, territorial limits to the exercise of authority, compulsory participation Hierarchy	Open systems, functional division of authority, voluntary participation Networks and partnerships
Decision-making process	Little consultation, no cooperation and involvement in policy making and implementation	Greater consultation, cooperation between actors in the definition and implementation of sectoral policies
Implementation tools	Top down tools. Mainly formal	Often informal tools, creating conditions and incentives for the acceptance of formal decisions

Interaction modalities	Hierarchical authority, conflictual relations, secrecy. Command and control, direct service delivery	Consultation and collaborative relations, transparent and open public administration Enabling role of public administration
Decisions	Rigid and specific	Based on criteria and principles orienting autonomous decisions
External implications of decisions	Compulsory effects, prohibitions and obligations	Not compulsory requirements but incentives and conditions determine the behaviour of the different actors
Source: Elaborated considering Borghonovi (2002); Carmichael (2002); Cassese (2002); Leach and Percy-Smith (2001); Mela (2002); Sbragia (2002); Schwab and Kübler (2001); Rosenau and Czempiel (1992).		

While the government-governance comparison is very useful in highlighting the basic definition elements of public governance, the NPM-governance contraposition is found to be more frequently recurring in the literature reviewed, especially the one viewing governance as a result of the recent reform processes (table 5). An oversimplified and dichotomous standpoint which paints a sharp either-or contrast between NPM and public governance has been criticised, among others, by Sibeon (1999, p. 9). This assumption should be re-examined both in terms of theory and practice, “a factor in relation to the latter being that there is evidence that the same personnel are involved in the management of intra and inter-organizational relations” (Sibeon, 1999, p. 14).

Table 5: New Public Management versus Public Governance

	New Public Management	Public Governance
Perspective	Micro. The focus of research is on business management techniques and tools	Micro, meso and macro perspectives are tackled. The focus is on public administration's capacity to steer complex social networks
Main focus of modernisation efforts	Delivery structures Management focus Incentives for efficiency Flexibility/autonomy Client/customer focus Specialisation Operational efficiency/ accountability Output focus Short-term focus Single-purpose agency Differentiated issues/programmes	Governance arrangements Policy focus Incentives for effectiveness Joined-up, whole-of-government perspective Citizens focus Integration, co-ordination (horizontal, vertical) Macro-efficiency / impact-accountability Outcome focus Longer-term focus Multi-purpose ministry Cross-cutting issues/programmes
Relationships external to public administration	Public-private and public-public competition Fragmentation and disaggregation of the public administration system	Public-public and public-private partnerships
Relationships internal to public administration	Separation between the political and the administrative/managerial level	A more realistic and complex interaction between politicians and administrators
Reference theories	Business management theories International literature	Political theories Mainly European literature
Source: Elaborated from Meneguzzo (1995); OECD/PUMA (2003); Peters and Pierre (1998); Stoker (1998); Kickert (1997b); Bovaird and Löffler (2001); Jones <i>et al</i> (2004); Kooiman and van Vliet (1993).		

Therefore, some authors consider governance as a new model that enables an enrichment instead of an abandonment of the NPM paradigm. This enhancement includes “(a) an improved understanding of linkages between politics and administration; (b) the need for improved analysis of stakeholder positioning and preferences in formulating public policy and management execution strategy; (c) analysis to better define network relationships among stakeholders internal and external to government; (d) the necessity for addressing potential and real abridgements of public participation rights and basic principles of democracy; and (e) finding remedies to address the absence of government responsiveness to citizens in policy formation and execution” (Jones *et al*, 2004, p. xi)²². These authors view the governance movement as a response to a perceived absence of sufficient attention given to these five issue areas in the drive to devise and implement NPM over the past several decades.

²² The quality and capacity of internal management – main focus of NPM – remains a basic and necessary, although not sufficient, condition for any good governance model.

