

Governance Network Theory: Past, Present and Future

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Abstract

Recently the New Public Governance (NPG) has been suggested as an alternative paradigm to the traditional Public Administration Model (PAM) and New Public Management (NPM). NPG strongly builds upon Governance Network Theory (GNT). This suggestion assumes that the governance network approach has evolved into a full-fledged theoretical approach both theoretically and in practice, and that it has developed as a response to NPM.

This contribution examines these assumptions by discussing the roots of the theory, its current state of the art, and challenges it might face in the future. We argue that GNT has indeed developed into a full-fledge theory that has gained prominence within public administration. Yet the emergence of New Public Governance opens up new challenges. Rather than governance networks and network governance replacing PAM and NPM, hybrid practices will emerge. Addressing this topic, and other new challenges, will require GNT to further develop, and perhaps even reinvent itself. This is not without risks. If governance network theory evolves into a theory of everything, it will lose its explanatory power, ending up being a theory of nothing.

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1. Introduction. The Past, Present and Future of Governance Network Theory

Recently New Public Management (NPM), aimed at introducing business-like ways of organizing and managing in the public sector, has lost much of its appeal, both in practice and in academia. Various authors claim that increasingly new initiatives are taken to overcome the drawbacks of NPM reforms (see for instance Christensen & Lægread, 2007; Pollit and Bouckaert, 2004; Bouckaert et al, 2010). At the same time, in the past two decades, the literature on governance and governance networks has shown an impressive growth.ⁱ Some authors suggest that governance network theory has provided the ideas and management practices that have resulted in the rise of a new paradigm: the New Public Governance (NPG) (see for instance Osborne 2010). Building upon governance network theory, this new paradigm might deal with the complexities, interdependencies and dynamics of public problem solving and service delivery, which NPM failed to address. This suggestion implies that governance network theory has developed into a full-fledged theoretical perspective and that it is accompanied by a mature organizational and managerial practice. This contribution examines these assumptions by outlining the past and present of governance network theory, and by exploring societal trends that will impact on the further development of the theory in the near future.

In the next section, we will discuss the roots of governance network theory (GNT), thus clarifying its empirical object, its theoretical and normative orientations and the type of answers it provides. Next, in section 3, we describe the state of the art of the theory by respectively addressing its core concepts and assumptions, the main research findings that have resulted from it so far, and some recent research topics that have emerged. In section 4, we identify three important societal developments that raise questions to which GNT will have to provide answers in the near future. In the final section, we will reflect on how all this may influence the future development pathways that the theory may take.

2. The Past: where does governance network theory come from?

Ideas do not suddenly emerge, but rather tend to build on long traditions (Kingdon, 1984). Recent theories on governance networks have clearly built on a history that spans at least 40 years of organizational science, political science and public administration. Before we reflect on the potential future direction of the theory of governance networks, it is necessary to look at its origin.

Three research traditions on networks compared

Classifying the large quantity of articles on networks from the past 40 years, which were written within different research traditions, is always a bit arbitrary. We suggest distinguishing between three different types of research traditions focusing on various network types (see Klijn, 2008)ⁱⁱ. These research traditions are:

- *Research on policy networks*

This type of research is strongly based on a tradition in political science that focuses on the actors that participate in decision making in policy networks and those that have power and access to decision making. This stream of work can be traced back to the famous discussions on power in the 1960s (Dahl, 1961). This tradition continues

in the research on agenda forming (Cobb and Elder, 1972; Kingdon, 1984) and subsystems or subgovernments (Freeman & Parish Steevens, 1987), and was adopted in British research on policy communities and policy networks in the 1980s and 1990s (Rhodes, 1988; Jordan, 1990).

