



## Book Review

### “NPG: a Cursory Survey of a New Currency”

**New Public Governance: A Regime-Centered Perspective** by Douglas F. Morgan and Brian J. Cook. M.E. Sharpe, Inc.: New York. 2014. 378 pages.

**Primer Pagunuran\***

A book surfacing on the ‘new public governance’ (NPG) debate attracts attention precisely because NPG is an emerging concept of governance in the field of public policy and administration. Rising next and above the level of new public management (NPM), NPG assumes various tags: a theory of governance, a movement, a fundamental framework, a paradigm shift, and quite historically so, a leadership course in the ‘new curriculum’. In effect, the work of Morgan and Cook triangulates the new theory with applied research and with lessons from the field making it a veritable corpus of knowledge.

The authors contributed immensely to the multidisciplinary focus of a central theme known as NPG as well as its sub-themes in the context of a globalized world. For its thesis, the work cuts neatly the perspectival difference between NPM and NPG in terms perhaps of what the former undervalues to what the latter overvalues. A broader range of public values find expression in NPG beyond such tenets as efficiency, effectiveness, and responsiveness; a reliable handle to grasp the meaning of ‘horizontal structures of authority’ (Morgan and Cook, *Preface*) in addition to conventional wisdom (i.e. vertical hierarchies); and more importantly, from a ‘mere aggregation of individual preferences’ (Morgan and Shinn, p.5) to the ultimate notion of what Morgan and Shinn call the ‘larger public good’. NPG then serves as a ‘catalytic agent to invest private and non-profit stakeholders in shared ownership of the public good’ (p. 6). The compendium is what came out from

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a symposium in September 2011 sponsored by the Hatfield School of Government's Center for Public Service where author Morgan is professor emeritus while Cook is a professor and chair of the Center for Public Administration and Policy of Virginia Tech.

The book encompasses nearly all that were said of NPM – its strengths, its weaknesses, and its accomplishments. NPG as the new mindset carries the germ of its own birth, its own history, and its own future. New public governance (NPG) as a – concept, theory, and system – broke ground in the academic literature fresh in time. This paradigmatic, parametric, and prescriptive frame of thought introduced few more conceptual values in the lingua franca of a field of study called public administration thus enriching and nourishing it. Beyond the common metrics of efficiency, effectiveness, and performance, NPG, as it leaves its predecessor NPM, is guarded by major companion concepts as collaboration, mediation, coproduction, and even cooptation thus making public sector shrivel while making private sector swell. Market model has small a hand to grapple with public sector dynamics. Statist model has neither a hand large enough to grapple with private sector or be an arbiter of public values amongst various stakeholders often competing for affirmative action.

NPG dwells largely on 'public sector dynamics' in a given contextual setting, namely: democracy. In a universe of varied voices and interests, the administrative state as the 'Open Society' that it is, has its 'Enemies', to extract a note from Karl Popper's social philosophy. But neither is it the attempt of this review to, in the end, drift to an idea that NPG ought to be something that soon must be replaced by another, assumptions put to a more rigid test, and be falsified to give way to a more nuanced theoretical approach. Or that the theoretical pendulum might swing back, in this case, return to the level of new public management from where it came. Not for now unless at any given threshold, NPG may yet be abandoned to attempt to define further on a one-step-more concept of the 'greatest good for the greatest number' also known as *summum bonum*.

It must be pointed out that the NPM movement is the precursor of the NPG [movement] after what is described by scholars and pracademics as 'several decades of infatuation' with the former. NPG as a regime-centered approach simply connotes reverence to rule of law, authority, and values in the political system derived mainly from the lessons of the American democratic experience or its



more mature counterpart like the United Kingdom. Historically enough, NPG traces its roots to anti-statist worldview: the idea that government needs to be fixed as its system has been broken and such notion of it [government] as too big to fail. NPG, according to the volume, accounts for two developments, namely: 1) policy setting in non-public legislative settings (i.e. consortia, think tanks) and 2) third-party mediating structures for public services delivery. Morgan, Shinn, and Cook say that this then results in a mindset that ‘obscures formal legal boundaries’ (Chp 23, 322). Suffice to say that the ultimate trajectory is that of the common good for a healthy democratic polity with its umbrella values of accountability and legitimacy where they seek shelter.

