Meta Governance: An Assessment

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Abstract: *All over the world, local, regional and national governments are exploring various governance approaches ranging from public-private partnerships to civic engagement and citizen participation. All of these meet the interdependency character of complex decision making process. In the governance literature, different forms of governance arrangements are seen as promising solution for managing such complex situation and indicate that it has become impossible for a government to rule alone, but it means that governance must be performed differently. Governance requires various forms of regulation of self-regulation, or-- as the governance theorists denote it – meta-governance. In fact, meta governance opens the door for development of a new strong model in policy making. The aim of this article is to reflect on how meta-governance as a model for societal governance affects the decision making from a democratic perspective.*

Key Words: Democracy; Governance; Government; Meta-Governance; Policy Making

Introduction

Many pressing problems no longer comport with the present established systems of politics, administration and society. Practical needs compel to drive away from the well-established notions of politics and brings new sites, new actors and new themes (Hajer, 2003). This movement from familiar topography of formal political institutions to the edges of organizational activities, negotiation between different sovereign bodies and inter-organizational network challenges the present distinction between private and public. In this new arena, the actors who populate these networks need one another to craft effective political agreements and find solutions which are acceptable to all involved in the constitutional system of democracy (Kjaer, 2004).

These networks reshape the politics and policy making in which the political scientists rethink governing, politics and administration. In the governance literature, different forms of governance arrangements are seen as a promising solution for managing such complex situation (Bogason & Masso, 2006; Hovik and Vabo, 2005). However, this state of affairs indicates that it has become impossible for a government to rule alone, but it means that governance must be performed differently. Governance requires various forms of regulation of self-regulation, or-- as the governance theorists denote it – meta-governance. In fact, metagovernance opens the door for development of a new strong model in policy making (Sorensen, 2006).

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The aim of this article is to reflect on how meta-governance as a model for societal governance affects the decision making from a democratic perspective. At first, this essay describes meta-governance and how it can be exercised by giving an illustration and then explains how meta-governance creates a new avenue for the democratic government to perform effectively to combat different social, economic, and environmental complex issues.

The concept of meta-governance

The present governance literatures are continuously raising questions about the capacity of the traditional democratic state to govern in the changing world. Specifically, Rhodes (2007) outlines certain trends that compel a shift from older hierarchical forms of government to a new system of governance. Some scholars find that the decreasing governing capacity 'hollowed out' the traditional government which Rhodes (2012) calls 'governing without government'. Introduction of new public management, unprecedented globalization and forceful flow of information are the reasons behind this notion. But a more mainstream position contends that the world is witnessing not a marginalization of government but rather a change in its role, style and use of instruments (Hirst, 2000). A number of authors (Bogason & Masso, 2006; McIntyre-Mills & Vries, 2011) consistently stresses on the hybrid nature of governance (i.e. government + governance) and the persistence of hierarchical rule within governance.

The last position predominates is that line of the governance literature dealing with the role of policy network. The policy network concept underscores the increasing multilayered nature of governance with its multiplicity of mutually depending public and private actors. Given that policy networks are some degree self-steering and self-organizing (Bell & Hindmore, 2011; Bogason & Masso, 2006) a major challenge for states and governments is how to govern and steer these networks. Moreover, issues such as social diversity and complexity as well as rising political cynicism and social demands for more inclusive forms of decision making have also been seen as new challenges to the centralized and hierarchical states (Sorensen, 2006). Rethinking the emergent issues, the governance theories in some ways have moved from the "hollowing out" thesis to "bringing government back in" by holding the concept of 'meta-governance' (Rhodes, 2012).

Meta-governance implies that the state plays a key role in the oversight, steering and coordination of governance arrangements and in mobilizing the requisite resources used in governance and that it takes into account the question of legitimacy and accountability, what is in question of present governance (Bell & Hindmore, 2011). Basically, the concept of meta-governance is concerned with how political authorities are engaged in promoting and guiding the self-organization of governance systems though rules, organizational knowledge, institutional tactics and other political strategies (Whitehead, 2003).

