

Moving beyond ideological problem-solving paradigms in higher education governance studies: Toward a renewed perspective

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ABSTRACT

New Public Management (NPM)-inspired higher education (HE) governance has become increasingly topical in recent years. However, while existing research provides an overall understanding of relevant changes, it does not offer a complete analysis of complex governance and falls prey to deterministic and relatively narrow ideological impositions. Scholars are overwhelmingly oriented toward governance models or modes and the ideas of efficiency, effectiveness, and competition in NPM. They either promote these aspects as an approach to organizing HE governance or criticize them in addition to evaluating or comparing their outcomes. Therefore, based on a literature review and drawing on Foucauldian ideas of political rationality, this paper proposes a shift from the ideology-based problem-solving paradigm to a renewed approach. By calling for an increased focus on bottom-up initiatives that stem from below while studying NPM-inspired HE governance, this paper recommends conducting a discourse analysis of technical policy papers together with empirical-analytical studies to identify interpretive political rationalities and histories. Overall, the approach proposed in this paper would limit the deterministic mode of policy analysis and lead to more refined ways of understanding HE governance in certain fields, clarifying problematic situations, and effectively estimating future directions.

KEYWORDS

higher education governance, new public management, governance reforms

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INTRODUCTION

Since the introduction of New Public Management (NPM) in the 1980s, the issue of higher education (HE) governance has become increasingly topical because of the global recognition of NPM as a key policy agenda since the 1980s (De Boer et al., 2017; Kennedy, 2003). Linked to this broader reform agenda, HE governance has also begun to receive more attention. According to most authors, the HE governance reforms that have been implemented in most EU countries in recent decades (De Coster, Forsthuber, Oberheidt, Parveva, & Glass, 2008) are a consequence of the dissemination of NPM.

Thus, scholars and policymakers have become overwhelmingly oriented toward NPM. For example, among the extensive discussions of the nature of NPM (Barzelay, 2002; Van de Walle & Hammerschmid, 2011), Broucker, de Wit, and Leisyte (2015) systematically identified and divided aspects of HE governance reform inspired by NPM into four broad areas: market-based reforms; budgetary reforms; autonomy, accountability, and performance reforms; and management techniques. According to Barzelay (2002), NPM is based on four assumptions, each of which is different in principle: a contractualist model, a managerialist model, a consumerist model, and a reformist model. Building on this, scholars have either promoted these aspects of NPM as an approach to organizing HE governance or criticized them (Pollitt, van Thiel, & Homburg, 2007) in addition to evaluating or comparing HE outcomes across nations.

Although NPM did extensively impact the HE governance reforms implemented in most EU countries in recent decades, most of the studies related to NPM are based on classical theories of public policy and public administration, and many simply reproduce the dominant ideological debate of the 1980s and 1990s (Hufty, 2011). Consequently, despite the pervasive academic debate on the topic, there is a tendency in the extant literature on NPM to adopt reductionist perspectives that fall prey to deterministic and relatively narrow ideological impositions.

This article picks up this challenge and aims to explore and distinguish what NPM-inspired HE governance is and what it is not and how we can study it. This is because taking a linear and rationalistic posture related to NPM not only misrepresents what HE governance is all about but also makes it difficult to evaluate it and fully understand its real impact on governance and resultant outcomes. Governance is not merely an alternative policy approach as alternative policies or reforms do not have a single major impact on governance. Governance is also not a set of structural adjustments, the role played by the state, or its management procedures. Governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions—formal or informal—accommodate their common or conflicting interests to make decisions (Carlsson, Ramphal, Alatas, & Dahlgren, 1995).

Therefore, the primary aim of this paper is to elaborate on the nature of NPM, overcome its conceptual limitations, and highlight the need to restrict a deterministic and macro analysis of something as complex as HE governance from a rather linear and rationalistic posture.

DEFINING GOVERNANCE

To provide a steppingstone for our study, this paper must first define the concept of “governance.” Defining governance and clarifying the distinction between governance and overlapping concepts is crucial to understanding its significance in the HE system and demonstrating its complexity.