Speaking of public values, one type, “regime values” include ‘beliefs, passions, and principles held for many generations by overwhelming majority’ (Newbold and Rosenbloom 2014, 286) and the other, “normative consensus values” include rights, benefits, obligations and the principles on which policies are based. This is mentioned so as not to allow our rather limited understanding of the subject of NPG fly off the handle, as if it were. This compendium of select articles over three identified thematic thrusts, namely: theory of governance, deliberative democracy in action, and public service leadership is intended as the marriage between public administration on the one hand and public policy on the other cast in a web of public sector dynamics that involve behavioural characteristics of democratic regimes, contracts or similar institutional arrangements, networks to considerable extent, competencies and leadership. Not to be forgotten is a process of injecting in them public values that then put in motion existing structures, processes, and practices. In other words, everything about the new public governance is gestalt and there will not be a gestalt switch that can lie ahead given that this scholarly volume encapsulates as well as invigorates forum from the lens of American or Western prototype in so far as regime is concerned.

Morgan and Cook pour concrete into the mixture consisting of 1) constitutional and political values; 2) local governing institutions; and 3) public leadership down the rung. From here it builds the theory of new public governance (NPG) from a ‘regime-centered perspective’ which means it largely rolls out what values there are in the American constitutional or political system. To the extent that it searches for that democratic ideal, the work of Morgan and Cook is set to throw



‘hundred points of light’ in its articulation and application down to the level of local governing institutions or better still across organizations, jurisdictions, territories, or allied legal boundaries.

A ‘regime-centered approach’ is axiomatic of one’s subscription to law, authority via structures, principles, and processes that inherently also preserve the values of the political system (Morgan, Shinn, and Cook, 315). In fact, said authors explain that “a regime-centered approach requires us to broaden our view of efficiency and effectiveness away from a managerial framework to include what makes sense politically in terms of political efficiency and political effectiveness” (316). Quite a long list of names belongs to this so-called “constitutional school” of public administration and their individual work excites commitment, not alienation.

NPG as a tier higher than new public management (NPM) theory crystallizes the deficit in NPM’s mantra (i.e. government is run like a business) and in its leadership in settings of absolute uncertainty. In short, the role of NPG begins where the role of NPM ends. In the book, some clear demarcation lines are made to distinguish structural and institutional arrangements based on such approaches as networked governance, contracts, and partnerships whereupon public values are built around NPG’s conceptual, theoretical, and systemic foundations. At bottom, NPG thrives in the ‘context of existing law and policy’ (Ch. 23, 323) – probably a vast level playing field – for values, policies, politics, polities, multiple relationships to play out in full bore. In the end, amidst complexities, constraints, and challenges that confront new public governance as a young formulation, it may be said at little risk of error that there is only one spider in the web.

In a larger sense, the work of the insightful authors draws from a well of comparative analytics crossing the very pathway between new public management and new public governance, the latter as a concept or theory at its infancy or otherwise considered to have been pulled out from archives of a yet more ‘self-conscious’ discipline and field of study. In fact, Morgan and Shinn in the very first article of the volume neatly refer to NPM as the first movement and NPG as the second where the former anchors on a market model while the latter on a collaborative approach, albeit these are actually strategies designed to measure efficiency and performance where both values do reinforce trust and legitimacy as end goals or objectives.



Again, this Morgan and Cook's scholarly volume of 23 articles cum chapters from respectable authors, editors, and contributors is a badge on how substantively and excellently relevant worldviews along disciplinal and multidisciplinary scopes could be put together in just one swoop in order to privilege students, scholars, practitioners of public administration and public policy and even more so of *pracademics* defined as career practitioners with earned doctoral degrees. For now, it can be said that the literature on NPG as a theory of governance is finite and such view may not invite debate. Morgan and Cook inject the serum making the finite compendium of articles glowing in its fresh and lasting scholarly appeal. This particular 'theory of governance' will be the currency in a field of study that accepts rather than rejects reconfigurations as soon as the grounds swell, as if it were.