Meta-governance is necessarily a key function of the state because it alone has the ability to assign the rules and resources on which all forms of governance depend. In particular government is a unique actor in any political arena because it maintains a continuing role for hierarchical regime (Whitehead, 2003). In this context, meta-governance can be denoted as 'self-organizing networks' (Rhodes, 2012) which operates 'under the shadow of hierarchy.' (Whitehead, 2003). Bell and Hindmoor (2011) see meta-governance as 'capacity of state' which increases the governability of state. They say that governability requires some key components- centralized decision making, strong administrative apparatus, fiscal resources, policy instrument and legitimacy.

The concept of meta-governance is relatively new approach in governance system (Bell & Hindmore, 2011). Whitehead (2003) argues that meta-governance substantially differs from the notion of governance. The fundamental difference is that the former draws attention to the process, on the other hand, the later focuses explicitly on the practices and procedures that secure governmental influence, command and control within governance regime. He also argues that meta-governance provides a way of exploring new articulations of state power especially under a shift from top down approach of rule to more cooperative modes of governance. That is why Kooiman & Jentoft (2009) denote meta-governance as third order governance (though Rhodes (2011) considers it second wave of governance), which is conducted through the structure of network relations, the process of consensus building and the outcomes of joint problem solving (Sorensen, 2006; Dryzek, 2000).

Meta-governance is seen as 'the governance of governance' and the purpose of it is to create some form of coordination, coherence and integration in the fragmented structure of network governance without undermining the autonomy, engagement and self-regulation in governance network (Sorensen, 2006). By this, meta-governance provides an analytical tool to analyze the network governance where both horizontal and hierarchical networks of power are developed (Rhodes, 2011). On the basis of hierarchical structures and self-coordination, Sorensen (2006) identifies four distinct ways by which meta-governance can be exercised- hands-off framing, hands-off storytelling, hands-off facilitation and hands-on participation. Such types of arrangement help to understand-

- how negotiation and political struggles associated with governance are played out, and
- how interdependencies between hierarchical intervention and local political coordination are structured.

From the above discussion it can be summarized, 'meta-governance' as a way of enhancing coordinated governance in a fragmented political system based on a high degree of autonomy for a plurality of self governing networks and institutions (Bell & Hindmore, 2011; Sorensen, 2006). It is an indirect form of governing that is exercised by influencing various process of self-governance (Sorensen, 2006) and an indirect means of

performing regulation of the self-regulation both at the macro-level of societal governance and at the micro-level of network management (Bell & Hindmore, 2011).

Meta-governance: way to exercise

Balancing environmental, economic and social objectives requires coordinated effort from different sectors (McIntyre-Mills & Vries, 2011). Sustainable development depends on the efforts of several sectors like different level of government, conservationist, agriculture, and forestry regional and economic development and landuse planning. The policy areas have different regional and local institutional bases, thus it requires policy integration between different levels of government as well as policy sectors. It also requires participation from local people, commercial actors and other organizations related to the particular area. The composition of network is defined by its participants and if the composition grants the decision making power to all recipients, and then the governance moves toward meta-governance (Bell and Hindmore, 2011).

This essay examined a case study for understanding how meta-governance supports decision making in a democratic arena. The '*Setesdal Vesthei- Ryfylkeheneine*' a protected mountain landscape area in southwest Norway, covers eight municipalities of three Counties. This landscape is declared as a nature protection site chiefly because this area is a home of wild reindeer. Moreover, a rare scenic beauty gives it more weight to conservationist argument.

The rural area is predominantly used for agriculture, fishing and hunting by the local communities. This area is also famous for as a tourist sight and outdoor recreation such as skiing, and hiking. These activities together with hydropower production threaten the vulnerable alpine environment, including wildlife and ecosystem.

The central government took a plan to protect the area and introduced Nature Conservation Act in 1989 which was opposed by the local actors including local politicians, and industries from agriculture, forestry and tourist. Their effort to prevent conservation in accordance with the Act was unsuccessful. However, they lobbied to the parliament MPs and gained support from them for a pilot project for local management. The project began in 1991 and continued up to 1998. Through this project the municipalities were given to power to manage the area in accordance with the principle of protected landscapes and rules laid down by the Royal Decree.