The term “governance” comes from the Latin *gubernare*, which means to direct, rule, and guide (Campbell & Carayannis, 2013; Sultana, 2012). Its origin can be traced back to the ancient Greek verb *kybernein* (infinitive) or *kybernao* (first person), which were first used in the context of maneuvering or piloting a ship or a land-based vehicle. Later, Plato, the classical Greek philosopher, used the term “governance” metaphorically to depict the best form of government to organize people. Thus, governance was originally conceived as evolving from people’s sovereignty, individual freedom, and the separation of powers from a social contract (Amaral & Magalhaes, 2002).

Nevertheless, the definition of governance has changed throughout the centuries, and nowadays, the term “governance,” developed in the sense of technical procedures, is being associated with steering and control (Amaral & Magalhaes, 2002, 182). However, Campbell and Carayannis (2013, 3) differentiated the concepts, stating that governance is more comprehensive than steering, which, in turn, is more comprehensive than control. They also emphasized that governance can involve steering but is not restricted to it just as steering presumes control but is not limited to it.

The term “governance” also overlaps considerably with “management,” and the two are sometimes used interchangeably (Sultana, 2012). Although some researchers (e.g., Middlehurst, 1999; Tricker, 1999) have distinguished “governance” from “management,” Hénard and Mitterle (2010) asserted that the management processes are considerably influenced by governance mechanisms. Tricker (1999) stated that management is concerned with “doing things right” whereas governance is concerned with “doing the right thing.” Governance, therefore, contributes to higher-level strategic thinking that establishes a sense of direction (Sultana, 2012) and institutes procedures for steering and control. Governance sets guidelines for management and leadership and influences choices and preferences among a formal and informal set of actors in policymaking and implementation. Due to this, governance occupies a central and important place in the debate on HE.

Apart from clarifying the distinction between governance and overlapping concepts, it is also important to note that the notion of governance can be considered from different perspectives and levels in the HE system. Zgaga (2006, 39) proposed three main levels of analysis of HE governance (Fig. 1).

Based on these distinctions between the levels, Sultana (2012) explained that internal university governance refers to a range of issues related to the way governance is exercised within a university (Marton, 2000; Ordorika, 2002). External or systemic governance deals instead with issues related to states’ or other stakeholders’ attempts to govern an HE system to achieve their desired objectives at the state or national level (Austin & Jones, 2015). A focus on global governance, for its part, should be emphasized because contemporary governance practices and ideological orientations are thought to be triggered by global forces, affecting host nations’ policy ideologies (Currie, 1998). This indicates that universities are considered to be directed by certain national policy imperatives, which are thought to be affected by globally dominant ideologies.

While this article firmly rejects the abovementioned universal cause-and-effect relationship between governance levels, it intends to highlight the high complexity of HE governance that is spread across spatial scales (regional, sub-regional, national, subnational, local and global, or external and internal) and also across a range of management and leadership bodies, functions, steering and controlling powers, and affairs (Amaral & Magalhaes, 2002; Rhoades, 1992). Moreover, the common element in the conceptualization of governance in the HE system is the