- Research on *inter-organizational service delivery and policy implementation*
This research tradition originates in organizational theory and adopts an inter-organizational perspective. It has a long tradition in organizational science, beginning with the early work on inter-organizational coordination (Rogers & Whetten, 1982). It assumes that organizations need resources from other organizations for their survival and therefore interact with these organisations (and thus networks emerge). Within this second perspective, attention is predominantly being paid to more complex services. Networks are regarded as vehicles for service delivery and implementation. The focus of this research tradition lies on coordination (mechanisms) and the creation of concrete products and outcomes (Hjern & Porter, 1981).
- Research on *managing networks*
The third tradition can be placed mainly within Public Administration. It focuses on solving public policy problems through and in networks. It stresses the complexity of the decision making involved in achieving policy outcomes. This research emerged in the 1970s with research on inter-organizational decision making and implementation (Scharpf, 1978). It focuses on existing networks involving policy initiatives and implementation, and on reconstructing and improving the networks and decision-making processes taking place within them (Kaufman et al, 1987; Marin and Mayntz, 1991; Kooiman, 1993). It also addresses the deliberation process between actors, including the possible outcomes and value conflicts that arise when actors try to achieve workable solutions for policy problems. More than in the other two research traditions, researchers who adhere to this third tradition have assumed that governance processes in networks are a consequence of, and are co-evolving with, the development of the (post-)modern network society (Castells, 2000).

Table 1 gives an overview of the three research traditions.

Table 1. Types of governance networks in empirical research and their characteristics

	Policy networks	Service delivery and implementation	Managing networks
Main origin	Political science	Organizational science/inter-organization theory	Public administration
Focus	Decision making and effects, closure and power relations on issue and agenda setting	Inter-organizational coordination, effective policy/service delivery, integrated policy/services	Solving societal problems, managing horizontal relations, connecting networks to traditional institutions, deliberation processes
Main research questions	- Which actors are involved in decision making (which network exists around the decision?) - What is the nature of the	- What does the network around service delivery look like? - How are networks around complex integrated services	- How can networks around societal problems be managed? How should networks be organized and connected to

	power relations/entrance to the network? - Which are the effects on decision making?	coordinated? - Which mechanisms are effective and efficient (contracting, partnerships, etc.)?	traditional institutions? How can the variety of content be improved? How can various value judgments be combined?
History	Started with the pluralist political science research of the 1960s and continues to focus on subsystems, policy communities, and policy networks	Started with the first inter-organizational theorists that focus on inter-organizational coordination and continues to focus on service delivery , contracting, and implementation	Started in the mid-1970s with work on inter-governmental relations (Scharpf, 1978) and continues with analyses of new forms of management, including their effects and requirements

Adapted from Klijn, 2008

Each of these traditions actually focuses on different types of networks. The policy networks tradition focuses on the relation between the state and interest groups (and the influence on public policy making), the service delivery and implementation tradition focuses on coordination problems in delivering public services in a fragmented setting, and the tradition of managing networks is focused on solving complex policy problems through horizontal coordination between interdependent actors. Despite these differences, the traditions all use the word ‘network’ extensively and focus on horizontal coordination mechanisms between actors (mostly organizations). They share a common interest in the relations between actors and assume that outcomes and performance result from interactions between a variety of actors rather than from the actions and policy of one actor alone. In that sense, all three traditions tend to enlarge the scope of analysis to the context in which policy and policy programs emerge and are sustained.

3. The Present: what is the state of the art?

Since the emergence of the three different network research traditions the literature on governance networks has grown substantively (see note 1; see Hwang and Moon, 2009 for a statistical analysis). In this section, we discuss the state of the art of GNT by giving an overview of its core concepts, the main empirical findings of its research and some recent developments.

3.1. The main concepts of governance network theory

The first observation that can be made about the state of the art is that convergence has occurred between the three research traditions. While in the past one would see only very few cross-citations between the traditions, which formed separate (disciplinary) pillars (see Marcussen & Olsen, 2007), both the variety in research methods and the use of concepts derived from the different traditions have increased (see Lewis 2011 for an overview). Although the debate on concepts and the nature of network theory among network researchers is ongoing and will continue, a body of common concepts and assumptions can be identified. The evolving theory on (governance) networks is characterized by the use of the following core concepts and assumptions:

- *Actors, interdependency and frames.* Policy and service delivery is formed and implemented in a network of interdependent actors. Most network researchers agree that interdependency is the core factor that initiates and sustains networks (Scharpf, 1978; Marin & Mayentz, 1991; Rhodes 1997; Agranoff & McGuire, 2003; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). However, they also stress that actors choose these strategies on the basis of their perceptions (or frames) of the world and thus have different views on problems and solutions (Schön and Rein, 1994).
- *Interactions and complexity.* As a consequence of the interdependencies between actors and the variety of perceptions and strategies that they rely on, complex interaction and negotiating patterns emerge in problem solving, policy implementation and service delivery. The governance network approach stresses that outcomes of policy and public services are a consequence of the interaction of many actors rather than of the action of one single actor (Mandell, 2001; Agranoff and McGuire, 2003; Kickert et al 1997).
- *Institutional features.* Interaction patterns result in institutionalization of relationships between actors. These can be understood as patterns of social relations (interactions, power relations etc.) and patterns of rules. Social network analysis is a well-known quantitative method to map interactions and to identify the structural features that emerge in networks (Lauman and Knoke, 1987; Provan et al, 2009; Lewis, 2011). However, institutional relations also involve the emergence of rules that regulate behavior in networks. Rules facilitate interaction in networks, thus reducing transaction costs and influencing the performance of networks (Ostrom, 1986; Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004).
- *Network management.* The complexity of processes within networks requires guidance and management of interactions. This is usually referred to as network management (Gage and Mandell, 1990; Kickert et al, 1997; Meir and O'Toole, 2007). These activities are aimed at facilitating interactions, exploring (new) content and organizing interactions between actors. The horizontal nature of network management implies that it is a different activity compared to traditional intra-organizational management.

3.2. *Empirical results from governance network research*

The past 10 years have yielded a wide variety of studies that have embraced the idea of 'networks' as a central concept. Initially, case studies and social network analyses dominated the field. But during the last several years, a larger variety of methods have been employed, particularly quantitative research with regard to the relationship between networking or network management and outcomes (Meier and O Toole, 2007; Provan et al, 2009; Klijn, Steijn and Edelenbos, 2010, Lewis, 2011). Below, we will highlight some of the core findings: the complexities of network processes, the importance of networking and network management and the role of trust.

The complexity of governance network processes

The many case studies aimed at reconstructing interaction processes in governance networks paint a picture of very complex interactions between interdependent actors with divergent interests and perceptions about desirable solutions. It is also apparent that networks cut through different layers of government and connect governmental actors

with a wide range of private and semi-private actors, which makes them very complex also from an institutional point of view (see for instance Mandell, 2001; Marcussen & Torfing, 2007) As a result, multi-actor interaction processes with regard to problem solving and public service delivery do not develop in a linear way, following a number of sequential phases. Rather, they are erratic. They may result in win-win outcomes and collaborative advantages, but they may also regularly fail, take a lot of time, and have high transition costs. They may result in dialogues of the deaf, or they may even be aborted (Mandell, 2001; Ansell and Gash, 2008; Marcussen and Torfing, 2007).

Networking and network management: governing networks

Because of the relatively autonomous position and strategies of the actors and the resulting complexity of the decision-making processes, it is difficult to achieve satisfactory outcomes without extensive networking between the actors and managerial activities. Although networking and network management are often linked, conceptual clarity requires that a distinction is made between the two. For network management - in other words, actively employing network management strategies, networking is essential, but not all networking is necessarily network management.

O'Toole et al (2007) have shown that networking, in the sense of aiming to establish contacts with a variety of actors, is common among managers both in the US and the UK. Meir and O'Toole showed that the more managers engage in networking, the better results they achieve (Meir and O Toole, 2007). This suggests that the more connections managers have, the more effective they are. However, Akkermans and Toorenvliet (2011), in their research on school principals, found indications that managers concentrate on specific connections depending on their ambitions. They also concluded that it is not always networking in general (i.e., simply increasing one's number of connections) that is beneficial but rather the development of specific connections with specific actors (such as politicians, parent organizations, etc.)

Network management strategies include: initiating and facilitating interaction processes between actors (Gage and Mandell, 1990; Kickert et al., 1997): creating and changing network arrangements for better coordination (Rogers and Whetten, 1982; Scharpf, 1978) and creating new content, for example by exploring new ideas, working with scenarios, organizing joint research and joint fact finding (Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004). It is clear that network management requires another type of management compared to traditional management, since network managers do not possess many hierarchical means to intervene. It requires negotiating skills, skills to bind actors and skills to forge new solutions that appeal to various actors whose resources are required to implement solutions. A sense of urgency on the part of the actors in the network to solve substantive and interaction problems is a very important condition (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004).

