

Stretching Concepts Too Far? Multi-Level Governance, Policy Transfer and the Politics of Scale in South East Europe¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that the literature on multi-level governance, dominated by Western European and U.S. writers and research settings, suffers from methodological and epistemological limitations. The concept, when refracted through the lens of lived political experiences in South East Europe, appears in serious need of revision and refinement. The paper goes on to argue that both notions of policy transfer and of the complex politics of scale of interventions in time, place and space, need to be added in order to complement the basic multi-level governance concept. Only in this way is it possible to capture something of the complexity of modes of governance in South East Europe.

Introduction

The concept of multi-level governance has become extraordinarily fashionable in recent years. The literature derives from mainstream political science, or perhaps more accurately from “within the broad discipline of Political Studies” (Bache and Flinders 2004a, 1), and particularly from British and U.S. studies of the influence of the European Union. However, if it is the case that the concept of multi-level governance provides “a unique opportunity to foster and develop a deeper understanding of the complementarity of a range of theoretical and empirical models and tools drawn from a number of interrelated disciplines and subdisciplines” (Bache and Flinders 2004a, 1), this has in many ways been, thus far at least, something of a ‘missed opportunity.’

The notion of ‘complementarity’ in the above quote plays down the innovative, invigorating and challenging perspectives which can be brought to the study of multi-level governance by political sociology (see Nash (ed.) 2000), political economy (see Gilpin, 2001), political anthropology (see Vincent (ed.) 2002), and political geography (see Jones, Jones, and Woods 2004). In particular, the way in which the literature remains dominated by a peculiar ‘realist modernism’ untouched by the ‘cultural turn’ in much of the social sciences in the last decade is a surprising, and a disappointing, limitation of the mainstream political science approach. Here, the cultural

turn, to oversimplify somewhat, is taken to refer to “the ways in which cultural analysis might enrich our grasp of politics, policies and practices” (Clarke 2004, 47), emphasising the discursive and symbolic features of social formations as “a rhetorical resource in social and political claims-making” (Clarke 2004, 31).

The cultural turn, whilst perhaps not beginning with, and certainly not ending with, Foucault, would not have the influence it has today without Foucault’s work and, in particular, his seminal notion of ‘governmentality’ or the ‘rationality of government’ (Foucault 1991). This, in part at least, underpins a widening of the notion of “government” to that of “governance” (see Lemke 2002), and allows for the study of “how policies work as instruments of governance, as ideological vehicles, and as agents for constructing subjectivities and organizing people within systems of power and authority” (Shore and Wright 1997, 35).

This article begins with an overview of the potentials and pitfalls of the ‘multi-level governance’ concept as it has developed historically and contextually. It then focuses on the concept of ‘policy transfer’ as a framework for a more nuanced understanding of the international movement of ideas and practices. A third section focuses on the importance of recent work on the politics of scale, which treats scale not as fixed but, rather, as contingent, complex, and socially constructed. The concluding section applies and adapts the study of modes of governance, policy transfer, and the politics of scale to South East Europe. The complex, shifting configuration of actors, agencies, themes, and initiatives found in the region stretches the ‘mainstream’ multi-level governance literature to breaking point. The article concludes by highlighting the need for a much more complex approach to multi-level, multi-actor, multi-sited political and policy arenas in the region.

Multi-level Governance

The main value of the concept of multi-level governance is that it allows for an understanding of complexity at and between levels. In this sense, the vertical notion of multi-level governance, including but also seemingly “above” and “below” the nation state, goes alongside the horizontal notion of complex governance to address relationships between state and non-state actors, and new forms of public-private partnerships. This goes beyond a linear approach to the study of international organisations on the national polity and on specific thematic areas such as social policy. A multi-level governance perspective forces one to address processes of the supranationalisation, the decentralisation and the dispersal of authority as potentially coterminous, rather than engage in very narrow, linear, debates about the influence, or lack of influence, of international agencies.

Tracing the utilisation of the concept historically is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is interesting to see changes in its use over time. In particular, some of the earliest usages of the term by the American political scientist Gary Matthews, now appear quite limited. In an early paper, Matthews defined multi-level governance as:

“... a system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers” (Matthews 1993, 392) [in which] “supranational, national, regional and local governments are enmeshed in territorially overarching policy networks” (Ibid., 402-3).

The quote, while emphasising vertical complexity, focuses on “governments” (hence the strange notion of supranational governments), but does not address the existence of two different regional tiers, making a distinction only between the national and the local, whereas, insofar as this paper addresses South East Europe, the construction of a regional or sub-regional space between the global supranational and the national is extraordinarily important.

The following quote from Bache and Flinders perhaps comes closest to capturing the continued relevance of the concept:

“While multi-level governance remains a contested concept, its broad appeal reflects a shared concern with increased complexity, proliferating jurisdictions, the rise of non-state actors, and the related challenges to state power”. (Bache and Flinders 2004a, 4-5).