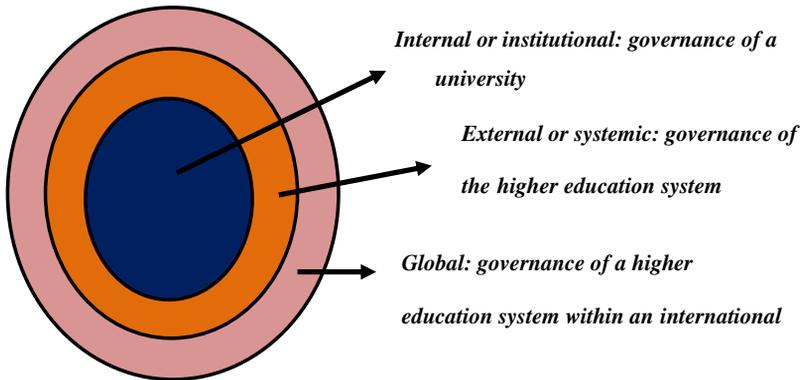


Fig. 1. Three main levels of governance analysis in higher education

dynamic (top–down and bottom–up) interactions between these bodies and groups operating at different spatial scales (Reed, Meek, & Jones, 2002, xxvii) to achieve “good decisions.” Governance, therefore, is the sum of the many ways, either formal or informal, in which individuals, groups, or institutions accommodate their common or conflicting interests with each being simultaneously equipped with varying modes or models to make decisions (Carlsson et al., 1995).

Given this complexity of HE governance and the dynamic interactions between different levels, there is an increasing need to better understand and distinguish what NPM-inspired HE governance is and what it is not and how we can study it. This is because the current linear and rationalistic posture related to NPM is generating a deterministic mode of policy analysis (Amaral et al., 2002; Bleiklie, 1998; Braun & Merrien, 1999; Capano, Pritoni, & Vicentini, 2020; De Boer & Huisman, 1999; Leisyte, 2014). However, a refined understanding of HE governance of a certain field, clarification of problematic situations, and an effective estimation of future directions cannot be obtained by imposing a deterministic mode of analysis on the highly complex process of governance.

In the next section, I shall offer a brief reflection on the evolution of HE governance across European nation-states over time to understand what HE governance was in these fields. Such an investigation limits the recognition of NPM-inspired HE governance as an alternative approach with global norms or a change in the model or mode. It instead lends itself to understanding the ongoing changes of HE governance across European nation-states over time and grasping its current complexity.

GENEALOGY AND EVOLUTION OF HE GOVERNANCE IN THE HE SYSTEM

The introduction of governance in the educational sphere can be traced back to the eleventh century in Europe, when urbanization and middle-class expansion created a demand for trained professionals (Davidovitch & Iram, 2015). Contemporaneously, there emerged cathedral schools (Ariès, 1962) or loosely organized unions, such as guilds, which were comparable to contemporary universities with a degree of academic freedom from the Church and the state (Vauchez & Pedersen, 1997). These medieval universities did not experience government interference and



had complete management autonomy (Schechter, 2006). Research conducted at these universities was determined based on individual interest and initiatives rather than institutional policy (Davidovitch & Iram, 2015). These guild models that originated in the Middle Ages granted the title of doctor and continue to influence doctoral students' education in many systems.

Sultana (2012), however, warned against idealizing this “republic of scholars” (Bleikie & Kogan, 2007) and their “ability to dissolve feudal hierarchy, to facilitate urban and artisan freedom, and to liberate learning from a dependence on wealth and patronage.” Instead, Sultana describes this “republic of scholars” as a “closed shop” that managed their affairs jealously but not always “successfully” against the influence of other groups who wanted to assert their views based on alternative philosophies. Consequently, they functioned as liberators and pursued self-interest against those who wished to rule through fear and force, and they experienced diverging struggles in different nation-states.

Overall, these developments contribute to grasp the complexity of HE governance across European nation-states, where different groups located within different cultural, ideological, or material networks and operating at internal or external levels struggle for power and try to assert their viewpoints with each simultaneously equipped with varying modes or models (Maassen & Stensaker, 2003).

This is also demonstrated in a prominent conceptualization of HE governance usually linked to the legacy of Humboldt University (1810). According to this conceptualization, universities are a self-governing community of scholars (Olsen, 2009). Based on Humboldt's ideal, a model of academia emerged that follows the principles of academic freedom to autonomously pursue knowledge and research according to each person's desire (Commager, 1963). Subsequently, the autonomy of HE was idealized and exemplified by many countries, resulting in an attempt to reshape universities worldwide (Davidovitch & Iram, 2015; Guri, 2005).