In recent years comparative findings have been reported in studies in a wide number of western countries such as the US (Mandell, 2001; Agranoff and McGuire, 2003; Huang and Provan, 2007), the Scandinavian countries (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007), the UK (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002), the Netherlands (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2004; Edelenbos and Klijn, 2006), Italy, Belgium and Germany (see Klijn, Steijn & Edelenbos, 2010). Thus network management as an activity seems to fulfill an important role. In an attempt to overcome the limitations of case studies, these analyses have been repeated by large-

N-studies. Huang and Provan (2007) have shown that network involvement, or network embeddedness, is positively related to outcomes. Klijn et al (2010a) have shown in a survey among actors involved in spatial planning projects that networks in which increasingly intensive network management strategies are employed show better performance (measured as perceived by the respondents) compared to networks in which fewer managerial strategies are employed.ⁱⁱⁱ

But that does not mean that network management is an easy task. Often the efforts needed to manage these processes are underestimated. As a result, managers and other actors fall back to obsolete behavior, thus frustrating the interactive processes. Interactive processes often fail due to diverging expectations. Involving stakeholders in processes may cause disappointments due to rising expectations. While managers may involve citizens from democratic perspectives, the latter participate because they expect substantive results. Often the boundaries of interactive processes are set in such a way that it is hard to meet the preferences of participants (Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004; Marcussen and Torfing, 2007)

Trust in governance networks

Trust is often mentioned as the core coordination mechanism of networks. It is contrasted with two other forms of governance: markets and hierarchies (Thompson et al, 1991). To conceptualize trust as a core coordination mechanism in networks, however, is misleading and confusing. Within networks, coordination by hierarchy and market is not necessarily absent. Moreover, many authors observe that trust in network is relatively rare and networks are characterized by interest conflicts and strategic behavior (Scharpf, 1978; Marin & Mayntz, 1991; Rhodes 1997). Therefore, trust cannot be considered as an inherent characteristic of networks.

Nevertheless, many scholars postulate that trust may indeed play an important role in networks (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Klijn, Edelenbos & Steijn, 2010b). Trust reduces strategic uncertainty, because actors take each other's interest into account. It also reduces the necessity of complex contracts and enhances the possibility that actors will share information and develop innovative solutions (see Lane and Bachman, 1998). Empirical research has shown that the level of trust affects network performance (Provan et al, 2009). Klijn et al (2010a), for instance, have shown in their quantitative research on complex environmental projects that a higher level of trust generated in governance networks had a positive impact on network performance

Given these findings it is probably better to reverse the argument about trust and networks: trust is not the sole coordinating mechanisms of networks, but trust is an important asset to achieve in networks. It reduces strategic uncertainty, and thus facilitates investments in uncertain collaboration processes among interdependent actors with diverging and sometimes conflicting interests.

3.3. Recent topics in governance network research

Beside the consolidation of central concepts of network theory, during the last ten years some new topics have emerged on the research agendas of network scholars. Below, we discuss three developments that have contributed to the enrichment of network theory beyond its original foundations: the introduction of the concepts of governance and meta-

governance, the rediscovery of democratic theories and the linking-up of network theory with literature on innovation.

Governance and meta-governance: verbal innovation and beyond

The concept of networks has increasingly been connected to the concept of governance, which has emerged since the late 1990s. In the context of network theory, instead of *policy networks* and *network management* we now speak of *governance networks* and *network governance*.

Governance may have many different meanings (Pierre and Peters, 2000). Within network literature, governance refers to the horizontal interactions by which various public and private actors at various levels of government coordinate their interdependencies in order to realize public policies and deliver public services. Governance refers to self-regulation of actors within networks; the 'networking' of these actors. However, governance is also used to refer to strategies of governments and non-governmental organizations aimed at initiating, facilitating and mediating network processes, that is: network management.

This conceptual ambiguity has been resolved by the introduction of the concept of meta-governance. Sørensen and Torfing (2007) refer to meta-governance as 'governance of (self-)governance'. They see meta-governance as a combination of hands-off tools such as institutional design and network framing, and hands-on tools such as process management and direct participation.