They outline four key dimensions which the concept allows us to think about more deeply. All are relevant to South East Europe. The first is the increased participation of non-state actors. Insofar as the transition in Central and Eastern Europe, and the wars of the Yugoslav succession, came at a time of increased focus on non-state actors, it is not surprising that a large literature has emerged focusing on the role of international and domestic non-state actors, in the context of the importation of Western models of ‘civil society’ and ‘democratization’ to the region (cf. *inter alia* Sampson 1996, 2003; Devic 2001, 2004; and Stubbs 1997, 1998, 2003).

The second is the need to move away from understanding decision-making in terms of “discrete territorial levels” and, instead, the need to conceptualise it in terms of “complex overlapping networks” (Bache and Flinders 2004b, 197). While there has been some work on the nature of transition utilising political anthropological approaches in Central and Eastern Europe, which are often reliant on Bourdieu’s analytical framework, (see *inter alia* Hann (ed.) 2001; Verdery 1996; Eyal, Szelenyi, and Townsley 1998; Burawoy and Verdery (eds.) 1999), and overviews have been produced on the role of informal networks and of social capital (Mihaylova 2004), there has been relatively little work on overlapping networks of decision-making in South East Europe (a rare exception is Deacon and Stubbs 1998, on social policy in Bosnia-Herzegovina).

The third refers to the way the multi-level governance concept allows for an understanding of the transformation in the role of the state towards new strategies of co-ordination, steering and networking. In part because of the specific features of state-making in post-socialist Central and South East Europe, and in part because of the rise of particular kinds of nationalism, there have been few in-depth studies of changing state forms and

administrations. However, some of the best literature on transition, nationalism and emergency contexts has hinted at the linkage with wider shifts in state forms (see *inter alia* Pugh 2001; Duffield 1996).

Fourthly, the concept forces an understanding of the ways in which traditional notions of democratic accountability are being undermined and challenged. The challenge to accountability has been raised in a variety of texts on post-communist transition (cf. *inter alia* Wedel 2000; Carrothers 2004). However, and this is the case for almost all of the literature cited above, none of these texts relate the crisis of accountability to the development of multi-level governance. In other words, the double silence is complete: the multi-level governance literature is silent on the specifics of South East Europe, and even the best literature on governance in South East Europe is silent on the concept of multi-level governance.

This is a crucial omission because it underscores the fact that the concept of multi-level governance does not derive from political, policy, and practical realities in South East Europe. Indeed, it has hardly ever been utilised in studies of the region. Consequently, when the concept is stretched in its geographical focus, its usefulness remains an open question, and two paradoxical outcomes are likely to emerge. The first, taking the multi-level governance concept as a kind of independent variable, might well overstate the path dependency of South East Europe towards Europeanisation, focusing on the role and impact of the European Union at the expense of other supranational actors. The second, taking South East Europe as a fixed entity, might suggest that the concept of multi-level governance needs to be deepened and widened to make it applicable to a complex region Matthewed by governance particularities or even anomalies. Both in general terms, and in terms of the specifics of this encounter, I would argue that there are three inter-linked problems with the concept of multi-level governance as it has been utilised in much of the literature to date. These problems are: 'premature normativism', 'abstract modelling', and 'rehashed neo-pluralism'.

Premature Normativism

The slippage from seeking to understand *how* multi-level governance works to seeking to judge normatively *how well* multi-level governance works is highly pronounced in the literature. Whilst Matthews and Hooghe, for example, suggest that “there is no agreement about how multi-level governance should be organized”, they seem to believe that such an agreement should be achievable and they accept uncritically the presumption that governance has become (and should be) multi-jurisdictional (Matthews and Hooghe 2004, 16, *our italics*). This is a very dubious elision since what governance has become does not imply what it should be unless one is tied to a path-dependant functional determinism. Moreover, what governance should be, whilst a legitimate question in normative political science, is of a different order to questions of what governance *is*. Within this elision, it is only another small step to a prescriptive approach, in which how well multi-level governance works leads to notions of how to make it work *better*.

In this context, the literature seeks not only to understand Europeanisation and the role of the European Union, it also discusses how

European Union itself has explicitly sought to explore its own commitment to multi-level governance as a privileged and ‘best possible’ form of governance. Increasingly, through its programmes of large-scale funding of network-based social scientific research, the European Union has also contributed to this normativism within the social scientific research community. Inevitably, as a major funder of research, the European Union is interested in improving its own multi-level governance architectures and mechanisms.

Abstract Modelling

The problem of abstract modelling is an extension of the difficulties caused because the close ties which the literature has to mainstream political science tend to make authors ignorant or dismissive of the cultural turn in the social sciences. The “modelling business,” popular in particular approaches to social policy and ‘welfare regime’ theories (on the welfare modelling business, see Powell and Barrientos 2002), as well as in the multi-level governance literature, has both general and specific limitations, facing practical as well as more fundamental epistemological and methodological objections.