This perhaps correctly brings challenge to the 'promise and potential' of NPG given a broad array of variables (i.e. local administrators, partnerships, network participants, etc.). In effect, the authors of the book roll out the multi-faceted constraints that stand in the way across actors, players or sectors that Don Bohn has aptly described as 'rowing their separate boats' (Chapter 11). Quite of interest is likewise on how neatly the book cuts between policy and polity thereby introducing such fresh notions of 'polity leaders' (Robinson and Morgan, Chapter 12) as distinguished from policy makers who are the ones who pull the restrictions or have the regulatory control of the so-called administrative state.

As regard the agency of networked governance, it is of interest to ponder upon the idea of multi-level environmental governance aptly coined as the MLEG framework advanced by Halimi and Shinn (Chapter 14) whereupon collaboration is like being tested to the tilt in terms of institutional capacity at all known levels, be them local state, regional, and international. Across these paths, if may even be possible to advance the suspicion of a 'centralizing' global NPG order viewed from the larger prism of policy and politics. But this view could invite just another vibrant discussion. Suffice that there is really a call for 'thinking holistically in a world of complexity' – an idea that breathes in the work – which, by and large, truly depends to my mind, on both policy and polity leadership. Certainly, collaborative governance conceptually occupies yet another space in the literature – an incentive for further research and scholarship.



A very interesting discussion is presented in ‘Agency in Networks’ (Morgen 2014, 224) in the case of the Columbia River Basin with regard to its apparent effects on 4 states, 15 Native American Indian tribes, and numerous local governments not to mention individuals and private interests throughout the Northwest. In here, we see how differences, conflicts even, play out in full bore necessitating 28 proposals that divide between what Morgen terms as ‘authoritative governance’ on the one hand, and ‘collaborative networks’ (Morgen 2014, 224) on the other. But 14 of 28 proposals were enacted all of which a result of collaborative approach. In this case alone, a lot of lessons have been learned.

The book is insightful in its discussion on drivers of change from NPM to NPG. After all, the theoretical pendulum swings from that end to the other. Larsen’s thesis is that NPM is ‘the vehicle that governments around the world have used for three decades to harness and better manage burgeoning bureaucracies’ (Larsen 2014, 126). Unwittingly perhaps, he set what comes across as a Malthusian fear: ‘increasing citizen demand for goods and services with decreasing resources’ (126). In such a dilemma, it gave way to citizen involvement in decision making and coproduction wherein now citizens help agencies produce government goods and services. Thus it is said that ‘engagement and public/private partnerships have spawned NPG as the new emergent form of governance’ as well as account for a ‘dynamic equilibrium’. As commonly said, democracy has several voices, several noises.

It is equally interesting Larsen’s citing Dahl’s notion of pluralism as inherent in the workings of American democracy (Larsen, 126): “Instead of a single center of sovereign power, there must be multiple centers of power, none of which is or can be wholly sovereign” (citing Dahl 1964, 24). Such centers are for: ‘taming power, securing consent, and settling conflicts peacefully’. The freshly-minted sub-field called new public governance makes its debut upon now present generations of students and scholars. Beyond the mere articulation on what NPG is designed to achieve for the administrative state, for the region, or for the world at large, perhaps what is even more important at a given critical juncture is on how ‘competently’ NPG is operationalized or applied – with education, with skill, and more so with values already deeply embedded where and when ‘command and control’



restrain, restrict, redirect the governance system in place. In a sense, the curse of path dependence in our view of the world has been overcome.

Public values reverent to the democratic criterion as in the American constitutional system makes case for a regime-centered perspective on new public governance and rightly so, at its best. In the overall run of public affairs, something can always give rise to what Morcol at a paper presented in the 2015 conference of the American Society of Public Administration terms as the ‘new situation’ (New Public Governance or Complex Governance Networks?, of the book). Morgan and Cook’s theoretical overview on 1) foundation or framework of new public governance, 2) capacity and leadership in democratic transformation, and 3) education and rethinking in the field – all these help to highlight the role of policy, politics, and polity and their inherent interoperability in the context of ‘democratic centering’. Whether they become ‘levers’ (Peters 2010, 220) for political leaders, policy makers, or allied practitioners probably depend on how much more or how much less the administrative state influences actors, players, or sectors from within and without.