Nevertheless, according to Olsen (2007), self-governance during Humboldt's time was not without constraints as professors were civil servants and universities were part of the state bureaucracy. According to Olsen's analysis, the ivory tower of HE, free to act as its occupants deemed necessary, was a myth to conceal the nation's instrumental purpose of handling economic and social needs. Hence, university governance during Humboldt's time was concerned with safeguarding the interests of the state while the state protected the actions of the university (Readings, 1996). This is because science was a significant productive force in the process of nation-state building (Nybom, 2003; Olsen, 2009).

Furthermore, one should not underestimate the diverging purposes of universities and differential political agendas of nation-states across the Humboldtian, Anglo-Saxon, and Southern European systems in the 1970s. For example, while, in Germany, HE policies depended far more on what the ministerial network actors considered essential (Rüland, 2012), academics in France effectively advocated their interests, asserted their preferred parameters, and collectively impacted governmental policies (Chevaillier, 2004; Musselin, 2005).

It is therefore important to highlight that HE governance in different fields was the entirety of the many ways individuals and institutions within policymaking and policy implementation struggled for power, competed, or cooperated, thus moderating the idealization of certain models or modes. Overall, no one type of governance set appropriate rules of behavior, and no type of governance effectively replaced another. Governance in different fields was a combination or clashing of mechanisms used in these fields to meet the changing priorities of the time (Musselin & Mignot-gerard, 2002).



Nevertheless, despite the different national characteristics and specificities of each European HE system that prevailed 20 years ago, the reforms they all experienced in the 1980s and 1990s certainly pointed in the same direction. According to [Olsen \(2007\)](#), the postwar period necessitated more practical problem-solving research and birthed the idea that science ought to be planned. Faced with the pressure of the oil crisis and the imperatives of global competition, governments sought to renew nonproductive services and improve efficiency through managerial innovations ([Bertram, 2000](#)). Managerialism or NPM thus gained prevalence over the years and has even become a leitmotiv globally, especially within Europe.

However, the adoption of managerialism or NPM should not be seen merely as the introduction of new management methods; it has also been recorded in the literature as a new ideology that attributes a certain role to the state ([Barry & Elmes, 1997](#); [Clarke & Newman, 1997](#)). From this perspective, the reforms of the 1980s can be understood as intended to reduce the distributive state's ineffectiveness and to make it evaluative and regulative ([Neave, 1998](#)).

Both managerial innovations and new ideas about the role of government have been documented in the literature as a positive movement toward short-term efficiency and as new obstacles to equity and social cohesion ([Van de Walle & Hammerschmid, 2011](#)). Based on the motto "doing more with less," many have argued that universities are not only under attack but also in ruins ([Readings, 1996](#)).

However, the key problem is that, despite the pervasive academic debate on the topic, extant literature on NPM continues to adopt reductionist perspectives that fall prey to deterministic and relatively narrow ideological impositions. This rather deterministic and ill-defined nature of NPM not only misrepresents what HE governance is all about but also makes it difficult to evaluate it and to fully understand its real impact on governance and resultant outcomes.

Considering the above indicated idiosyncrasies of different fields and the resilience of national systems, one cannot associate those systems' contemporary or NPM-inspired governance with only a set of structural adjustments, the role of the state, and its management procedures. I argue that, without examining the political and historical basis of existing fields, it is difficult to distinguish between real causes and effects, and, therefore, it is difficult to evaluate or compare HE governance outcomes or to promote or criticize them. Employing an approach for dealing with and incorporating these political rationalities and histories into the NPM framework is therefore necessary.

THE EMPIRICAL STORY SO FAR

In light of the above discussions, I found that many empirical works on NPM have looked at structural adjustments and focused on the changes in HE governance models or modes. While these works ([Bleiklie, 2014](#); [Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011](#); [Gaus, 2019](#)) do acknowledge the delimited vision of NPM and recognize the existence of embedded national characteristics, they adopt a deterministic universal cause-and-effect relationship between global forces (NPM forces) and local interpretations.