One of the most basic practical problems relates to the fact that models tend to be only two-dimensional, with two variables, producing four possible governance (ideal) types. For example, Newman’s four approaches to governance (self-governance, open systems, hierarchy, and rational goal) are based on two continua: degree of centralisation/integration and degree of continuity/order as opposed to innovation/change (Newman 2001, 34). However, it is unlikely that there are the only two possible axes because these categories already contain more than one variable (assuming that order is not the same as continuity, and vertical integration is not the same as centralisation). If a third axis were introduced, rather than a two-dimensional, four-fold typology, one would have a three-dimensional Zwicky box with at least eight possible ideal type governance forms, and more if we envisage not just the extremes but some intermediate types (cf. Manning 2004).

More importantly, authors who focus on complexity and contradiction see the growth of hybrid forms of governance consisting of elements of two or more of the ideal types as not only possible but increasingly likely. Rosenau’s notion of ‘fragemegration’, which combines the concepts of fragmentation and integration, is a case in point (Rosenau 2004). In its original form, and certainly when applied to South East Europe, the entire multi-level governance edifice stands or falls on its ability to understand and deal with change that can be profound, so the idea that change is uni-linear rather than multi-linear, is problematic. While space precludes a detailed explication here, the most interesting aspect of changes of governance forms in South East Europe is the possibility of the simultaneous existence of aspects of all four of Newman’s models of governance, plus many others which she barely considers.

Many of the other classic typologies of multi-level governance in the literature have similar limitations, making their relevance to South East Europe tangential at best. Matthews and Hooghe’s often cited distinction

between two forms of governance, Type I (consisting of general purpose jurisdictions, non-intersecting memberships and a limited number of relatively stable levels, as found in most national and sub-national arrangements) and Type II (more task-specific jurisdictions, with intersecting memberships, infinite levels, and flexible design, more likely to be found in international and cross-border arrangements) is relevant here because it merges modelling with premature normativism. The typology offers contrasting visions of “how multi-level governance should be organized” (Matthews and Hooghe 2004, 16), with the somewhat banal conclusion that the two types of governance are ‘complementary’ (ibid., 29).

The relationship between abstract theoretical modelling and specific comparative cases is a key question here. Some of the best work is more inductive than deductive. For example, Blatter’s typology of cross-border institutional arrangements, based on detailed studies of four border regions in Western Europe and North America, posits a key distinction between the former’s ‘multi-level’ institutional nature, and the latter’s ‘multi-polity’ framework (Blatter 2001). However, the author then tends to posit these as the basis for deductive work elsewhere rather than stressing the need for more inductive approaches across space and time.

In their concluding chapter of *Multi-Level Governance*, Bache and Flinders (2004b) make a crucial point, based on Sartori’s distinction between ‘conceptual travelling’ and ‘conceptual stretching’ (Sartori 1970, 1035). Previous models of typologies of multi-level governance derive from Western Europe. They seem less likely to be able to travel, i.e., to be effectively applied to new cases, than to be ‘stretched’ and distorted, sometimes to the breaking point, at least when encountering governance forms in South East Europe. The paradox is that the concept, precisely because of its theoretical vagueness, can travel, but the rigid modelling, theoretically far more precise, cannot.

Rehashed Neo-pluralism

While it is certainly true, as Bache and Flinders suggest, that the concept of multi-level governance acts as a counterpoint to ‘state-centric approaches’ to governance (Bache and Flinders 2004b, 203), the danger is that fundamental questions about the structures of power relations, often over-emphasised in statist theories, are downplayed in multi-level governance approaches. At times, the concept appears to amount to little more than a rehashed neo-pluralism in which societies are seen as composed of diverse interests, with power distributed along various dimensions. Of course, critical neo-pluralism does not rule out the possibility of interest coalitions forming, including strong links between the state and organized business, and it is not as optimistic regarding democratisation as is classical pluralist theory. Nevertheless, insofar as the concept of multi-level governance is based on a renewed neo-pluralism, in which nebulous networks and policy communities take their place alongside older interest groups, there are, again, certain general and specific problems presented.

What is, perhaps, crucial is that most of the multi-level governance literature, with the notable exception of the work of Bob Jessop (2002a,

2004), is strangely silent on the issue of the implication of globalisation and the continued importance of neo-liberal discourses and practices. The debate within the globalisation literature regarding neo-liberalism is a complex and contentious one, with some authors far too willing to present the neo-liberal project as unchanging, all-powerful, and universal, with even small cracks in the edifice of Western European welfare states described as gaping neo-liberal holes (for example, see Keskitalo 2004).

My approach follows closely that of John Clarke who has argued in his most recent book that while ‘neo-liberal globalisation’ is the dominant form of contemporary globalisation, any attempt to understand it as ‘a hegemonic project’ has to address “both the logics and limits of neo-liberalism, and the different ways in which people and places live with/in—and against—neo-liberalism” (Clarke 2004, 89). He is profoundly interested, therefore, in ‘uneven neo-liberalisms’ which vary in space and time and which are able to enter ‘national-popular formations’ only in and through alliances. He is also concerned with ‘assemblages of political discourses’ which inevitably change, shape, and produce ‘hybrids, paradoxes, tensions and incompatibilities’ rather than “coherent implementations of a unified discourse and plan” (ibid., 94).

