This article discusses Rod Rhodes’ contribution to governance theory. Rod Rhodes’ work on governance has been much quoted. He has contributed to setting a new governance agenda and to an ongoing governance debate. This debate has also had an impact on political practice. However, as this paper argues, Rhodes’ definition of governance is problematic in that it is narrowly identified with networks, and it is not consistently applied. Rhodes’ concept of governance remains too narrow for it to be able to include a comparative analysis of a variation of governance forms. In addition, the governance concept needs to be equipped with tools from political economy in order be able to incorporate important aspects of interests, power and conflict. The way forward for governance theory would seem to involve the inclusion of political economy analysis of context as it affects beliefs and dilemmas.

Rod Rhodes’ work on governance has been labelled the ‘new’ governance (Peters 2000), the governance ‘orthodoxy’ (Davies 2005), or the ‘anglo-governance-school’ (Marinetto 2003). It has been praised and criticized. Much of both the praise as well as the criticism are justified; however, there is no doubt that Rhodes’ writings on governance have been influential. His Understanding Governance volume, for example (Rhodes 1997), has been cited, according to the Web of Science, in no less than 520 articles in key international journals. That number is much higher than the average number of quotations for a volume. This paper explores how Rhodes has contributed to governance theory (the praise). Further, I discuss the weaknesses of Rhodes’ governance theory (the criticism), and finally I point at areas where the debate might be taken forward.

RHODES’ CONTRIBUTION TO ‘GOVERNANCE’ THEORY

‘Governance’ means there is no one centre but multiple centres; there is no sovereign authority because networks have considerable autonomy. (Rhodes 1997, p. 109)

Rhodes’ account of governance theory is possibly the most influential in British political science (Marinetto 2003, p. 592), and its influence also extends beyond Britain. There are at least three important ways in which Rhodes has contributed to governance theory: First, he was one of the first to theorize the changes that had occurred in the public sector through a governance lens. Thereby he contributed to the opening of a new research agenda on governance. Second, Rhodes also provoked critique and thereby promoted a lively governance debate; and, thirdly, the research agenda on governance had an influence on policy practice.

In his work on governance, Rod Rhodes was one of the first to use the concept of governance to theorize the changes that had taken place in the aftermath of a long period of reforms. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, governments had been busy introducing managerialism in the public sector, setting up special purpose bodies such as quangos, and contracting out various service delivery tasks to the private sector. The changes implied...
that many actors other than central government were pursuing public goals, and this had significant consequences for the way we analytically deal with public policy-making and implementation. Inter-organizational networks between different levels of government and across the state-society divide were gaining more autonomy when delivering public services and this made them much more difficult to steer than previously. Rhodes (1994, 1996, 1997) characterized this process as a ‘hollowing out of the state’, whereby the scope of public intervention becomes limited and the state loses authority.

Along with James Rosenau’s parallel observations of international relations (see, for example, Rosenau 1995), Rhodes was one of the first to conceptualize governance as denoting a move away from government. By pointing at the many simultaneous processes of ‘hollowing out’, Rhodes’ analyses demonstrated that the central state was losing steering capacity, and these analyses gave us conceptual tools with which to understand those changes. Rhodes argued for a revision of key notions in the traditional Westminster model of the British political system. Hence, he contributed to the opening of a new research agenda on governance.

Secondly, introducing governing through networks as an intended or unintended consequence of public sector reforms had tremendous resonance in the academic community. It instigated not only much debate but also a lot of criticism. One repeated criticism is that there is nothing new to networks; they have always existed in the form of a plurality of interest groups, some of which collaborated with state agencies; phenomena that have been noticed ever since Tocqueville wrote his famous praise of American civicness. Colebatch (2009, p. 63), for example, argues that many elements of the governance narrative had ‘already been recognized by political scientists before governance was coined as analytical construct’. In other words, the governance concept represents no more than old wine on new bottles. This critique led to an increasing number of empirical studies exploring the extent to which the capacity of the centre to steer was really being eroded. Many found that it was not (see, for example, Pierre and Peters 2000; Marinetto 2003; Marsh et al. 2003; Kjær 2004; Davies 2005).