For example, [Goedegebuure, Lysons, and Meek \(1993\)](#) explored the policy dynamics in numerous HE systems while elaborating on international trends and national variations. Following from this, [Marginson and Rhoades \(2002\)](#) and [Marginson \(2004\)](#) discussed a "glocality," an increasing global diffusion of governance models and local internalizations.



Gornitzka and Maassen (2000) discussed hybrid steering approaches, Donina and Hasanefendic (2019) discussed policy translation and heterogeneity, and King (2010) emphasized the notion of a global template with local interpretations. Though these studies provide overall understanding of formal and structural changes, they mostly neglect the dynamics of the bottom-up domestic policymaking and implementation arena.

Overall evaluations of NPM-inspired HE governance from bottom-up perspectives are relatively scarce. The work of Jungblut (2015) was perhaps the first to capture the dimensions of HE governance from a bottom-up political perspective. Jungblut (2015) provided a clearer picture of how political parties have preferences not only regarding different forms of educational redistributions but also regarding how the state should steer the public sector and, more specifically, how centralized power over the HE sector should be. Jungblut (2015) also brings back the historical-institutional context as a crucial covariable for the direction of policy change.

While these studies (Jungblut, 2015; Jungblut & Dobbins, 2020) provide a good starting point and give reasons for national diversity in the NPM-inspired HE governance approach, problems persist in these studies. In particular, in these studies, political actors are limited to parties and do not include private-sector and non-state actors. Additionally, the preferences of parties are based on the ideological foundations and lack a critical discussion of actors' preferences in HE governance as a democratic process. For example, authors discuss how social democratic, green, and anti-establishment parties of the left prefer centralized forms of HE governance while Christian democrats, liberals, conservatives, and anti-establishment parties of the right prefer decentralized governance and the use of NPM ideas.

Subsequent research conducted by Chou, Jungblut, Ravinet, and Vukasovic (2017), Vukasovic, Jungblut, Chou, Elken, and Ravinet (2018), and Vukasovic (2018) offers a further conceptual step to somehow unravel the complexity observed within contemporary HE governance. For instance, authors using multilevel, multi-actor, and multi-issue frameworks discuss private-sector and non-state actors as important players in HE governance and attempt to encapsulate the dynamics of the formal and informal domestic policymaking arena. However, in these studies, authors again see NPM-inspired HE governance as an alternative approach or change in the model or mode and mainly focus on patterns of convergence and divergence between countries. The main problem, therefore, is that all existing studies still view the HE system as a hierarchical nesting of levels wherein the state, political parties, or other powerful network actors aim to determine a certain mode of governance to effectively use *across* the system.

The relative scarcity of encompassing research is not entirely due to researchers. Rather, the lack of substantive research is arguably due to the ill-defined nature of NPM. This is because, in all existing studies, authors see NPM-inspired HE governance as a change in the model or mode. They focus on NPM as one type of governance that set appropriate rules of behavior and explore how this type of governance might effectively replace or be replaced by another. Authors also study political idiosyncrasies and historical path dependencies as covariables affecting the direction for this type of governance, but not as part of it, dealing with it and incorporating into the framework.

However, since HE governance in different fields was a combination or clashing of mechanisms used in these fields to meet the changing priorities of the time, we must also be able to grasp the complexity of NPM-inspired HE governance. Therefore, in the next section, based on the definition of governance and drawing on Foucauldian ideas of political rationality, I attempt to respond to this challenge.



WHAT IS NPM-INSPIRED HE GOVERNANCE?

Thus far, we have learned that governance is the sum of the numerous ways individuals and institutions within policymaking and/or policy implementation struggle for power, compete, or cooperate, thus moderating the idealization of certain modes or global norms. In this sense, Foucault (1984) says that norms cannot be given a universal grounding independent of the actors and the context involved. According to Foucault (1984), norms that provide order in society should be defined within certain contexts, and such a definition can best be achieved by focusing on power because the formulation of a norm in society is the exercise of power. In Foucault's analysis of power, the production of knowledge is central, and which knowledge ends up being accepted as truth or as a norm in society is determined by power.