So far, the emergence of the concepts of governance and meta-governance seems to be mostly a verbal innovation. That does not mean the terms are unimportant. They have proven their communicative value in academic debate and appeal to practitioners, thus contributing to the valorization of insights of network theory in practice.

In some respects, these concepts do introduce new meanings. Some scholars seem to regard meta-governance as a way of framing network conditions, thus shaping and constraining the behavior of actors in networks (Jessop, 2002). As a result, hierarchical control is indirectly reintroduced, but now in an even more opaque and manipulative manner. This seems to be at odds with the characteristics of networks and network society that limit the possibilities of government and meta-governance alike (see Koppenjan et al, 2011). Research on meta-governance is the key to further clarifying the nature and working of meta-governance strategies and their influence on the (self-)governance of actors in networks, and to proving the value of the concept.

Rediscovering democracy

Originally, especially in the policy networks tradition, the concept of networks was strongly tied to the theme of democracy, as researchers asked the question who influenced the main decisions and how this related to (representative) democracy. Increasingly, network research focused on the efficiency of networks and problem solving. Recently in the European research on networks, this connection between networks and democracy has been 'rediscovered' (Klijn and Skelcher, 2007; Sørensen and Torfing, 2007)

Many authors recognize tensions between the idea of representative democracy with a more vertical accountability structure and the direct democracy of network governance processes that includes stakeholders in policy making. The existence of this tension

between both forms of democracy in network governance practices is confirmed by empirical research (Skelcher et al, 2005).

Several authors suggest ways to enhance democracy. They propose ideas to strengthen relations between networks and elected bodies, to enhance the openness of the decision making within networks, to improve the representativeness of stakeholders, to introduce horizontal forms of accountability, and so on. In general, one may conclude that networks can be undemocratic (when they are closed to stakeholders), but that they can also be opened up and thus contribute to the democratic character of decision making (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007).

There is a significant amount of literature about improving the democratic character of networks by enhancing the role of politicians, citizens and other stakeholders. The available research suggests that many network governance processes still have a predominantly technocratic nature. The quality of the discussions in governance networks often is low and does not meet criteria coming from more deliberate democracy models (see Griggs and Howard, 2007). It seems difficult to open up decision-making processes for other goals than those of the initiating governmental actors. In general, the formal accountability rules are met in the sense that representative bodies do have to approve decisions in the end, and stakeholders and citizens are allowed to express opinions and to use their rights for appeal. But these actors do not seem to have a very large influence on the content (Edelenbos and Klijn, 2006; Le Gales, 2001).

Thus we may conclude that although intentions for improving the democratic legitimacy of network processes exist, this new practice is only slowly emerging. It proves hard to achieve outcomes of open interactive processes that involve stakeholders, accepted in the formal decision-making arenas. The interface between interactive arenas and formal decision-making arenas should therefore be a major concern in process design (Koppenjan et al, 2011) .

The governance of innovation networks and collaborative innovation

The contribution of network governance to innovations has recently gained attention. Innovation has not been totally absent in network thinking, since the realization of outcomes that do justice to the preferences of various actors requires the search for innovative solutions. However, the main concerns within the network approach have been effectiveness and, more recently, legitimacy. In economic innovation literature, the presence of inter-organizational networks between private firms in research and development is a well-recognized condition for innovation. Enhancing network formation has been an integral part of governmental innovation policies (Teece, 1992). Since the 1990s, collaboration between private forms, governments and knowledge producers - the triple helix - aimed at the enhancement of innovative capacity of economic regions, districts, clusters and business parks, has received much attention (Lundvall, 1985; Van Himpel, 2007; Dente et al, 2008).

Recent theory development on system transitions stretches these insights beyond product, process and institutional innovation to the level of societal subsystems, by analyzing the role of collaboration, arenas and networks in transition processes towards sustainability of, for example, (parts of the) the energy and the transport sector (Koppenjan et al, 2012). As far as innovation within the public sector is concerned, network governance aimed at collaborative innovation in public policy making and service delivery is seen as an

alternative to uniform, top-down reforms of bureaucratic government and the New Public Management-inspired innovations spurred by public managers (Hartley, 2005; Considine et al, 2009).