Rhodes’ work thus provoked response and criticism, in addition to new empirical work, on governance. According to Rhodes himself, he likes to use rhetorical devices; to ‘state arguments baldly and then qualify them’ (Rhodes 2007, p. 1258). In that sense, using phrases such as ‘from government to governance’ or ‘governing without government’ and thereby maybe overstating somewhat did serve the purpose of provoking a large number of responses. The statements served as something to ‘play against’, so to speak, and this surely contributed to a rapidly growing and increasingly rich body of theoretical and empirical analyses of governance.

Finally, while the governance debate emerged from real world changes, it also fed back into policy. The agenda which Rhodes had helped set, thus in itself had an impact on political practice. Joining other scholars who argued that ‘practitioners need to begin to incorporate the network concept into their administrative efforts’ (O’Toole 1997, p. 45; see also Mayntz 1993), Rhodes emphasized the implications of his analysis for policy-making. He argued that to simply ignore the existence of networks was not an option since this would lead to the governments’ diminishing ability to achieve public goals:

A key challenge for government is to enable these networks and to seek out new forms of co-operation ... the challenge for British government is to recognize the constraints on central actions imposed by the shift to self-organizing; and to search for new tools for managing such networks. (Rhodes 1996, p. 666)
The boundaries between the social sciences and the empirical world they study, as Giddens (1984) pointed out, are not clear, and social science may impact practice as much as the other way around. In the UK, New Labour’s ‘Third Way’ affected the academic debate; in addition, this debate must have had an influence on ‘Third Way’ ideas. Bevir (2005, p. 30) identifies an intersecting group of leading actors that combine ‘the Third Way, Network Theory and Institutionalism to a recognizable package’. He argues that many of the academics provided policy advice to New Labour, and leading politicians such as Tony Blair often referred to institutionalist theories. Rhodes himself mentions his workshop on governance with top civil servants as a high point in doing consultancy. Whichever way the influence goes, the academic governance debate is highly recognizable in New Labour’s policies. For example, the idea of joined-up government became an important ingredient in the modernizing government initiative (Cabinet Office 2000; Ling 2002; Pollitt 2003). The joining-up strategy seeks to bring together not only government departments and agencies, but also a range of private and voluntary bodies, working across organizational boundaries towards a common goal (Bogdanor 2005; Kjær 2009).

The influence of the governance debate, even though it was most pronounced in Britain, can also be traced in the general discourse on public participation and ‘co-governance strategies’. The adoption of citizen inclusion and public-private partnerships slipped into many governments’ toolkits, including those of international agencies and Western donors in the third world (Burau and Kjær 2009). In forest management, for instance, international donors now typically support an approach in which communities are given a larger say and in which centralized hierarchical governance modes give way to more decentralized forms of co-governance (Nathan and Boone 2009).

In sum, Rhodes’ governance analyses contributed to setting a new research agenda; they triggered criticism and lively debate; and this debate in turn had an influence on policy practice as well. The contributions notwithstanding, there are, of course, issues that call for critical exploration. Here it is possible only to touch upon some of them. They are: (1) the definition of governance; (2) the comparative aspects of governance; and (3) the way governance as analytical concept (fails to) incorporate key elements of power and interest. I shall address these issues in turn, and then, in the final section, discuss how the debate can be taken forward.

RHODES’ DEFINITION OF GOVERNANCE

It (governance) means what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less. (Rhodes 2007, p. 1246)

There are many uses and definitions of governance, and as the quote indicates, Rod Rhodes has his own, an understanding that is closely associated with networks. There are three problems with Rod Rhodes’ use of the concept with regard to definition. First, Rhodes equals governance with networks; second, he refers to four distinct features of governance; and, third, this definition is not consistently applied.