The power to manage the nature conservation regulations was delegated to each of the eight municipalities which received grants to cover their administrative costs. Their main responsibility was to decide on applications for exemption from the ban on land development motorized traffic. At the same time, as a part of the project, the municipalities were asked to develop management plan which was approved by each municipality and by the Directorate for Nature Management, which is one of the environmental policy agencies at central level in Norway. An inter-municipal company

was set up to support the project and to improve the knowledge base. At the same time, an advisory group, consisting of the chairs of three municipal councils, the county governor and the affected county councils, was formed to ensure the legitimacy. Initially only the landowners' interest were represented but later it expanded by including local reindeer committee, the Norwegian trekking association and the hydropower producers. An open meeting was held once in a year to ensure transparency. The municipalities laid emphasis on negotiating with all the members and observers of the advisory group and on receiving a consensus on the plan within the group. Thus both private stakeholders and national, regional and local authorities were given a role in developing local nature management policy. The management plan dealt with sustainable business development as well as nature conservation. It was approved in 2004. From this case, it is evident that the policy has been carried out through negotiation and exchange. But the cooperation was directed by the parliament, in other words clearly 'under the shadow of hierarchy' (Hovik & Vabo, 2005).

This kind of top- down governance approach is termed as meta-governance. Here, instead of hierarchical tools of government, various modes of coordination such as framing, facilitation and negotiation are employed (Hovik & Vabo, 2005). The main aim of meta-governance is to secure cooperation and coordination in complex situations- where market and hierarchy are likely to fail (Kjaer, 2004).

Meta-governance: searching for democracy

Under condition of governance, a multitude of private and public actors participate actively in governing process- through self-governance and through meta-governance (Sorensen, 2006). But when the focus on democracy, the question is how the power of democratically elected representatives could be transferred to relatively self-regulating networks and how legitimacy, accountability and equality, as core value of democracy, can be achieved by exercising meta-governance. The answer of this question completely depends on two issues- who exercises meta-governance and the manner in which it is exercised.

Bake & Stoker (2012) argue that the network, works in meta-governance, increases the responsiveness of public administration. The case study reveals that network can localize political involvement and increase the responsiveness which was occurred by the members of parliament.

The case study also illustrates the manner by which the emergence of demands for greater stakeholders included during the policy formulation. The solutions came up from bottom-up process namely local councils to the state council and informal planning network where cooperation is seen among the County Councils, local government and interest groups and union companies. However, this practice undermines the traditional political institutions and organization to include ongoing consultation and negotiation with wide range of interests and actors.

It is growing concern that participation from stakeholders diminishes the legitimacy and accountability of policy. But Kjaer (2004) argues that participation from stakeholder in the policy network (i.e. meta-governance network) increases the legitimacy and accountability. In line with that, Hovik and Vabo (2005) identify two ways that can reinforce democratic legitimacy in exercising meta-governance. First, by linking the network decisions to decisions made by elected councils. From the case study, it is found that at first decisions had been taken by the local councils and then those were linked and approved by the decision of regional government or state council. Here the interests of affected inhabitants were presented through the local councils which increased the accountability of the authority as well. Secondly, legitimacy can be secured by increasing the number of participants in the policy making. This includes all or many of the affected parties, not those required to formulate effective solutions. In *Setesdal Case*, initially in the advisory committee only landowner participation was ensured, but it expanded by time including various committees working in that area, which ultimately increased the legitimacy of the policy network.