What are needed then are ethnographic and anthropological studies of ‘grounded globalizations’ (Burawoy 2000, 341) exploring ‘forces, connections and imaginations’ (ibid; 344), because global forms are always articulated in specific places and times, or as Collier and Ong would have it, “territorialised in assemblages” which “define new material, cultural and discursive relationships” (Collier and Ong 2005, 4). Following Tickell and Peck’s seminal work on the topic (Tickell and Peck 2003), if we consider ‘neo-liberalisation’ as a *process* whose outcomes are “contingent and geographically specific—working themselves out in a non-necessary fashion across an uneven institutional landscape” (ibid.)—then South-Eastern Europe represents a particularly important example of this phenomenon.

Insofar as neo-liberalisation represents a ‘form of social rule’ (Graefe 2004), the silence regarding this phenomenon in the multi-level governance literature is astonishing and deeply problematic because it ignores the complex ways in which pressures from above and below the nation-state can themselves contribute to neo-liberalisation and new forms of social rule. Investigating forms of governance in South East Europe through the lens of neo-liberalisation would acknowledge the importance of an intellectual “common sense,” in part produced and reproduced by a large number of liberal and neo-liberal think tanks in the region, which argues that rather than ‘blaming ‘neo-liberalism’ for ‘mistakes in the last decade’, one needs to recognise that “liberal economic policy was never given a trial in a consistent manner.” This certainly seems to be the case in Croatia, where “the liberal programme did not fail during the first decade of the transition—it has yet to be tried” (Šonje and Vujčić 2003, 245-6).

Jessop’s work, on the other hand, seeks to outline a ‘strategic-relational’ account of governance, with a particular emphasis on meta-governance, or ‘the governance of governance’, as a way out of the problems of both ‘statist’ and ‘governance’ frameworks (Jessop 2004, 48). His emphasis on the development of multi-level meta-governance as ‘a reflexive

process', and on various kinds of meta-governance failures (Ibid., 70-71) is in keeping with the approach here, and it is worthy of further exploration in South East Europe. At times, however, Jessop retreats to a functionalist framework regarding the link between governance and the reproduction of capitalist relations, and his interesting excursus on the nature of the European Union in *The Future of the Capitalist State* (Jessop 2002b) is prone to deductive rather than inductive reasoning. It also tends to be pitched at a high level of generality, lacking the contextual detail which an ethnographic approach would bring.

A related set of critiques of the multi-level governance literature concerns the very different nature of state forms in South East Europe. The neo-pluralist theory of the state, as balancing competing interest groups, does not fit the complexities and paradoxes of 'failed', 'weak', 'authoritarian,' and 'captured/clientelist' states in South East Europe. All of these concepts are extremely familiar in the literature on international relations, and they have been utilised in explaining political processes in many countries and regions. Yet, presumably as a result of a Western European/European Union bias, they appear to have been ignored by the multi-level governance literature. The nature of the wars of the post-Yugoslav succession; the existence of a neo-protectorate in the province of Kosovo/a and a complex governance arrangement in Bosnia-Herzegovina—just to state the most obvious cases—suggests that the broadly consensual notion of multi-level governance, framed in terms of technical questions of 'co-ordination', needs to be radically re-assessed if it is to have any wider applicability and to remain an analytical framework capable of being applied to a wider range of cases and situations. In addition, and crucially in the context of a wider perspective on globalisation, the existence of a wide range of supranational agencies and forms in South East Europe, above and beyond the European Union, suggests that questions of competition among supranational agencies and of diverse strategic bilateral and multilateral interests and alliances need to be addressed. But in its distancing from an international relations framework, the current multi-level governance literature is extremely weak on this point.

Policy Transfer

One way of overcoming some of the limitations regarding the concept of multi-level governance may be to address an emerging literature on policy transfer. Bob Jessop has systematically addressed the two themes by focusing on the "complex trend towards the internationalization of policy regimes," including the role of "foreign agents and institutions as sources of policy ideas, policy design, and implementation" (Jessop 2004, 66). This remains, however, somewhat abstract and highly structuralist, with little or no attention to the process of policy transfer, which operates at and between levels.

Like the multi-level governance literature, policy transfer offers a framework rather than a model or theory, and it builds on earlier work on the international movement of ideas and practices, particularly utilising concepts such as policy diffusion and lesson-drawing (see Hulme 2004, Rose 1991,

and Bennett 1991). Dolowitz and his collaborators have been particularly influential, defining policy transfer thus:

“The process by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system (past or present) is used in the development of policies, arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system” (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000, 5).