Many scholars understand governance broadly as steering, or as managing a government’s resources (Peters 2000; Kjær 2004). Continental scholars such as Kooiman (1993, 2003) see social-political interactions as essential elements of governance. For Kooiman, adopting a governance perspective means being open to the fact that public governing is not only carried out by one actor but is a shared set of responsibilities. According to Kooiman (Kooiman 2003, p. 5), some governing activities ‘are of a self-governing nature, others are considered to be co-governing, and there is also place for authoritative or
hierarchical governing’. In broader understandings, the concept thus refers to a number of different governing processes. In comparison, Rod Rhodes’ definition of governance is quite narrow: ‘Governance refers to self-organizing, inter-organizational networks characterized by interdependence, resource-exchange, rules of the game, and significant autonomy from the state’ (Rhodes 1997, p. 15). This definition is problematic because it refers to a set of ‘specific’ governing structures. The specificity thus serves to exclude organizational set-ups that cannot be characterized as networks. For example, market strategies such as outsourcing, or governing through hierarchy, would in Rhodes’ vocabulary not be termed governance at all, which would seem strangely illogical and counter-intuitive. A narrow definition reserves the term governance for a very particular governing form that does not always take place. One example to illustrate this emerges in a previous special issue of Public Administration (Public Administration 2003), edited by Rhodes et al. The contributors to the special issue were asked to characterize governance in specific countries. However, several of the contributions (for example, Tom Christensen’s on governance in Norway, and Robert Elgie’s on governance in France) do not apply the word ‘network’ at all when they characterize governance in their countries. But the fact that networks are not significant in, for example, Norway, does not imply that there is no governance in that country. On the contrary, the purpose of the entire special issue is to narrate and compare governance across countries. So, if governance can feasibly take place without networks, it would make sense to refer to network governance as one specific sub-type of governance rather than as a defining feature. Rhodes on occasion indeed does seem to refer to networks as a sub-type of governance. In his own words: ‘For clarity’s sake, it is best if the word always has a qualifying adjective. Here, I talk of network governance’ (Rhodes 2007, p. 1246). In other words, other qualifying adjectives, such as, for example, hierarchical governance, could in principle be applied.

The second problematic aspect of Rhodes’ governance definition is the fact that he equals governance with four specific institutional features: (1) interdependence between organizations; (2) continuing interactions between network members; (3) game-like interactions under rules agreed by network participants; and (4) a significant degree of autonomy from the state (Rhodes 2007). This means that if one or more of these characteristics of governance are not empirically observable, we would not be able to analyse the given phenomenon as governance. For example, one criterion is that there be significant autonomy from the state. Such a criterion would, a priori, exclude a situation in which governance networks have little autonomy from the state, because they, for example, depend on government money, personnel, or other state resources in order to survive or because state actors intervene regularly in their routines and functions. The degree of autonomy from the state should be an empirical question. In all, a definition of governance that does not a priori exclude non-network forms of governing would be of more analytical value.

In pursuing a broader definition of governance, institutionalism would be a good point of departure. Even though Rhodes is right when he says governance is a slippery concept – and, indeed, it has become a weasel word with many uses – it is possible to find a core of institutionalism in the governance debate. Most governance theory centres on the formal and informal rules of the game in a polity (Feeny 1993; March and Olsen 1995; Hyden et al. 2004). I would argue that most, if not all, uses of governance reflect a common concern with institutions and institutional change. They also represent attempts to come to terms with the actor-structure schism when attempting to explore institutional changes; they assume that institutions exist because political actors live by and through
them (Bevir et al. 2003; Hyden 2008; Leftwich 2010). Indeed, Rhodes et al. (2003) argue for an institutionalist approach that can incorporate individual beliefs:

Rules are always open to interpretation. It is not just a question of literal meaning but also a question of to whom the rule applies and of how to apply the rule in any given situation...we must ask how beliefs, and so actions, are created, recreated and changed in ways that constantly reproduce and modify institutions. (Bevir et al. 2003, p. 5)