In addition to economic innovation theory, attempts at public sector innovation can be informed by network governance research. Research into these topics is aimed at revealing the mechanisms underlying the emergent processes of collaborative innovation and the role of the characteristics of the horizontal innovation networks therein. In doing so, network governance research may contribute to innovation in the private and public sectors by identifying principles for meta-governance strategies.

4. The Future: where is governance network theory going?

Making predictions about the future is bound to fail (Gardner, 2011). We prefer an alternative approach: below we address three major societal developments which we expect to have a major impact on governance networks in practice and therefore on the research of, and theory building by, network governance theorists. These trends are: the mediatization of society and governance; the ongoing proliferation of the risks and uncertainties in today's society; and the emergence of New Public Governance practices.

4.1 Governance networks in a mediatized world

In order to be effective and actively manage their network, public managers must engage in interactions with various stakeholders. The capacities and leadership skills that are required in this respect, contrast with the skills needed to survive in a mediatized and dramatized political world. Authors stress that politics has become more and more theatrical, a development that has largely been boosted by the media. Democracy has become a drama-democracy (Elchardus, 2002; Hjarvard, 2008). Baumgartner & Jones, (2009) emphasize the erratic character of decision making as a result of media attention). This is partly the result of the media logic that governs the framing of the news. Bennett identifies four types of informational biases that are characteristic for media logic (Bennett, 2009):

1. *personalization*, or the tendency to emphasize the personal aspect of news;
2. *dramatization*, or the tendency to present news as more dramatical than it actually is, emphasizing crisis and conflict in stories, rather than striving for continuity or harmony;
3. *fragmentation*, or an increasing focus on isolated stories and events, separating these from their larger context and from each other (Bennett 2009: 44-45);
4. an *authority-disorder bias*, a preoccupation with order and whether authorities are capable of maintaining or restoring that order.

Patterson's (2000) analysis of 5,000 news stories between 1980 and 1999 confirms many of these biases and shows a significant change in both the subject of news and the way news is presented in the US. Stories without public policy-related content increased from 35 percent to nearly 50 percent of all news. In addition, today's news is much more critical towards politicians and focuses more on their individual and private lives. This tendency has also been found in other countries (Kleinnijenhuis et al, 2006; Ruemanen et al, 2010).

The mediatized drama-democracy world seems to ask for strong leaders that communicate strong ideas. Politics has become personalized, and communicating ideas has become more important than implementing them (Fisher, 2003). Recent research using survey material from complex decision-making processes shows that negative media attention has a significant negative effect on the performance of networks (Korthagen and Klijn, 2011). Tensions between the complex negotiating character of the networked practical world, the back stage, and the mediatized world of the political life that requires simple solutions and strong leadership, the front stage, increasingly become apparent. Both practice and in research are faced with the question how these front and back stages practices can be combined.

Mediatization is not limited to mass media though. It also manifests itself by the increasing use of social media such as the Internet, cellular phones, text messages, Twitter and the like. The impact of these new media goes beyond the development of e-governance, by which government uses the Internet to provide services to citizens. The proliferation of these new media lead to the emergence of virtual networks: communities that, under certain circumstances, may impact on governance network and politics. Rather than virtual realities, these networks produce real virtuality (Castells, 2000). Policy makers are often unaware of the existence of these virtual networks and the dynamics they create, in influencing the behavior of actors in networks, mobilizing support for or opposition to policies, and setting the agenda of the traditional mass media (see Bekkers et al, 2011). While social media in cases of emergency may uncover the inability of authorities to react adequately, they may also be used by governments to be informed by citizens, to inform citizens, and to enhance the ability of citizens to self-govern (Russel, 2007). The study of the role of social media in government networks is still in its infancy, but attention is growing and this certainly is a promising avenue for further research.