Foucault, Davidson, and Burchell (2008) encourages us to think of power not merely in terms of the prohibitive and sovereign power of the state; he widens our understanding of power to include the forms of productive power (making things happen, building notions of pleasure and pain, and achieving outcomes). This is labeled by Foucault as "biopower" or "biopolitics", in which actors are guided by the productive power of future possibilities.

In his lectures at the *Collège de France*, Foucault analyzed biopolitics as emerging out of and complementing two other forms of power: sovereignty and discipline. Whereas sovereign power refers ultimately to a prohibitive state and discipline to a form of power directed at training the body, biopolitics concerns the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species are the object of a general strategy of power (Foucault, 1972).

Foucault et al. (2008) claims that neoliberalism is paradigmatically biopolitical, and actors within neoliberalism or NPM self-optimize and try to assert their preferred norms concerning the issues at hand. This is because norms—whether written and formal or unwritten and informal—will determine how the rules of the game are defined between the actors (Musselin, 2005; Stensaker & Harvey, 2010). Consequently, rational or self-interested and boundedly rational actors embedded in the political reality of the existing field are likely to contribute to norm formations through communications and conflicts. Biopolitics must therefore be understood as a specific approach to governance that operates through a network of dispersed actors (formal and informal) who utilize freedom and choice, self-regulation, and the promotion of certain kinds of subjectivity (Dean, 2010; Walters, 2012). Therefore, what we know as a norm is the outcome not of universal truth but of conflicts and contests between competing viewpoints.

That said, biopowers do not exist in a vacuum. They are exercised in relation to something or someone else, and they open up space for resistance. However, resistance in biopower takes on a subtle form. Unlike in sovereign power, this power has certain logics and orientations that evolve from communication and mutual knowledge and similar power conditions (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014).

It would thus be overly simplistic to portray complex HE governance as change in the model or mode. Rather, it is a dynamic and complex interplay of the involved actors aiming to impose their views through persuasion, negotiation, communication (Bourdieu, 1980), or a combination of these (Hufty, 2011), each of which leads to the formulation of norms concerning the performance, research, or teaching-related issues at hand (Scott, 1985).

If, for example, we want to analyze the HE governance in Switzerland, we should not limit our analysis to the broader structural changes or to the way the HE system is regulated by powerful actors and how it is leading to certain modes of governance. We should instead



consider the form of productive power that revolves around formal or informal actors to set various norms and create rules regarding *the issues* at hand through various channels.

This relationship is not unidirectional, however, because, when norms reoccur, they become institutionalized and can enable certain rules to flourish or automatically determine the rules of the game. These institutionalized norms may be defined in general terms as governance of governance or meta-governance in a given society.

While Jessop (2009) and Larsson (2015) say that meta-governance eventually requires sovereign powers of the state to establish comprehensive normalization, Kooiman and Jentoft (2009) say that networks cannot be externally meta-governed by the state due to their self-governing nature, and any form of meta-governance is usually produced within networks as they establish their own norms and principles. In this sense, Foucault et al. (2008) also writes that governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium with complementarity and conflict of mechanisms that assure coercion and other normative processes through which the individual constructs him or herself.

Thus, when seeking to identify the “cause” of a particular actions of subjects, we must not only distinguish the coercive powers of the state to establish comprehensive normalization (Dean, 2007) but also critically examine whether existing the state of affairs that generated conditions for those actions might actually be the result of what is appropriate and correct within the context of external norms and discourses. For example, there might be broadly accepted and non-subjective factors such as costs and benefits of a certain act as opposed to other alternative acts that directed the network actors, eventually producing the existing state of affairs or meta-governance in that society.