If we accept that governance should be able to include other forms of set-ups than networks, and if we accept that most governance theories share a common concern with institutional change, then we should opt for a definition that refers to governance as the way political agents go about rules and rule-making. In short, governance theory introduces an element of human agency which is often lacking in institutionalism (Kjaer 2004, p. 10). From an institutional perspective, governance therefore is about affecting the ‘frameworks within which citizens and officials act and politics occurs, and which shape the identities and institutions of civil society’ (March and Olsen 1995, p. 6). I would argue that the addition of political agency to an institutional governance perspective would imply a definition such as that of Feeny’s (1993, p. 172). Governance can thus be defined as ‘the setting of rules, the application of rules, and the enforcement of rules in pursuing public goals’ (Feeny 1993, p. 172). This definition probably also has its flaws. It risks becoming as broad as to be emptied of meaning. However, it has the advantage of not excluding a substantial part of existing governance research, and it captures what most governance theory is essentially about: combining structure and agency in analysing changes in the political rules of the game. In addition, it enables us, as I will demonstrate below, to better compare governance in different countries and it enables an analysis of tensions and dilemmas in governance.

The final point of contention with regard to the definition of governance is that Rhodes does not seem to apply it consistently. In his comparative work on governance narratives, for example, governance is understood as ‘encapsulating the changing form and role of the state in advanced industrial societies’ (Bevir et al. 2003a, p. 14); in other words, a much broader understanding than the narrower network definition. This broader understanding is also applied in Bevir and Rhodes’ (2006) work, Governance Stories, in which elite constructions and perceptions of governance are in focus (see also Colebatch 2009, p. 61). Hence, Rhodes’ use of governance is not consistent, which makes it hard to apply it with analytical rigour. The broader governance understanding becomes necessary for the analysis to capture any form of governing that is not characterized by networks.

GOVERNANCE AND COMPARISON

This section will argue that the network understanding of governance is not particularly helpful for purposes of comparison. Rod Rhodes has been preoccupied in recent years with interpretations and narratives of governance (Bevir et al. 2003; Bevir and Rhodes 2004, 2006; Rhodes 2009). One of the aims is to understand how public sector reforms create different governance debates across countries, partly depending on the different traditions in each of the countries. This is a worthwhile and timely effort since the public sector reforms and the ensuing debates certainly did have different contents in, for example, continental Europe and the Anglo-American countries. In continental Europe, new public management reforms were not as pronounced as in, for example, Britain, and the emergence of networks took a different form in, for example, Germany, than in
Britain (Mayntz 1993). In addition, networks in Germany emerged less as a consequence of deliberate reforms than as an outcome of the processes of the modern complex society (Mayntz 1993). As Bevir et al. (2003, pp. 192–3) point out, there are no law-like generalizations about governance, because governance is constructed and re-constructed differently. They also argue that there is no universal process of globalization driving public sector reform and, therefore, no toolkit applicable within or across countries. And as their special issue on governance narratives across countries (Bevir et al. 2003) indeed shows, in some countries, governance did not have much to do with networks, but rather with, for example, protecting the state or providing hands-off support to civil society groups rather than involving them in networks (Christensen 2003; Burau and Kjær 2009). Comparing governance across countries is necessary because it enables us to discern general patterns in the organization of the state and public services. Comparing governance helps us to ask and answer questions about why one governance mode has emerged in one country and not in another, although the economic pressures from globalization might have been the same. In addition, we might wish to explore the implications of similar governance modes in different countries. In other words, although we ‘cannot make law-like generalizations’, we can nonetheless begin to find patterns in the dynamics leading to certain governance choices, and we can find patterns in how local contexts affect how governance dynamics play out.