Many of the problems, particularly regarding abstract modelling and premature normativism applied to the multi-level governance literature can also be applied to policy transfer, with its focus on push factors (along a continua from *coercion* to *voluntarism*), and pull factors (a continuum from *isomorphy* to *immunity*). Nevertheless, the research framework developed by Dolowitz and others appears to offer a conceptual apparatus better equipped to study specific localised processes within general contexts. They have elaborated a list of key questions. Why do actors engage in policy transfer? Who are the key actors involved in the policy transfer process? What is transferred? From where are lessons drawn? What are the different degrees of transfer? What restricts or facilitates the policy transfer process? How is the project of policy transfer related to policy success or policy failure? (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000, 8) These seem both operational and logical, if somewhat linear and ultimately normative.

Utilising an ethnographic approach, it is possible to conceive policy transfer as a process consisting of a series of uneven, complex flows of ideas, of people, and of projects. The insights provided by Janine Wedel, based on her case study of U.S. aid to Russia in the early 1990s, offers several pertinent middle-range concepts designed to study these processes. While she prefers the metaphor of foreign aid as a “transmission belt,” her focus is on “the interface between donors and the recipients” and “what happens when differing systems interact” (Wedel 2004, 154-5). She addresses the importance in these encounters of multiplex networks (*ibid.*, 165), where players know each other and interact in a variety of capacities, with multiple identities (which she terms ‘transidentities’), and in a variety of roles. Her tale is one of shifting and multiple agency, promoted in part by what she terms ‘flex organisations’, which have a “chameleon-like, multipurpose character,” with actors “able to play the boundaries” between the national and the international, the public and the private, the formal and the informal, the Matthewet and the bureaucratic, the state and the non-state, and even the legal and the illegal (*ibid.*, 167).

The study of policy transfer in South East Europe would be enriched greatly by an exploration of transidentities and flex organisations. This stress on ambiguity and fluidity should not, however, lead to a failure to consider power relations and the possibility of powerful brokerage or intermediary roles. One strand of the policy transfer literature is the ‘principal-agent’ model (cf Pollack 2003; Bartlett, 2005), which points to the complexity of aid relations and the possibility of *agents* who implement projects, working for

very different agendas to *principals*, or those who commission projects. As Bartlett suggests, methodologically:

“a case study approach is needed which would investigate the detailed interaction between the various principals and agents and identify the interactions and outcomes of individual cases with their own institutional, historical and political specificities” (Bartlett 2005).

Diane Stone’s work on think tanks and on global public policy networks provides another linkage between the policy transfer literature and multi-level governance. She argues that new, complex, forms of governance in general, and of “war, ethnic conflict, or a lack of central state capacity” in particular, “provide opportunity for local knowledge agencies such as universities and think tanks, as well as for foreign NGOs, consultants and development agencies, to shape policy developments” (Stone 2003, 43).

A concern with what Stone terms ‘shaping’ needs to hold onto the complexity of uneven flows and processes, as well as seeking to understand the shifting power relations, uneven capacities and political opportunities which need to be taken into account when addressing how policy developments are ‘shaped’. Kathryn Sikkink, working within social movement theory, has recently, for example, pointed to the importance of the existence of both transnational and domestic political opportunity structures (Sikkink 2005, 152), an insight applied by Ana Devic, in her study of NGOs in Kosovo/a, in terms of their ‘two facedness’ regarding ethnic nationalism (Devic 2004).

In periods of uncertainty, the ability to assert the possession of technicised, codified knowledge within a particular policy field is by no means a simple task. Unpicking the “multi-dimensional, confusing and contradictory” (Stubbs, 2004; 177) nature of policy transfers can be understood in terms of the ways in which codified knowledge, seen as globally applicable, and working through standards, techniques and “best practice,” becomes tacit knowledge through a series of ‘interpretative encounters’ (ibid.).

Finally, the study of policy transfer needs to encompass the “relatively undertheorized” dimension of ‘policy resistance’ (Bache and Taylor 2003, 283). Bache and Taylor’s own work on processes of reforming Kosovo/a’s Higher Education system, based on their own active participation as external experts, and drawing on contributions from anthropology and democratization studies, notably James C. Scott’s work (Scott 1987 and 1992), provides an excellent starting point. Scott’s conceptual repertoire, itself heavily derived from Goffman’s work (notably Goffman 1959), situational logics, multiple audiences, front stage and backstage performances, and scripts, which are utilised in a way which attempts to make sense of internal actors’ diverse strategies not only in terms of immediate interests but also with respect to the profound importance of historical legacies, experiences, and contexts.

Bache and Taylor’s ethnography is unfortunately not focused on the relationships between internal and external actors in any detail, much less on

“the existence of multiple international donors with competing objectives” (Bache and Taylor 2003, 298), other than in terms of the way this “increases the scope for domestic resistance” (ibid.). Nevertheless, the importance of description and analysis which serves “to highlight the sophistication of resistance strategies of apparently weak groups in the context of asymmetric interdependencies” (ibid., 284) is a valuable contribution to the policy transfer framework, worthy of being extended to other aspects of policy transfer in South East Europe.