Interestingly, as regards ‘perspective’ (Quibria 2015, 18), author Quibria cites Fukuyama’s argument to the effect that ‘governance is about the bureaucracy’s performance as opposed to politics or public policy’. That said, “an authoritarian regime can be well governed just as democracy can be mal-administered” (Quibria citing Fukuyama, 18). However in the short road and long road of NPG, it cannot be gainsaid that ‘constitutional orientation’ (Newbold in Ch. 2, 21) is itself a value that cannot be taken away from new public governance in the overall public-sector dynamics.

The volume amply supplied evidence-based discussion on the theoretical frame of NPG as well as a more detailed if not comprehensive overview than that perceived ‘narrower analytical framework’ of NPM. Over the course of history, experience, tradition, and ethico-social philosophy characteristic of NPG, we see clearly that as a theory of governance and therefore of public administration, it is inevitably if not inherently culture-bound. It is so since it embraced either an intellectual or constitutional orientation explicit and implicit of American democracy and political system.

And when the notion of common good over that of mere economic success rests on the platform of purely constitutional norm and values, again, it may open the door for unresolved



conflicts since relationships across all actors and sectors might necessitate State intervention which is anathema to a vibrant regime for NPG. Certainly, the controlling mind, regulating hand, and a value-legitimizing attitude of the administrative state must seek to behave in ways congruent with ‘the prevailing structure of American life and government’ as Moynihan foregrounds in Chp. 5 (60). However, were it in a manner suggestive of a kind of supremacist vogue or hegemony among democratic states or *primus inter pares*, then it would readily de-legitimate much bandied paradigm, parameter, and historical contextualism (Moynihan, 61) as probably void. Vogelsang-Coombs talks exhaustively of American constitutional or democratic legacy in Chp. 7 as basis and source of a public interest framework.

It is a consequent contention that values follow a logic of their own and in fact the path followed by NPG is in response or resistance even to what Moynihan terms as ‘real contemporary changes in governance’ (Chp., 5, 65). Whether indeed there ought to be a ‘model’ or ‘logic of governance’ (Spicer, Chp. 6, 67) in the heart and soul of NPG designed to inform public policy, politics, and polity ought to be a work in progress. Furthermore, this reviewer is of the view that whatever model, logic, or framework pushes the democratic agenda given such a contextual regime, the phenomenon of new public governance injects the experience, the history and tradition of a long revered system of values people, communities, institutions, and organizations held in common. As Bohn says in Chp. 10 (14), that ‘path to relevance’ must and should result in ‘shared ownership’ (141). NPG is taking reins. As an emergent theory or system, let NPG serve as the torch that would light both sides of the constitutional road in perhaps an enabling environment that allows communities to achieve ‘self-centering’ (Morgan and Shinn 2014, 6 citing Smith and Lipsky). Lastly, let not NPG’s constitutional orientation be a shoe-fits-all so that democratic as well as non-democratic regimes equally benefit from its lessons. In short, let NPG acquire a ‘citizenship’ of its own.

When the teachings of NPG are characteristically rather culture-bound, its articulation much more its application might be akin to walking through a slippery slope. The question that begs courtesy is whether we can take NPG out of its place of origin, shred it off of its historical American



or Western orientation, and to promote it with the cloak of universal citizenship and currency. In short, it should not be the bible for its own constitutional sect.

Perhaps, a jolly way to end this review of a rare and highly scholarly work of Morgan and Cook on new public governance is to grab the quote that reads thus:

*“Turn him to any cause of policy,*

*The Gordian Knot of it he will unloose,*

*Familiar as his garter” (Shakespeare, Henry V, Act 1 Scene 1.45-47)*

In sum, NPG as a concept, theory, and system in a decade or two hence would be worthy of much scholarship and research to see what would again replaced it as administrative science continues to evolve over time and across body polities.

## References

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