However, Rhodes’ ‘Governance as networks’ concept is not an adequate toolkit for analysing variations across countries, simply because this narrow definition rules out variation (see also Peters 2000, p. 42). Indeed, Bevir et al. (2003, p. 42) seem to acknowledge that, for purposes of comparison, a broader concept is necessary. They refer to governance, broadly conceived, as exploring the changing boundary between state and civil society, a ‘focus on hierarchies, markets and networks’ (Bevir et al. 2003). In other words, in some of the traditions, governance may imply networks, in others not.

What can we gain by using governance as a frame of discussion of differences between nation states? In my view, the virtue of governance is that it explores the changing boundaries between state and society, and it forces us to explore state authority as an empirical question rather than to take it as a given. Governance also strengthens a focus on the implementation side of the policy process which is much warranted. The kind of comparative questions you ask depend, of course, on the governance perspective you choose. The narrow perspective on governance as networks allows us to explore variations in type of network, for example, the type of public private partnership. However, when using a broader governance concept, we can ask about how different governance modes, hierarchies, markets, or networks co-exist and the potential tensions and dilemmas that arise from their co-existence (Burau and Kjær 2009). In other words, when defining governance broadly as rule-making and application, we can begin to ask ‘which rules are set by whom, why, and with what consequences’? Governance as analytical framework and as theory directs us to the comparative questions of how, and through what institutional mechanisms, governing occurs in particular settings (Peters 2000, p. 44). For instance, we can explore the effects of different institutional set-ups on the implementation of similar sector policies. Or we can analyse how differing socio-economic contexts affect the implementation of similar policies in two or more different nation states. In both cases it would be important to combine institutions and political agency and ask how and why political actors live by the rules and how they seek to or succeed in affecting them. In sum, in order to become more useful for comparative purposes, a broad and institutional governance perspective is necessary.
GOVERNANCE, POWER, INTERESTS AND CONFLICT

Critical voices have over the years objected to the lack of attention to power and conflict in Rod Rhodes’ work on governance (see, for example, Marinetto 2003; Marsh et al. 2003; Davies 2005). There are two versions of this critique. One is mainly directed at the fact that Rhodes disregards the continued importance of central government power and the conflicts this entails. For example, Marsh et al. challenge what they claim is Rhodes’ pluralist notion of power. The authors question the assumption that power is diffused in inter-organizational networks and that there is no single power-centre. Marsh et al. (2003, pp. 312–13) claim that, on the contrary, the British political system continues to be more closed and elitist than Rhodes acknowledges. They argue that the polity’s key characteristic is one of structured inequality and that the exchange relationship between centre and local government is asymmetric due to the concentration of power in the centre.

Another critique is directed at the role of socio-economic power. The critique questions the apparent assumption of consensus in networks. Networks are often described as consisting of members who have a shared purpose and similar interests. In reality, the argument goes, actors, both organizational and individual, in the networks have different and sometimes conflicting interests as well as varying resources with which to pursue those interests. Hence, powerful actors may dominate networks that are set up in order to achieve consensus. For example, the Danish government tried to implement the EU Habitats Directive through network governance. This directive on the conservation of natural habitats requires member governments to identify special areas of conservation. In Denmark, the identification of these areas occurred through collaboration between central government, the regions, and experts. The government suggested that some of these conservation areas should be designated as national parks and decided that this should happen through a process of incorporation of as many civil society actors as possible. None of the pilot projects succeeded in reaching a consensus on the setting up of a national park. This was mainly because farmers were opposed to the whole idea as they feared a national park would impinge on their use of the land for agricultural production. In one region, a recommendation based on agreement was indeed made but only after the farmers had withdrawn from the project. Since unanimity was a precondition, the establishment of the national park proved impossible had not parliament stepped in and settled the matter through legislation. In other words, networks were not able to reach a decision due to conflicting interests and (in the example given) the farmers’ de facto veto power. In order for anything to happen, hierarchy was necessary (Kjær 2009, p. 145).

Therefore, one possible outcome of the presence of conflicting interests in networks is inaction; decisions are vetoed. This necessitates government intervention. Jonathan Davies (2005, p. 325) has described such situations in terms of the ‘antagonisms structured into markets’ that undermines the capacity of network members to pursue a common agenda. Thus the government finds it necessary to intervene in networks that it intended should be decentred and autonomous.