4.2 Governance networks and the ongoing proliferation of risks and uncertainties

The risks of today's complex, globalized and networked society represent one of the most pressing challenges facing governments and their governance structures today. Beck's diagnosis of the risk society has gained a new salience after '9/11' and the financial crisis with their worldwide impacts (Beck 1992). But other developments, such as climate change, the spread of epidemics and cyber attacks, also show the interdependencies and vulnerability of today's globalized society. Events that are unexpected and that until recently were considered to be unlikely - 'unknown unknowns' and Black Swans - threaten the critical technological, societal and governmental infrastructures of our society, and seem to be immune to the existing methods and institutions that guide risk and crisis management (Longstaff, 2005; Talub, 2007). What is more, due to their complexity, risk management methods are not fully understood, allowing knowledgeable risk takers to behave strategically, and to capitalize on risks rather than to reduce them (De Bruijne et al, 2001). On top of these developments, the authoritativeness of experts, scientific research and knowledge institutions has become problematic. The nature of the problems, the public and the media call for immediate actions, evidence-based policies and strong leadership, the evidence base of the direction of such actions is contested or compromised. The escalating debate on the mistakes in the climate report published by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 2007 provides an example of

this trend. Knowledge producers and experts are increasingly seen as partisan and involved in policy advocacy (Nowotny et al 2001). The rise of social media adds to this development, making it difficult to distinguish between evidence- and non-evidence-based statements, producing competing truths and thus contributing to information overload and uncertainty (Bekkers et al, 2011). As a result, some observe a flight from rationalism, resulting in populism and ‘fact-free politics’ (Van Zoonen, 2011). Governments therefore need not only to reassess their risk-analysis and risk-management strategies, but also to rethink the role of expertise, scientific research and knowledge institutes (Collins and Evans, 2007). Network management ideas stress the need for interactions and trust building in order to internalize externalities, create stable, negotiated environments, and prevent the emergence of principal-agent-type relationships with their inherent pattern of strategic information exchange and gaming. Network theory suggests and investigates new ways of arranging relationships between knowledge producers and other societal parties in interaction processes. Boundary work is aimed at balancing the contradiction between the need for scientific distance and impartiality and that for involvement and connection with alternative knowledge sources in policy, business and social networks (Head, 2007; Koppenjan and Klijn 2004). At the same time, however, the answer to these complex questions cannot be provided by a single theoretical approach. Theories on complexity, complex adaptive systems and crisis management emphasize self-regulative mechanisms within systems (Teisman et al 2009; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2007). Attempts at management are not self-evident, according to these approaches. As far as management is possible, it should be focused on strengthening the adaptiveness and resilience of systems (De Bruijne et al, 2010). It may well be that the complexity of the risks involved transcend the genuine management strategies suggested by network theory. Since the managerial orientation of theory building on complexity is underdeveloped, it may be worthwhile to look for contributions of network governance. This may involve the re-evaluation of various core assumptions and core concepts regarding the nature of complexity and networks as envisioned by network theory.

4.3 From New Public Management towards New Public Governance

Although governance network theory has gradually developed over the past decades, in the recent debate on the shortcomings and negative effects of New Public Management, it is presented, under the heading of the New Public Governance, as a new perspective that might replace NPM as the dominant steering paradigm in both practice and academia (Osborne, 2006; 2010). We, however, doubt whether NPM will soon be a concept of the past (Christensen and Laegreid, 2007). These practices and the institutional changes that have accompanied them will likely persist.

What is more, practitioners applying NPM methods recognize the need to compensate or repair the drawbacks of the one-sided emphasis on efficiency. Initiatives are taken to introduce new arrangements which compensate for the negative effects of unbundling, contracting, and performance measurement; effects like the loss of trust, the rise of strategic behavior and the increased need for coordination and collaboration. The introduction of joint-up government initiatives and the whole of government movement are examples attempt to enhance collaboration and new ways of coordinating. New forms of regulation are introduced to safeguard public interests. Perverse impacts of

performance measurement, are mitigated by steering on quality, building commitment, and developing codes of corporate governance, aimed at re-establishing public values in government (Bouckaert et al, 2010; Jørgenson and Bozeman 2002). Theoretically, it has been recognized that the image of the rational actor who acts according to a logic of consequences is contingent, and that in many complex environments, institutions and logics of appropriateness are relevant as well. The predominance of economic outlooks has weakened at the favor of the sociologically and historically inspired approaches (Thelen 2004).

Ideas derived from Governance Network Theory may help to prevent that ways to repair the drawbacks of NPM practices are search for in only one direction, namely by reimposing hierarchy and enhancing control rather than by strengthening interaction, commitments and trust. On the other hand, NPM may help to mitigate the blind spots of Network Governance: the risks of endless deliberation without paying attention to transaction costs and accountability. Therefore, in public administration practice, pressures can be detected that drive both perspectives towards each other, resulting in cross-overs and the convergence of practices and ideas (Koppenjan, 2012).