The Politics of Scale

In many ways, the concept of multi-level governance relies on a taken-for-granted notion of geographical scales—supranational, national, and local as well as various regional scales. A different approach, a fusion of post-modernist and critical political geography, points to the contingency, complexity, and, above all, the socially and politically constructed nature of scale. This asserts that “far from neutral and fixed . . . geographical scales are the products of economic, political and social activities and relationships,” (Smith 1995) and that “scale is a contingent outcome of the tensions that exist between structural forces and the practices of human agents” (Marston 2000, 220).

Neil Brenner’s rigorous review of academic contributions which emphasise the politics of scale, suggests that:

“... the notion of a politics of scale refers to the production, reconfiguration or contestation of particular differentiations, orderings and hierarchies *among* geographical scales. ... The referent here is thus *the process of scaling* through which multiple spatial units are established, differentiated, hierarchized and, under certain conditions, rejigged, reorganized and recalibrated in relation to one another.” (Brenner 2001, 600; emphasis in original).

Ultimately, his suggestion that “scales evolve relationally within tangled hierarchies and dispersed interscalar networks” (Brenner 2001, 605) so that “scalar hierarchies constitute mosaics not pyramids” (ibid., 606), does appear to be an improvement on the treatment of hierarchy within the multi-level governance literature (Bache and Flinders 2004b, 200). The notion of ‘multi-scalar networks’ which “link local and trans-local processes, producing and consolidating social constructions of place” (Jones et al, 2004, 104) is also important to this approach, suggesting a degree of indeterminism regarding how particular policy and political questions will be bundled together.

Similarly, the work of David Stark and his collaborators provides a set of useful concepts, particularly those focusing on ‘heterarchies’ which involve ‘relations of interdependence’ with ‘minimal hierarchy’ and ‘operational heterogeneity’ (Girard and Stark 2004, 303) and the growth of ‘hybrids’, ‘strategic alliances’, and ‘symbiotic arrangements’ (Stark 2002, 1).

His concern with ‘new organisational topographies’ (cf. Bach and Stark 2004), borne out of work on NGOs and new communication technologies in Central and Eastern Europe, is of immense value in understanding scale-reorganizing practices in South-Eastern Europe

Also important is the notion by McAdam and others of ‘scale shift’ as “a change in the number and level of co-ordinated contentious actions leading to broader contention involving a wider range of actors and bridging their claims and identities” (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 331)—providing one is sensitive to the possibility of movements from the global to the local and vice versa, as well as the possibility that actors such as local NGOs can ‘jump scale’ if they bypass national constituencies and appeal directly to supranational bodies.

One of the critical questions then becomes whether it is possible to overcome Kevin Cox’s seminal division between ‘spaces of dependence,’ which he defines as “place-specific conditions for our material well being and our sense of significance” (Cox 1998, 2), and ‘spaces of engagement,’ defined as “the space in which the politics of securing a space of dependence unfolds” (ibid.). Transcendent possibilities have led to some convoluted and imprecise, but valuable, fused concepts such as ‘glocalization’, first used by Japanese economists in the late 1980s and then popularised by Roland Robertson, to mean “the simultaneity—the co-presence—of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies” (Robertson 2001) and the concept of ‘intermestic’, which refers to “the intermingling of domestic, regional and international factors that overlap or intersect and that can transcend traditional state-centric (realist) notions of sovereignty” (Bullion 1995; cited in Pugh 2001).

In a seminal text, Ferguson and Gupta (2002) have argued that it is increasingly difficult for states to present themselves as ‘legitimate’, even ‘natural’ authorities, through routine bureaucratic practices which produce forms of verticality and encompassment. Seeking to study the relationship between states, space and scale as part of a wider ethnography of neo-liberal governmentalities, Ferguson and Gupta suggest that both ‘supranational’ and ‘grassroots’ actors are engaged in similar practices of verticality and encompassment. Hence, they are critical of a perspective which treats the ‘global’ “. . . as if it were simply a superordinate scalar level that encompasses nation-states just as nation states were conceptualized to encompass regions, towns, and villages” (ibid., 990).

They continue:

“... it is necessary to treat state and nonstate governmentality within a common frame, without making unwarranted assumptions about their spatial reach, vertical height, or relation to the local ... For the central effect of the new forms of transnational governmentality is not so much to make states weak (or strong), as to reconfigure states’ abilities to spatialize their authority and to state their claims to superior generality and universality” (Ferguson and Gupta 2002, 994 and 996).

This combination of a common frame with the absence of unwarranted assumptions, so that ethnography retains its “power to surprise” (Willis 1980) is crucial to the methodology of examining the shifting politics of scale in particular contexts. To quote Jeremy Gould, “socio-spatial positionality is a pivotal point of epistemological reflection for ethnography” (Gould 2004, 283). Trouillot’s follows a similar logic in pleading for ‘an anthropology of the state’ which studies the respatialization of “practices, functions and effects without prejudice about sites or forms of encounters” (Trouillot 2001, 131), and neither the state nor any other agency is ‘ready made’ and available for anthropological analysis outside of specific practices and encounters.