Another possible outcome of the presence of conflict is that policies are decided at the central government level, but attempts at implementing them are impeded by the presence of latent conflict. In a study of joining-up in Hull (Northern England) and Dundee (Scotland), Davies (2009) identifies the presence of a strong partnership ethos. However, because of this ethos and the fact that a consensus was expected, avoidance of conflict became the result. Avoiding political conflict had the consequence of displacing rather...
than solving conflict, and ‘shallow consensus enabled stakeholders to proceed as if they shared norms, meanings and goals’ with sub-optimal outcomes as a consequence (Davies 2009, p. 90). The examples illustrate how a governance perspective without analytical room for power and conflicting interests may end up ignoring factors that can impede the efficient implementation of policies – such as health care or urban regeneration – to benefit communities.

Rhodes’ response to this criticism has been to acknowledge that socio-economic context is indeed important: ‘My core claim is power is neither diffused (pluralism) or concentrated (Marxism) – but is structured in a few competing elites, which includes the private government of public policy by policy networks’ (Rhodes 2007, p. 1250). Rhodes accepts that socio-economic context should be included more clearly and the way he has begun to do so is through a focus on governance ‘traditions’. Rhodes refers to a tradition as a ‘set of understandings someone receives during socialization’ (Rhodes 2007, p. 1250). Traditions explain how rule, power, order and norms arise and sustain patterns of governance within civil society (Rhodes 2007, p. 1253). The central idea is that individuals can use their reason to modify beliefs they have inherited and thereby also to change traditions. This avenue is exciting but needs to be supplemented with tools from political economy, for at least two reasons. First, it seems that Rhodes perceives traditions as understandings that change quite slowly. However, many governance phenomena, for example, the partnership ethos, are relatively new (Davies 2009, p. 92). As Davies argues, they can be better understood by referring to socio-economic conditions than through a relatively broad understanding of traditions.

Secondly, we arguably need tools to identify the socio-economic origins of beliefs. How do we find the roots of particular beliefs without exploring how they derive from a particular socio-economic setting? If we want to understand policy outcomes, we not only need to understand beliefs and traditions, but we also need to focus on the type and constellation of interests, their degree of organization, and their relative resources and influence. For example, in the case of national parks in Denmark, many network members shared an interest in setting up these parks. However, these interests were rather more diffused over a larger number of people and far less organized than the landowners and farmers in the designated areas. In spite of the fact that we cannot, as Rhodes (2007, p. 1252) argues, read off people’s beliefs from their socio-economic position, we still need to be able to explore the conditions in which governance is carried out. In all, although Rhodes acknowledges the importance of including socio-economic contexts, there is still a need for a better political-economy toolkit in order for such an endeavour to succeed.

GOVERNANCE: THE FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA AND THE INCLUSION OF CONTEXT

Rhodes rightly emphasizes that ‘governance broadly conceived explores the changing boundary between state and civil society’, and that the term refers to ‘the changing role of the state after the varied public sector reforms of the 1980s and the 1990s’. However, more substantively, governance has to do with much more than networks. It has to do with how political actors affect formal and informal rules; how they live by and through rules. Such rules could be, but are not necessarily, of the network type. Understood that way, a statement such as ‘the growth of governance reduced the ability of the core executive to act effectively’ (Rhodes 2007) does not make sense when viewed in isolation, because governance dynamics take many different forms.
Rather, governance as an analytical concept offers a way to analyze how the core executive has changed, and whether its ability to act has been reduced. In other words, whether or not the central state loses power to networks must be open to empirical enquiry. How can governance help us grasp those changes better? Rod Rhodes suggests a future governance research agenda that focuses on beliefs, practices, traditions, and dilemmas. I have discussed ‘traditions’ in the above, and in this final section, I will touch upon ‘beliefs and practices’, and then discuss ‘dilemmas’ at greater length. In particular, I will argue for the need to understand how context affects dilemmas emerging in the implementation of governance strategies.