This discussion further leads to another insight that national systems are not only idiosyncratic but also resilient. This is because the abovementioned factors in the HE system can result from non-subjective historical contingencies. After all, no country simply experiences a “revolution” and instantly moves from Situation A to Situation B with one type of governance being effectively replaced by another. In fact, each country first moves from Situation A to Situation A+ as a consequence of an amalgamation of existing practices and new solutions (Musselin, 2000). As Foucault (1984) asserted, the present is likely a collection of heterogeneous historical elements put together with each having its conditions of possibility (Barry et al., 2013; Dean, 2010). Relatedly, Huczynski (1996) asserted that managerial fads, while often promoted as “new,” are usually based on several existing practices with new ideas linked to old ones.

Hence, when examining governance, scholars should also adopt a particular analytical approach to determine the country’s managerial past in its historical context. The point is not to search for “origins”; rather, the idea is to trace the resilient and discontinuous elements whereby the past became the present. The aim should be to understand the present by tracing the resilient forces that gave birth to our present-day practices and to identify the historical conditions on which our present-day practices continue to depend (Garland, 2014).

Based on the overall argument presented here and on Foucault’s approach, it can be said that addressing the complexity of NPM-inspired or contemporary governance requires a comprehensive and bottom-up perspective. Such a perspective should consider the interpretive rationality of the actors in the political context and the country’s managerial past in its historical context while simultaneously discerning general patterns of structural changes (Fig. 2).



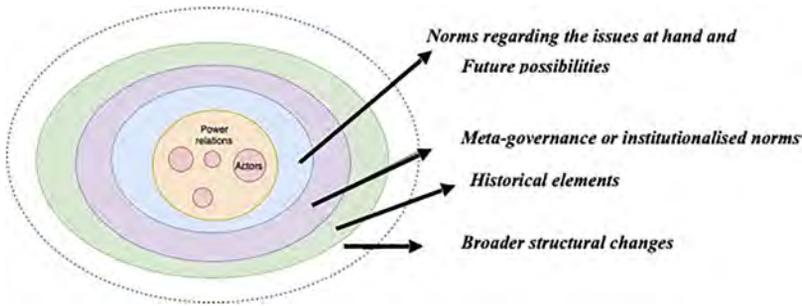


Fig. 2. Bottom-up perspective to study HE governance (the author's own creation)

HOW TO STUDY NPM-INSPIRED HE GOVERNANCE FROM A RENEWED APPROACH

Although reductionist and managerial approaches related to NPM in the early 1980s certainly set the agenda for thinking about HE governance, expanding the contemporary NPM-inspired HE governance debate to power, politics, history, and other related scholarly domains could provide refined approaches for studying complexity, interaction, and stability mechanisms and their impact on the performance, teaching, research, autonomy, or accountability-related issues at hand systematically and in more detail.

First, the approach presented here could serve as a strong methodological tool for HE research to better understand national policymaking and, therefore, HE governance. Since policies are a particularly forceful strategy of power as an outcome and a tool used by some to exercise power over others (James, 2018), researchers could focus on policies through the present perspective to reveal some interesting insights.

For example, in this case, as shown in Fig. 2, the central aspects to be understood are actors, their objectives and influence, power relations among actors to formulate new norms regarding the issues at hand, and meta-governance in a given society. It is assumed that the way a policy is stated explicitly reveals how power is woven into governance schemes in certain ways; how policy molds the agents of the policy as per certain arbitrary notions of appropriateness regarding the issues at hand (e.g., performance, evaluations, teaching, and research) may implicitly disclose HE governance practices. The actual content of policies or legislations can reveal certain norms in relation to the issues at hand and might redefine the rules of the game for network actors. In addition, policy redesigns through secondary legislations or alternations in the operational rules might also influence normative procedures and respecify the power of actors within their respective networks. Researchers might also identify short-term ineffective policy outcomes that may influence certain consequences.

While policy designs, alternations, and redesigns are usually shaped by the state, they can also result from the involvement of network actors in policymaking for acquiring certain positions of power, reputation, or other personal gain. For example, a country might embark toward redesigning policy strategies to improve the research capacity of universities and initiate various performance measurement and evaluation strategies as a result of NPM. However, there might be an increased involvement of non-state actors in the process of promoting certain ideas



and influencing policymaking. There might also be an increased involvement by Ministries of Development or National Economy or sectorial Ministries of Agriculture, Health, or Environment and agencies that operate under each different Ministry, over which the Ministry of Education has limited control. This is because, in many countries, budgets for academic research are channeled to these actors, and they have particularly increased interests in regulating universities given the existence of national research budgets.

