

Special Issue

Neo Weberian State: From Practice to Theory and Back to Practice

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The current and the previous issue of JPS have explored where Canada, Germany, Brazil, Mexico, and South-Korea, Australia, Japan, France, Italy, and Romania stand vis-à-vis a governance space defined by hierarchy, markets, and networks.

The public sector realm of all the countries in question have undergone changes in recent years, and all have faced crises, in particular, the pandemic, which was a common threat demanding a stringent response. In the wake of the pandemic, the question that arises is if the hierarchy that structured governance during the pandemic has persisted and if so in what capacity.

On the other hand, the macro-organization of the state is different among the countries, varying from more centralized (France) to federalized (Germany) or even confederalized (Canada). The European level for EU members also means there is a difference for those countries between national intergovernmental relations and multilevel governance. A shared conclusion is that federalism and its features affect how we look at hierarchy. A centralized country, for example, has a single hierarchy, a confederal one has multiple hierarchies, and in an entity like the EU, there are layered hierarchies in the form of intergovernmental relations, while the structure of hierarchies in multilevel governance might be compared to that of a marbled cake.

The kind of public sector reform that been effected also results in a different path dependency. A more NPM country like Australia needs different pathways to incorporate more hierarchy and networking compared to countries like Germany that have been less open to reform. Countries like France and Canada that have more stable democratic governance versus countries with features of populism and even authoritarian features will likewise require different pathways. Obviously, history and culture also impacts dynamics of change and reform., including the variation among common law and administrative law countries, is relevant. Some countries have experienced several regime changes (Romania, South Korea) while others have had more stable political regimes.

The extent to which and the way hierarchies, markets, and networks define a country's governance space is the

common denominator in the articles. A shared normative position for all country case studies is that keeping and protecting a rule-of-law based liberal democracy requires more than just markets and networks and that NWS has the capacity not only to regulate markets and networks but also to safeguard this democratic state of law.

A crucial aspect of the debate is if a shift to more hierarchy represents a fundamental paradigm shift or an incremental change that is part of a trend. The articles also explore whether NWS is a normative model used to redefine reform strategies or is rather in making governance changes, countries leaned more toward hierarchy than markets and networking to the point where the reforms accumulated to a model resembling NWS. The question could be rephrased by asking whether what we are witnessing is a dynamic reequilibration of a governance system or if it is an indication of a growing (ideological, theoretical, and practical) paradigm shift.

One question that the articles raise is whether the shift to more of a reliance on hierarchy during crises like pandemics or other transmigration (as in Mexico) is temporary or if it affects the governance of routine service delivery after the crisis has passed.

Another question is what the effect is of an almost dialectic shift first from a classical Weberian hierarchy (thesis) to a market-driven NPM that is modified and complemented by a network-driven NPG (antithesis) and then back to hierarchy (NWS) with regulated markets and networks (synthesis?), a shift that may correspond to the swings from nationalization to privatization back again to the government assuming control.

This inductive exercise of country case studies demonstrates the usefulness of empirical analyses of governance spaces that can bring to light what works good, better, best, or not. These insights can in turn form the basis of a deductive and normative reform strategy grounded in a theoretical pure model and supported by an ideologically explicit choice for a rule-of-law based liberal democracy whose hierarchy is defined by collaborative, deliberative, and participatory mechanisms. In this sense, we could move from practice to theory and back to practice.



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