Rhodes argues for a decentred analysis that studies beliefs and practices through an interpretive approach, because only from that starting point are we able to understand actions, practices, and institutions (Rhodes 2007, 2009). Following and being close to government elites can make us understand better why they push for the policies they do, and why some policies get decided and implemented and others do not. It can also help us understand ‘situated agency’ in the sense that because people interpret a situation in many ways, no practice or norm can fix the way they act. Institutions do not determine behaviour (Bevir and Rhodes 2006, p. 3). The interpretive approach is thus a refreshing turn in the study of governance and an important counterweight to more positivist studies.

However, a governance lens should enable us to not only describe and interpret elite beliefs and practice but also to understand how various governance strategies have implications for policy outcomes. A narrative of everyday lives and perceptions of the elite will begin to tell a story about the decision-making process, but it will never finish it unless it also captures the implementation and outcome side of the policy process. Rhodes (1996, p. 657) was among the first to point out that policy outcomes are not the product of actions by central government. The centre may pass a law but subsequently it interacts with local government, health authorities, the voluntary sector, the private sector and, in turn, they interact with one another.

Exploring the intellectual narratives and ideology of the elites involved does not really tell us much about policy outcomes on the ground. We need to be able to discern a pattern in the way different governance modes affect policy outcomes. In other words, in addition to the rather more descriptive governance narratives, we would need propositions about discernable patterns, we would need theorizing about causation (see also Dowding 2004; Hay 2004; Durose and Rummery 2006). The implementation of a particular policy on crime control in different municipalities, for example, could be influenced by the type of networks involved.

In addition, a strong focus on ‘elite’ beliefs is, in a sense, at odds with the assumption in governance theory that the centre is losing authority and that many other actors in voluntary organizations and the third sector have influence on policy decisions and not least on policy implementation. A key feature of hierarchy is that decisions are taken at the top and implemented through lower layers. However, Rhodes’ governance theory has challenged the traditional notion and a central idea is to explore the multi-centred nature of power. A singular focus on a few individuals in the top ranks of the hierarchy would leave out what takes place in the shadow of hierarchy in the myriad of networks that cross traditional organizational boundaries. Shadowing a permanent secretary, studying his or her diary and interviewing him or her, will only to a limited extent tell us what takes place at lower and more horizontal organizational levels.
Finally, the concept of ‘dilemma’ is an important part of Rhodes’ future research agenda. A dilemma, argues Rod Rhodes (along with Bevir and Weller 2003, p. 10), ‘arises for an individual or an institution when a new idea stands in opposition to existing beliefs and practices and thereby forces a reconsideration of existing beliefs and associated traditions’. For example, a dilemma posed by the increasing size and scale of British government fuelled constitutional changes in that country, because it was no longer possible to have a minimalist view of the state. Hence different interpretations of the constitution clashed and the dominant interpretation had to be revisited. Similarly, in Germany, dilemmas occurring through increasing complexity and steering problems fuelled the idea of the activating state. This way of understanding dilemmas and how dilemmas give rise to changes over time is very broad and does not enable us to understand the very real dilemmas political actors face when they have to make choices about governance. Nor does Rhodes’ understanding of dilemma enable us to explore the tensions that occur between different governance modes (Burau and Kjær 2009). As Newman et al. (2005) have argued, new forms of governance do not displace the old, but interact with them, often uncomfortably. Such uncomfortable interactions often give rise to tensions and dilemmas that political actors have to deal with in policy-making and implementation. It is these dynamics that governance analysis should be able to explore.