In cases described as above, researchers must also keep in mind that the above norm formations might result from a policy's historical or inherent elements since policies' inconsistent characteristics make them costly to manage or remain in place because they serve certain interests (Rayner & Howlett, 2009). In fact, according to various scholars, it can be easier to change policy content or instruments than to change a policy model's inherent elements (Hall, 1993; Mahoney & Thelen, 2009; Pierson, 1993). As such, researchers must try to identify those historical or inherent elements of the policy resulting from path dependency (Pierson, 2000) while seeking to understand contemporary governance processes.

Although there are several approaches to examining these aspects, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can be the most penetrative due to its focus on opaque and transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, and power as manifested in language. While there are no particular methodological prescriptions on how to go about performing CDA, it mostly requires researchers to be realistic and deeply reflexive to understand *actors, their objectives and influence, power relations among actors to formulate new norms regarding the issues at hand, and meta-governance in a given society* through self-conscious analytical scrutiny of "statements" and how these statements attribute a critical function in social production of inequality, power, ideology, and authority concerning the issues at hand.

However, norms are not only written and formal but also unwritten and informal. This is similar to policies, which, although forceful, are not the most influential form of power; thus, policy analysis alone might not be sufficient to provide information for future interventions. In this sense, researchers can also conduct observations and interviews with participants to use it as discourse data to deliberately reveal the same in actual governance practices and day-to-day activities.

In fact, according to Peters and Rava (2017), a great deal of policymaking occurs in the process of implementation, which can be both formal and informal. In particular, since networks in bio-power utilize freedom and self-regulation and collaborate spontaneously (Larsson, 2015), actors within networks might actually invest more time and effort in informal procedures; network actors might use discretions to define the meaning of law (Peters & Rava, 2017) to formulate informal norms regarding the issues at hand and pursue their own interests instead of policy objectives. For example, enthusiastic expectations for outputs in the policy and potentially inconsistent regulatory mechanisms that emerge with the involvement of different actors guided by the productive power of future possibilities might push universities to deploy different strategies of power. Specifically, university leaders or academics might use communication or persuasion strategies to define the meaning of law and influence different courses of action to pursue their own interests rather than policy objectives.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the perspective presented in this article satisfies several criteria that seem fundamental for understanding NPM-inspired HE governance in an existing field, clarifying problematic



situations, and offering an effective estimation of future directions. It is less deterministic, explanatory, and practical and introduces a historical dimension to the analysis.

Given the pressures facing the HE system not only in Europe but also in other fragile countries, I contend that we should pay more attention to the bottom-up initiatives that stem from below. I further contend that, if NPM refers only to changes in the policy approaches, structural adjustments, and governance models, the validity of which is restricted in time, the understanding of HE governance will have limited validity and will fade when this particular period ends. By focusing only on governance models or modes, we not only fail to understand the actual HE governance but also lose the capacity to adequately solve problems and estimate future directions for further progress.

That said, it is important to mention that, this presented approach to NPM-inspired HE governance does not challenge or contradict other post-NPM governance narratives such as network governance or public value governance. Instead, since HE governance in different fields is a combination or clashing of mechanisms, it only complements them and their comparison can even be a further stream of future research.

To conclude, the presented perspective is novel in HE research and requires further empirical investigation to identify its limits and possibilities. One of the ways of further research on the topic could be the collection of case studies using the discourse analysis and storytelling method to exemplify how the approach works in real cases.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Danagul Yembergenova is a change management analyst and a former doctoral researcher at the University of Geneva. Her research expertise transcends the boundaries of HE governance, organizational change, and economic advancement in general. Her specific topics of interests include HE governance reforms, principal-agent relationships, change, and outcomes.

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