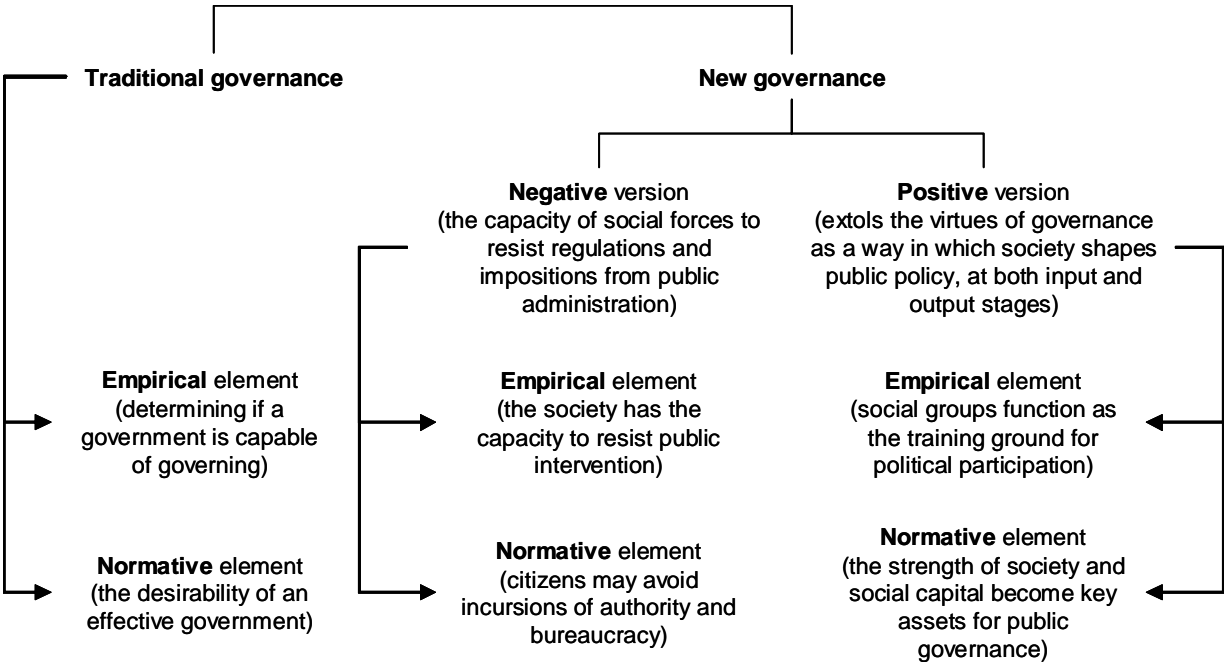
Furthermore, national specificities are better taken into account in the public governance model than in the NPM. This is perhaps the reason why the international comparison of public governance has proven more difficult (and is thus infrequent in literature) than the NPM comparison²³. This conceptualization of public governance as an evolution from traditional government and NPM has important research and operational implications, highlighted in the following paragraphs.

4.2. Research implications

Two different interpretations, empirical and theoretical, of public governance are often mixed up in international literature, although a descriptive connotation is found to prevail in the scientific debate. While some authors specify which kind they are using in their research, others do not make a clear distinction between the two, combining positive and normative considerations, transforming empirical information into values and vice versa. This is transformed in conceptual confusion and, most of all, hinders comparative research on public governance. The first research implication, therefore, recommends that the two interpretations of the term, though not contradictory, should be clearly distinguished (figure 2). This doesn't mean that academic research on governance should have no practical implications, nor that practice-oriented research should not be undertaken; but only the desirability of preserving a clear distinction between normative and analytical-descriptive theorizing (Sibeon, 1999).

On one hand there is the empirical manifestation of public administration adaptation to its external environment, on the other hand there is a theoretical representation of coordination of social systems, with a focus on the role of public administration in the coordination process (Pierre, 2000, p. 3, 42).

Figure 2: Interpretative approaches to governance



Source: Elaborated from Peters (2000, pp. 39-42).

Secondly, the choice of investigating public governance by grouping literature in geographical categories has enabled the identification of the Anglo-Saxon pluralistic (no-state) tradition, in which clear-cut borders exist between the public administration and the other economic and social actors; the Germanic one, in which public administration and civil society are organically linked to each other;

²³ See also Hood (1998) on cultural analysis and public management.

and the Scandinavian one, representing a mix of the two and characterized by dense networks of interest groups, a long history of consensus and a decentralised and participative public administration.

Thirdly, public governance research should be able to integrate, not only different disciplinary approaches, but also different (micro, meso, macro) perspectives, because all three contribute to the comprehension of public administration (table 6). These levels of social process are deemed to be relatively autonomous and if empirically significant linkages between them develop, this is a contingent outcome (Sibeon, 1999, p. 18).

Table 6: Public governance perspectives

Perspectives	Definition of governance	Strategic steering role of public administration
Micro (each public administration)	Outward-oriented public management	Problem-solving and stakeholder-involvement capacities
Meso (distributed public governance)	Distributed public governance is concerned with the protection of the public interest in the increasingly wide variety of government organisational forms	This can be achieved externally, when authority is exercised by central organs of the state or other authorities which have responsibilities for control and supervision of public organisations; or internally, through the responsibility of the governing body and top management of each public organisation
Macro (State, market and civil society)	Global governance determined by the relationship of public administration with external actors (namely private, for and not for profit, firms, civil society and international institutions)	The steering role is aimed at achieving an appropriate combination of public, private and civil society participation, at achieving rule of law and safeguarding the constitutional allocation of power
Source: Elaboration based on Borgonovi (2002); OECD/PUMA (2002); Meneguzzo (1995); Kooiman and van Vliet (1993); Kettl (2000a).		

4.3. Operational implications

Important operational implications originate from the theoretical framework drawn from the literature review and described above.

A first conclusion refers to the role of the public administration inside the networks with which public governance is often identified. Two different positions can be found in the literature. The first considers strategic steering and coordination of networks as a function that can be endorsed by every actor inside of it (Dunsire, 1996; Kettl, 2002; Kickert, 1993a; Kooiman, 1993; Rhodes, 1996; Stoker, 1998)²⁴. Public administration is, therefore, in an equal position with regard to the other actors of the network.