As far as a New Public Governance practice will emerge, it will probably not replace NPM by network governance. Rather it will result in the proliferation of hybrid institutional assemblages that combine NPM-like arrangements aimed at efficiency and transparency, with network governance-like provisions enhancing interaction and commitment (Van der Walle and Hammerschmidt, 2011). Since hybrids may prove to be unstable, resulting in monstrous combinations rather than in 'the best of both worlds' (see Warner, 2008; Billis, 2010), the practical and theoretical challenges will be to identify incompatibilities and common grounds in the assumptions and principals that underlie both paradigms. For governance network theory, this will imply a shift of focus from network arrangements and network governance towards the study of hybrid governance structures and practices, in which hierarchical, market and network arrangements are combined.

5. Conclusion: the sweet smell of success?

In this contribution, we described the development of governance network theory from its first emergence, building on various older traditions, towards its maturity. We also discussed some societal trends that can be seen as new challenges to be addressed by governance network theory in the near future. This leads us to the question where the theory will be heading eventually.

One development that might be foreseen is a growing specialization and differentiation within governance network theory. The generic concepts and assumptions of governance network theory will be applied in different sectors and to different issues, getting intertwined with other theories and specific questions. It may well be that the next generation of public administration scholars may take governance network theory for granted and build specific theories on topics such as trust, strategic behavior, process management, citizen participation, media, horizontal accountability, risks, institutional design.

As stated earlier, complexities may be such that they cannot be captured in one single theory. In an attempt to address the challenges of future public administration, network theory may be connected with other theories and new approaches. A likely transcending pathway might be that of the advancement of ideas derived from complexity theory. The adoption of complexity ideas by network theorists might propel attention to emergence, self-regulation and adaptive governance, enriching the explanatory power of governance network theory beyond its current scope. This may result in the identification of innovative and promising governance perspectives. A risk may be that such developments drive network theory off the track, diminishing the attention for and believe in the governability of networks.

One challenge that governance networks theory definitely has to face is the emergence of hybrid governance practices as a result of the crisis in New Public Management, in combination with trends such as growing societal vulnerabilities and system risks and the shift towards a low-trust, mediatised drama democracy. If we are correct in assuming that the rise of New Public Governance will not necessarily result in the replacement of hierarchy and new public management by network governance, but rather in the evolution of hybrid arrangements combining these coordination mechanisms, the governance network theory has to reinvent itself to be able to address the potentials and risks of hybrid governance.

Above all, we should be aware of the limitations of governance network theory. The concepts and explanations that the theory offers are especially suitable for complex public problems which include many, interdependent actors. Not all problems and tasks handled by government are complex and can be informed by network theory. In light of the fast growth of research and literature on governance networks, we might almost forget that governance networks theory is not the theory of everything.

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ⁱ Scopus alone counts over 8,000 articles written in the period 1996-2007 (in the category of the social sciences, but Public Administration and urban and rural planning take up a fair share) in which the word governance can be found in the title, abstract or subtitle (when the scope is broadened, for example by including economics, the number exceeds 10,000). If we look at the numbers per year, a steady growth can be observed in the number of articles about governance, with rapid increases after 1996 and in the period after 2003 (1990:12; 1991: 7; 1992: 19; 1993: 28; 1994: 54; 1995: 64; 1996: 106; 1997: 248; 1998: 346; 1999: 408; 2000: 548; 2001: 574; 2002: 621; 2003: 715; 2004: 866; 2005: 1059; 2006: 1133; 2007: 1193. The word 'networks' gives even more 'hits'.

ⁱⁱ A quite similar demarcation can be found in Berry et al (2004) who distinguish between social network analysis, political science tradition and a public administration tradition. The first tradition we would call a method rather than a tradition. but a closer look reveals that it bears resemblance to our inter-organizational perspective.

ⁱⁱⁱ This research indicates that management strategies aimed at explorations and connecting are considered more effective (in terms of actors being satisfied with the process outcomes) than strategies aimed at arranging interactions and developing process rules (Klijn et al, 2010a).