

Conference
Centre de Recherche en Civilisation Britannique – EA 4399 CREW

Call for Papers

28 March 2014

Institut du Monde Anglophone
5 rue de l'école de médecine
75006 Paris, France

Governance and public policies in the contemporary United Kingdom

The purpose of this conference is to study the notion of governance in a specific time and space context: the United Kingdom from 1997 to 2014. The evolution of governance in British public policies will be questioned. Participants will be invited to rethink the transformations of public and State action, especially in the sectors that have been reformed (health, housing, education, energy and urban policy), faced with the imperatives of “devolution”, pressure from international trade dynamics, and the growing influence of the European Union and intergovernmental agencies. The forthcoming general elections provide an opportunity to take stock of the research on public policy management in the field of British studies.

Argument

‘Governance is necessarily incomplete and as a necessary consequence must always fail’
(Malpas & Wickham, 1995, 40).

Over the past 20 years, the notion of governance has risen to prominence in the field of public policy studies. According to Mark Bevir et R.A.W Rhodes (2003 : 9), governance “refer[s] to the changing boundary between the British state and the civil society, in particular to the ways in which the informal authority of networks constitutes, supplements and supplants the formal authority of the state”. In other words, the notion of governance has emerged as a modernised version of government. Governance therefore refers to the transformation of the hierarchical, rigid, state-centered decision-making structure associated with past forms of government, to ever-more fluid structures integrating a wider array of actors - notably from the civil society. The age of governance has often been narrowly interpreted as the end of the State’s authority. It has indeed

been argued that the increasing use of governance has been congruent with a gradual erosion of State involvement in public policy-making and implementation processes (a hollowed-out State).

In the UK, the Thatcher years most forcefully illustrate such a trend. The logics of the private sphere have indeed been applied to the public sector (New Public Management Theory –NPM), hence entailing a reassessment of the role of the State within the British society as a whole. This subsequently caused a progressive withdrawal of the British State embodied by a shift in power from a waning public sector to private partners, who from then on, came to be in charge of implementing political decisions through Public-Private Partnerships (PPP). Generally speaking, “steering” and “rowing” became two clearly distinct processes of public action (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992, 20). Such an evolution fuelled some critical analyses stemming from radical geography or neo-Marxist theory which contended that governance was being used not only as a means to justify a gradual dismantling of the State, but also as “the acceptable face of tax cuts” (Stoker, 1998, 18). The possibly negative effects of those new lines of public management have also been put to the fore by many research works (Jessop, 2001).

Conversely, the empowerment of citizens and private partners, induced by their increased involvement in the public policy-making process, has been seen by others as paving the way for a more participatory form of democracy. From that point of view, the civil society would appear as having more sway over the decision-making process thanks to forums, public inquiries and public consultation processes at the local, regional or national levels. Those interpretations therefore consider governance as a way to restore the balance of power between the State, citizens and private stakeholders (Bernard & Wilkin, 2009).

If the body of literature on public policies henceforth hinges on this critical notion of governance, is it still the most relevant tool to analyse the changes recently experienced by the British political system? Or hasn't it become an umbrella or a “blanket term to represent a change in the nature or meaning of government” (Bevir & Rhodes, 2003, 45)? It now seems appropriate to reflect not only on the modalities or consequences of governance, but also on the notion in itself which remains hazy and possibly hackneyed due to too frequent a use. Governance is also likely to be manipulated for political purposes.

This conference will also aim at identifying potentially regular patterns in terms of goals, mechanisms and instruments which would outline a possible British model of governance. On the other hand, motley public policies would mean that public action is actually quite fragmented. British public policies would thus be shaped by the nature of the sector they target and not the other way round.

During this conference, several examples of British public policies will be looked into and compared. In a historical approach, abstracts may also broach the origins of the notion and the institutional changes it triggered under the New-Labour and Coalition governments. Proposals

may also provide critical hindsight on the issues of accountability, democracy, or also the redefinition of the State-private stakeholder paradigm.

Session 1

In this session, the origins of governance will be studied, as well as the way in it has evolved since the 1997 Labour victory. How did the notion of governance come to replace that of government, without necessarily superseding it? The evolution of public policy-making and their implementation under the Conservative governments (1979-1997) has been analysed as symptomatic of a crisis of the State, whose scope for action was significantly limited (*roll back*) (Heinelt & Kübler, 2005). The involvement of the civil society and the private sector in the decision-making process has continued under the New Labour governments (1997-2010), even though the State retains a central role (*roll out*) (Bell & Hindmoor, 2009). Contributors are, for instance, invited to compare and contrast the various governments' periods of action and/or inaction when faced with the new challenges in the management of public policy (Kober-Smith, Leydier and Sowel, 2010).

Session 2

In this session, a necessary distinction will be drawn between different types of actors, either institutional or from the private or the third sectors, while the impact of the national, regional and local scales on these actors will be taken into account. Recent publications (Rhodes, Hajer, Bevir) have shown the growing involvement of the third sector through network building in the framing and implementation of public policies. The empowerment of these actors could reinforce the thesis of a decline in State power to the advantage of greater participatory democracy. On the contrary, other studies (Anderson, Newman, Bell, Hindmoor) minimise the scope of that participation and emphasise institutional complexity.

Session 3

The dichotomous vision of governance as either a "success" or a "failure" can be considered more normative than analytical. It thus seems necessary to go back to a more nuanced definition of governance. Some doubts have been raised regarding the actual efficiency of that organisational model, because – among other things – of some failure of citizen participation, as well as the implicit continuing supremacy of the market and the government. The limitations of the theoretical tool will be explored. Would it be more relevant to consider using other notions such as metagovernance or mutual interdependence?

Submission

The deadline for abstract submission is **15 January 2014**.

Authors of accepted abstracts will be notified by email at the **beginning of February 2014**.

Talks can be delivered in either English or French. Abstract proposals can be written in either language. Proposals from various fields of study will be welcome. Abstracts must be sent by email in Word or pdf formats to governance.workshop.paris3@gmail.com. Abstracts should not exceed 450 words and should include the following information: a title, the session to which the abstract is submitted, and the contact details of the author(s) (name(s), affiliation, a short biography and email address).

The conference will take place at : Institut du Monde Anglophone, 5 rue de l'école de médecine, 75006 Paris, France.

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