According to the second viewpoint, only public administration has the legitimacy necessary to steer and coordinate networks (Agranoff and McGuire, 2001; Mayntz, 1998; Peters and Pierre, 1998; Jessop, 1998)²⁵.

Nonetheless, the two positions have important points in common, which make differences less drastic. On one hand, authors who do not recognise a primary coordinating function to the public administration, do not deny that it plays, in practice, an important role. On the other hand, writers postulating the irreplaceable steering role of public administration, recognise the lack of adequate tools for achieving it, which means that the function remains unexercised.

In conclusion, the question of where power lies is a matter for empirical enquiry, and not a matter for theoretical predetermination (Sibeon, 1999, p. 13).

A second operational implication concerns the political – administrative linkages. While with the NPM a revival of the Weber's clear separation between politicians and administrators has occurred, public governance calls for an alternative model which gives a more varied and realistic description of the relationship between politicians and administrators²⁶.

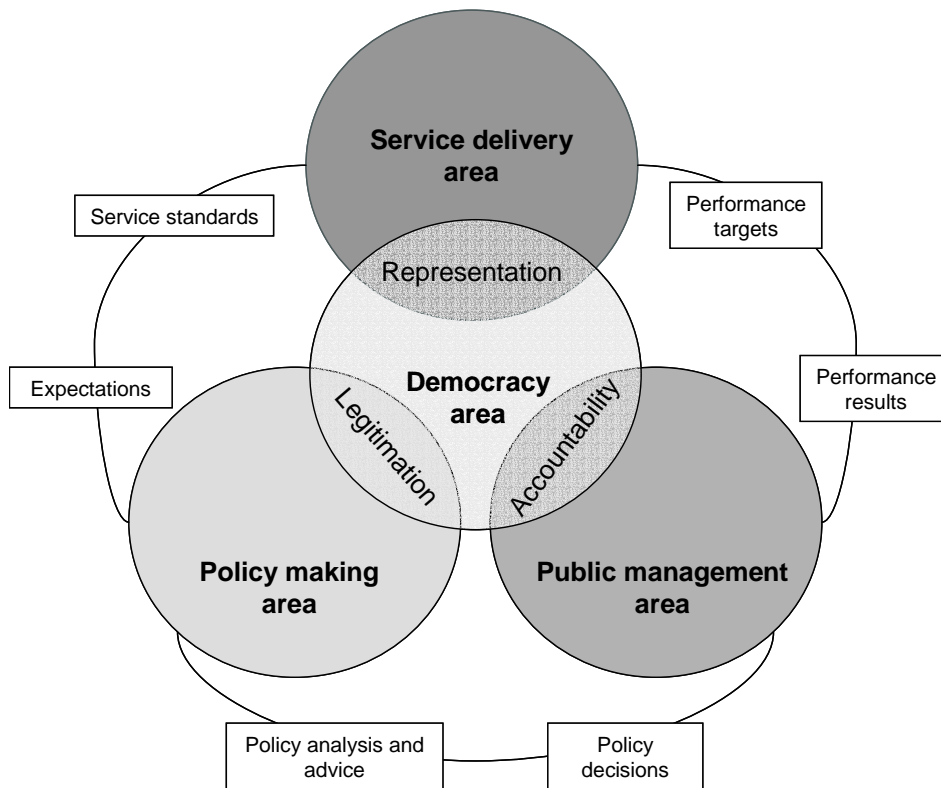
²⁴ "In principle, every actor who is active in the policy process can fulfil the role of manager", Cf. Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan (1997, p. 168).

²⁵ Agranoff and McGuire (2001) define "public management networks" as "multiorganizational arrangements [...] led or managed by government representatives".

²⁶ This has been identified as the dichotomy-duality model by Hansen and Ejersbo (2002, p. 734), who analyse several empirical studies showing a more complex interaction between politicians and administrators.

Finally, a third working implication refers to the public sector modernisation efforts.

Figure 3: Public governance areas of reform



Source: European Commission (1999), p. 27.

If public governance principles are fully adopted, policy-makers responsible for reform strategies should take into account not only the management domain, but all the areas in which public administrations play a significant role. As shown in figure 3, many linkages and interdependencies exist between the public management area and the areas of service delivery, policy-making and democracy.

Acknowledgments

Prof. Marco Meneguzzo, University of Rome “Tor Vergata”, Prof. Elio Borgonovi, Bocconi University and Prof. Riccardo Mussari, University of Siena have provided invaluable insights on earlier versions of this article. Precious help was received from Christian Humborg, University of Potsdam and Adrian Ritz, University of Bern during the review of the German and Swiss literature. Helpful comments from researchers at the Monash Governance Research Unit are acknowledged.

“Administrators are to a very large extent involved in the formulation of visions and objectives at the political level. Their involvement is not limited to choosing means but also involves ends. Likewise, politicians see a need to involve themselves directly with constituency cases and administration”. According to Svava (1998, p. 51) the dichotomy model should be viewed as an aberration of what stated by the founders of public administration. The interdependent relationship between elected officials and administrators leads to a model of complementarity rather than dichotomy. See also Mussari (1990, p. 116).

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