Considering democratic theories, Dryzek (2000) argues liberal democratic theory cannot create proper foundation understanding the network. Liberal democracy is inherently linked to the public sector with limited scope and intervention is reduced mainly regulation and provision of infrastructure. Recognizing the complexity of the world, the democratic theories have taken into account much more active citizenry and broaden the understanding of the proper rules of administrative agencies and local government in running various affairs (Bogason & Masso, 2006; Rhodes, 2011). In the perspective of meta-governance, participatory democracy and deliberative democracy can correct the liberal democratic theory by arguing for enhanced deliberation and consensus in developing alternatives and making political dimensions (Bogason & Masso, 2006). In participatory democracy, democracy is participation. Participation is desirable because it educates people, gives citizen control and generate identity (McIntyre-Mills and Vries, 2011). Deliberative Democracy (Dryzek, 2000; Rhodes, 2012) emphasizes on "talk-centric" aspect of democracy which recognizes the collective practices within a constitutional framework. In exercising meta-governance, both the approaches of democracy is considered, at the same time decisions are very closely linked to the liberal perspective of democracy because democratic legitimacy is achieved by the participation of elected government.

'Who governs in the metagovernance'- meta-governance sees state at the central point of policy making. It requires that politicians regulate self-regulation in the democratic fundamentals. Sorensen (2006) in her study discusses the role of politicians as state actors in the Danish municipal context. She finds that Danish Municipal politicians view themselves as metagovernor rather than sovereign. In this context, Hirst (2000) indentifies the possibilities for state to perform central part- first, as a constructional authority state holds the ability to distribute power, responsibility between itself, regional and local level, and civil society; second, state represents its population more credibly than any other body. In the given context, private actors such as tourist association,

reindeer committee advocates their self interest but the local authorities promote the interests of their communities. However, central capacity does not always meet the challenges of meta-governance. A study of Bell & Park (2006) about water management plan in New South Wales, provides a picture that the wrong selection of participants in the government arrangements, without specification of goals and confusion over the rules to authority-sharing and decision-making arrangements caused all consternation among participants. This was a case where authorities were unskilled, under-resourced, and over-stretched in attempting to meta-govern governance.

Meta governance: promises and problems for democracy

Effective meta-governance provides benefits both for the participants in any governance mechanism and for the broader public (Bogason & Masso, 2006). First, the increased space for citizen self-governance increases more avenues of influence than the traditional institutions of representative democracy. Second, this increases the chances that each citizen obtains influence on the decision making process by raising their voice. So that meta-governance ensures the human rights. Third, it increases the plural ways of life of the society. Fourth, continuous access of citizen to the government and decision making process increases the competencies, skill, and efficacy of citizen. Finally, the larger participation of citizen in the governing process strengthens the social and political sense of community which is seen in the '*Setesdal Conservation Case*'.

However, all is not good in meta-governance for democracy. The fault line covers- firstly, politician experience lack of power in the decision making process as decision making is left to the self-governing actors involved in the process. Secondly, high degree of fragmentation and informality of the governing process reduce the publicity in the decision making process. Thirdly, it creates avenue for the elite groups to exercise more power in large and finally, self-governing actors might develop a strong sense of internal community that might undermine the construction of a broader, crosscutting sense of community.

Conclusion

Meta-governance is one of the new governance mode that carries the notion of 'bringing government back in' instead of the notion of 'governance without government'. The article illustrates that government is needed alongside governance to achieve balanced development in situations of confronting goals between local and central level. Dryzek (2000) suggests that states are more likely to be able to receive their goals if the interests of the state and society are advanced 'collaboratively rather than competitively' and the relationship of government and non state actors ought to be viewed as positive-sum rather than zero-sum (Bell and Hindmore, 2011).

From the study, it is revealed that meta-governance framework creates conditions which enable policy making effective and efficient. In the democratic perspective, it also undermines the problem of legitimacy, accountability of governance, though it not panacea for solving all problem. For effective enforcement of metagovernance it requires strong, resourceful, knowledgeable and skilled central government and private actors.

To conclude, this article intends to quote Bell and Hindmoor (2011)

'the exercise of meta-governance results in a continuing role for hierarchical government in any governance regime ----- even when government choose to govern through market, networks and community engagement rather than through hierarchy, they retain a key role in governance process".

Meta-governance leads us to emphasize the ways in which the relationships government builds can enhance its policy capacity thus it is in other sense a 'meta policy making'.

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