One example of a dilemma arising out of uncomfortable interaction between hierarchy and network is described by Eversole (2008) in her study of Australian regions. She identifies a tension arising from the prominence of hierarchy in network-based co-governance, whereby the state tends to colonize community initiative and activities. Hierarchical government institutions ‘work with’ communities by actively attempting to appropriate community knowledge and energies, and by redirecting them to bureaucratic frameworks. In either case, the lack of correspondence between informal (network) and formal (hierarchical) institutions of governance means that ‘communities’ and their individual members have no real say in decision-making processes, which continue to be controlled by a largely impenetrable government hierarchy. For example, in Australia, as a community driven initiative, volunteer Natural Resource Management groups are widespread and active. Yet, as government ‘engages’ with these community groups, problems emerge. Bureaucratic governance frameworks replace community based ways of doing things. Accountabilities and directives increase, and community volunteers are expected to do more and more to comply. For example, group members indicated that being ‘overwhelmed’ with paperwork (due to bureaucratic processes and regulation) was a reason for memberships in the groups to drop (see also Burau and Kjær 2009).

As the example from Australia illustrates, dilemmas not only evolve over long time spans and lead to new discourses on the state, or constitutional amendments, as in Bevir, Rhodes and Weller’s examples; dilemmas also occur when network strategies collide with hierarchical operating procedures. In several of his contributions, Rod Rhodes does analyse how networks and hierarchies are at odds. For instance, he contrasts the different media of exchange (authority versus trust) and the means of conflict resolution (rules and command versus diplomacy) in hierarchical versus network forms of organization (Rhodes 1999, p. xviii). That type of contrasting seems to have disappeared from the new focus on governance stories and on beliefs and dilemmas. The new focus on traditions and dilemmas is too abstracted from organizational set-ups to be able to provide a framework by which to analyse the tensions and dilemmas that occur through the everyday implementation of policies.
We do not know enough about the tensions and dilemmas that arise when new and old forms of governance co-exist and interact, and more research on these topics is needed. In particular, we need to know more about how context affects the nature of tensions and dilemmas. To that end, comparative analysis may help to draw a more general picture of types of dilemmas and tensions, of how they affect policy outcomes, and on how they are affected by different socio-economic and political contexts. Forms of governance naturally differ across countries and across sectors within countries. However, many of the governance strategies adopted by policy-makers are similar, simply because governance ideas tend to globalize (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000; Pierre and Peters 2000). For example, measures to include citizen participation in waste or natural resource management are based on a discourse of strengthening the efficiency of public services as well as empowering individual citizens (Ribot 2003; Barnes et al. 2007; Kooiman et al. 2008; Sorensen and Torfing 2008). This discourse is as pronounced in third world countries, particularly among NGOs and donors, as in many developed countries, such as the New Labour’s third way. However similar the rhetoric and the strategies, the way they play out in specific contexts are likely to vary. For example, the implementation of measures to include citizens in service delivery will be affected by the strength of civil society. If there is a strong tradition for voluntary association, inclusive strategies are more likely to succeed. However, even with such a strong tradition, a centralized and hierarchic state may intervene in ways that could colonize societal initiatives, as happened in Eversole’s (2008) case study of an Australian region. Therefore, we arguably need a toolkit to better study context.

Burau and Kjær (2009) compare very different cases of governance strategies based on participation and inclusion in settings as different as British health care, voluntary associations in Norwegian municipalities, Cambodian forestry and Australian regions with particular attention to natural resource management. In all of the very different cases, the authors find basic tensions between hierarchy and network, but the more specific ways in which these dynamics play out differ depending on context. Context should be analysed with regard to social, economic and political parameters, including the nature of central and local state bureaucracy, strength of civil society, the organization of interests, and the traditions of state-society interaction.

In conclusion, in writing about governance, Rod Rhodes has not only been extremely prolific; he has contributed to a new research agenda and to an ongoing governance debate. This debate has also had an impact on political practice. However, for it to be able to be included in a comparative analysis of a variation of governance forms, Rhodes’ concept of governance remains a narrow one. The governance concept also needs to be equipped with tools from political economy in order to be able to incorporate important aspects of interest, power and conflict. The way forward for governance theory would involve including political economy analysis of context as it affects beliefs and dilemmas.

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