



**Can meso-
governments use
meta-governance
tools to tackle
complex policy
problems?**

**A all llywodraethau
canol ddefnyddio
offer meta-
lywodraethu i fynd
i'r afael â
phroblemau polisi
cymhleth?**

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Research question

- International trend toward regionalisation and growth of meso-level governments and their powers
- Significant scholarly interest in metagovernance as researchers have sought to understand how governments and other actors seek to address complex policy problems

So, an exploratory study of whether, how and why meso-level governments use the tools and techniques of metagovernance to develop and implement policy agendas

Meso-government and meta-governance

Meso-government:

- Between and qualitatively different from national and local
 - 'exert self-rule within distinct homelands' (Hooghe et al. 2016) implies autonomy and permanence beyond mere administrative functionality.
 - Application to Wales: (now) significant but constrained self-rule (legal and budgetary autonomy) in small distinct territory

Meta-governance:

- 'the governance of governance' (Jessop 2016); 'deliberate attempts to facilitate, manage, and direct interactive governance areas' (Torfing 2016)
- Networks operate 'under the shadow of hierarchy' (Sørensen and Torfing 2009) and the state's resources usually give it advantages

Four tools of meta-governance (Sørensen & Torfing 2009, Torfing 2016)

'Hands On'	'Hands Off'
Network design <ul style="list-style-type: none">• E.g. shaping rules, norms, composition, procedures; setting/ negotiating milestones and timings.	Active network management <ul style="list-style-type: none">• E.g. arbitration, resolving differences, reducing transaction costs for participants
Steering network goals and framework <ul style="list-style-type: none">• E.g. define problems and possible solutions, align goals with those of actors to encourage collaboration, diffuse best practices, fund selected activities, distribute roles among participants	Active network participation <ul style="list-style-type: none">• E.g. active leadership, coalition building, argument, displaying trust to foster trust

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Case study: Part 2 Housing (Wales) Act 2014

Rationale for selection

- Relatively recent, ambitious and (so far) successful example of Welsh Government deploying range of powers and policy levers
- Single case offers understanding which can be tested in other settings and combined with insights gained from them

Methods

- Detailed documentary analysis
- In-depth semi-structured interviews with 16 policy actors
- Policy reunion with 7 key informants and academic discussant

Case study: findings 1

Network design

- Wales: Small country, few governing institutions, often close-knit policy communities. Small civil service relies more on non-governmental actors for information and support.
- WG actively fostered compact, well-integrated networks
- Steering network goals and framework

WG funded and steered networks

- Fostered common storyline and sense of ownership of outcomes by partners
- Promoted shared ownership of implementation

Small size of Wales and homelessness policy community mandated a 'hands on' approach to these 'hands off' tools

Case study: findings 2

Active network management

- Implementation referred to above
- Arbitrating in intra-network conflicts: Ministers' decisions accepted as binding by all participants
- WG had financial and legal responsibility/ powers but LAs/ third sector implemented: they needed each other.

Active network participation

- Constant engagement and sometimes coalition building by WG officials
- Collaborative engagement in producing statutory guidance

Discussion

- The Welsh Government used metagovernance to develop an innovative and distinctive homelessness policy framework
 - Mitigated some of the limitations of WG's *constitutionally* intermediate position
 - Maximised the benefits of WG's *geographically and hierarchically* intermediate position
- WG's proximity to other actors in the field meant that metagovernance extended upwards to ministers and downwards to relatively junior officials
- Demonstrated importance of combining formal and informal powers and resources.

Conclusions

- WG used all four of Sørensen and Torfing's tools- but in practice boundaries between them were often blurred and tools were deployed concurrently
- WG officials can be described as 'governor-participants', consistently shaping and steering networks whilst also participating in them. 'Governor-participant role' may be particularly important in the case of meso-governments
- Relatively junior WG officials displayed strategic and collaborative metagovernance competences that Sørensen and Torfing (2009) suggest are usually found among more senior officials.
- Possibility: the closer (geographically and hierarchically) a government is to network actors and the more active its metagovernance, the less the distinction between policy and implementation and the more opportunities and requirements for officials at different levels to act as metagovernors.

References

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