That development agencies and projects talk of “scaling up” from localised pilot projects to full-scale national programmes and of projects “going to scale” shows the centrality of constructions of scale within development discourse. Scaling up can be in terms of space (from the local to a larger scale), but also in terms of time, from short-term projects to longer-term programmes and, ultimately, to ‘sustainability’ through ‘mainstreaming’, in terms of the incorporation into nationally owned provision. However, as Gould suggests:

“a jump in scale is not just about a readjustment of the quantitative index of resolution. Different languages, rhetoric, ideals, justifications and rationalities circulate at different scales, at different levels of an organization, for example.” (Gould 2004, 283).

His suggestion that aid “is composed of multi-sited, multi-level, trans-scalar flows and processes” (Gould, 283) is, actually, axiomatic for the study of governance, with the consequent need for multiple, complex, triangulated research methods to gather data, including ethnographic data, going beyond an either/or distinction between a «bird’s eye» view, good on context but poor on everyday social processes, and a «worm’s eye» view, which has the exact characteristics.

South-Eastern Europe: Modes of Governance and New Organizational Topographies

The context of specific forms or modes of governance and new organisational topographies in South East Europe gives rise to a broad research agenda, only some of whose items can be addressed here. While at first the phrase might seem offensive, it is the case that, perhaps even more so than in other parts of post-communist Central and Eastern Europe, South East Europe is “an extraordinary laboratory” (Stark 2002, 5) for studying complex, specific, even anomalous forms of governance and new organisational topographies, in and through notions of multi-level governance, policy transfer, and the politics of scale. Among the central questions are how governance forms have developed in South-Eastern Europe since 1991, and why we encounter a rather large variety of governance structures and policy outcomes in such a small region.²

One set of research questions concerns the active construction of South East Europe as a region and the various kinds of ideological and practical “work” which have to be undertaken to construct a notion of a common past, a common present, and/or a common future. Notwithstanding her refusal of the parallel, much as Edward Said traced Western constructions of the Orient as “Other” (Said, 1979), Maria Todorova, in her *Imagining the Balkans* (1997), suggests that the negative notion of the Balkans was, in part at least, a product of Western European great-power politics in the early twentieth century. Švob-Đokić has argued that at times the concept of South-Eastern Europe has been coterminous with that of the Balkans and at other times different from it, notwithstanding the fact that many countries included in the latter resist such an ascription (Švob-Đokić 2001).

The portrayal of the region by networks such as George Soros’s Open Society Institute, which describes South East Europe as “the continent’s most troubled region in the 1990s,” arguing that “the often uneasy peace that has prevailed in the new millennium continues to be buffeted by distrust and occasional bursts of violence”, is one starting point for a constructionist perspective. The OSI web page constructs a region whose states have to various degrees “serious lingering problems including poverty, corruption, infrastructure degradation, and population decline.” But the site suggests that there are now two groups of South East European countries, those “that have been promised admission to the European Union in the not-too-distant future (Bulgaria, Croatia, and Romania) and those still struggling with bouts of political and ethnic hostility and citizen dissatisfaction (in particular, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro).”

The text continues, “The Open Society Institute and its 10 affiliated Soros foundations in South East Europe collaborate closely to develop regional co-operation and tackle major open society issues. In recent years, they have agreed to a regional agenda of cross-border projects in the areas of anti-corruption, education, public health, media, illegal labor migration, and minority issues” (http://www.soros.org/initiatives/regions/south-eastern_europe/see_overview). The Soros network and its concerns, representing an innovative organisational form and set of practices, has been almost completely free of critical social scientific scrutiny (Lovink 2002 is an exception, referring to the wider debate initiated on the critical internet discussion list *nettime*).

Also all but ignored by researchers, the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe continues to play an important role in defining and redefining critical policy assemblages, even though its public profile is much lower than when it was formed in June 1999. The nature of the Stability Pact as a complex and flexible organisation, described by one of its founders as a “black box” and so open to influence and adaptation by public policy networks and new policy entrepreneurs, is itself worthy of serious study. The partners are, to say the least, diverse and include the Republic of Moldova, rarely considered in any other context as part of the region.

The nature of decision-making in the Stability Pact appears to fluctuate among various forms of authority, from traditional bureaucratic from to recently networked and traditional charismatic ones. The process includes a Regional Working Table, various Working Tables, Task Forces,

and Sub-Working Tables, based on a series of alliances between agencies and individuals, in which a powerful chairperson or the Special Co-ordinator can significantly alter the process and content of deliberations (see <http://www.stabilitypact.org/about/default.asp> for a list of partners, aims, priorities and formal structure). The fact that Local Democracy and Cross-Border Co-operation, the Fight against Organised Crime; and Migration, Asylum and Refugee Issues are listed among the six core objectives for 2004 (ibid.) gives some indication of the nature of the dominant policy assemblages within the Pact.

The European Union's relationship to the countries of the Western Balkans (its own term for the countries of former Yugoslavia, minus Slovenia and including Albania) includes innovative elements of multi-level governance alongside its more traditional instruments regarding the integration of new member states. As Despina Syrri has argued:

“The process of the Western Balkans’ integration in the European Union seems not only to be regulated by the official Stabilisation and Association Process (Sap), bilateral agreements between national governments and unilateral efforts by states. It is also heavily influenced by the presence and involvement of a multitude of actors; indicatively in border areas their work is focused on trade and transport facilitation (the SECI Initiative), business promotion, capacity building for NGOs, and migration issues. Depending on their agenda the focus or interface differs, the emphasis shifts from trafficking and organised crime to civil society strengthening, good governance, local community development and migrants’ integration.” (Syrri 2005)

It is precisely this shifting configuration of actors, agencies, themes and initiatives which tests to its limits the Western Eurocentrism of the “normal” multi-level governance literature and highlights the need for a much more complex approach to the multi-level, multi-actor, multi-sited political, policy and practice arena.

In addition, as noted above, traditional multi-level governance approaches, while breaking away from state-centred notions of governance, appear to be predicated on a particular notion of the state. In South East Europe this is far from the norm. Rather, in the region one can find protectorates, e.g., UNMIK in Kosovo/a; semi-protectorates, e.g., the Office of the High Representative (OHR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina, itself constitutionally made of two entities (with a *de facto* third entity) and a very weak central state. Indeed, what constitutes a states is problematic; Serbia and Montenegro have three Governments—a Union government and two “member states,” with two official currencies. When one adds the range of complex civil-military settlements involving foreign peace-keepers (in Kosovo/a, Bosnia, and Macedonia), complex arrangements appear to be common, if not the norm.

Among the other factors which need to be considered are the role played by think-tanks, new policy initiatives, and meta-NGOs, defined by Bach and Stark as NGOs “whose primary purpose is to provide information and assistance to other NGOs” (Bach and Stark 2001, 15) and can end up “governing” other NGOs. When one adds the complex construction of ethnicity to this range of actors, amplified by the existence of diasporas, both contiguous and dispersed, as subjects and objects of political processes, then one has a rich and complex canvas on which to address questions of multi-level governance, policy transfer and the politics of scale.

It is therefore unlikely that any team of researchers, however large, can explain more than parts of the shifting architecture of multi-level governance in the region. What is needed are “interpretative frameworks that can provide conceptual tools for inter-relating events and observations at different levels of an ethnographic site” (Gould 2004, 283-4). Studies of single organisations are unlikely to be sensitive enough to the shifting configurations, alliances, and opportunities noted in this paper, although they can be part of the puzzle. More useful, within a comparative methodology, may be to choose particular symbolic locations, such as trans-border areas, but remain sensitive to the fact that many actors will also be involved elsewhere in the region and that policy transfer is neither linear nor straightforward. A “traditional” Western European approach, which asks “how do the structures and processes of multi-level governance differ across policy sectors and how can these differences be explained?” (Bache and Flinders 2004a, 5) might be a starting point, but only if one utilizes a reflexive methodology, capable of coping with “the conjunctural, the complex, and the contextual” (MacLeod 1999) and avoids such *a priori* assumptions as, for example, that social policy and migration are discrete, clearly delineated, policy frames. This goes beyond an oft-repeated call for “an ethnography of the powerful” to a more nuanced, if at times seemingly unsystematic and intuitive, search for the lived encounters of agents, concepts, forms of governance, and modes of policy transfer. Such an approach must move between macro-, meso-, and micro-levels, and confront meta-level questions of memories, value systems, capacities and forms of trust and mistrust (cf. Neilsen, 2000), avoiding “the analytical straitjackets that inhibit our capacity to think properly” (Clarke, 2004; 2).

Endnotes

- ¹ A version of this paper was first presented at the Institute of Economics, Zagreb/SEERC, Thessaloniki workshop on ‘Multi-Level Governance and Policy Transfer in South East Europe’ in February 2005. The author thanks participants for comments.
- ² I am grateful to Dimitri A. Sotiropoulos of the University of Athens for this formulation.

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Multilevel governance is a result of the growing political capacity of the European Union and subnational actors, which assesses the weakening of the traditional state-centered regulation model....¹ Developments in intergovernmental relations: Towards multi-level governance. *Policy & Politics*, 29(2), 131-135. [CrossRef](#) [Google Scholar](#). Piattoni, S. (2009, May). Multilevel governance in the EU. Does it work? Conference presented at the MIT. [Google Scholar](#). Radaelli, C. (2002). The domestic impact of EU public policy: Notes on concepts, methods, and the challenge of empirical research. *Politique Européenne*, 2001, 107-142. [Google Scholar](#). Schmitter, P. (2004). Multi-Level Governance, Policy Transfer and the Politics of Scale in South East Europe 1. PAUL STUBBS. Institute of Economics, Zagreb. ² Stretching Concepts Too Far? European Union itself has explicitly sought to explore its own commitment to multi-level governance as a privileged and "best possible" form of governance. Increasingly, through its programmes of large-scale funding of network-based social scientific research, the European Union has also contributed to this normativism within the social scientific research community.