

How to Metagovern Collaborative Networks for the Promotion of Policy Innovations in a Dualistic Federal System?

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ABSTRACT

Collaborative networks are increasingly used as vehicles for fostering policy innovations. However, scholars have noted that the extent to which collaborative networks can actually contribute to the development of policy innovations depends on how they are metagoverned. Empirical research on the metagovernance of policy innovation processes in collaborative networks is scarce. Therefore, we review in this article a unique case as a means to add new insights to the causal link between metagovernance, policy innovation, and collaborative networks. Specifically, we examine the efforts of a metagovernor in a collaborative network that operated in the Belgian dualistic federal system.

Key words: metagovernance; policy innovation; collaboration; sustainable transport; federalism.

Introduction

In our contemporary society, policymakers are challenged by increasingly complex policy problems. Issues like global warming, ageing society, and immigration can no longer solely be solved by traditional policy responses, as these daunting problems typically transcend conventional organizational and governmental boundaries in the public sector (Head, 2008). Therefore, many governments have set up collaborative networks to tame these ‘cross-cutting’ problems (OECD, 2014).

Collaborative networks are, multi-organizational arrangements in which actors work together to solve problems that cannot be solved, or solved easily, by single actors (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003: 4). Hence, the expectation of policymakers is that more concerted and innovative policy solutions will emerge, as more stakeholders and thus more knowledge, resources, and experiences are included in the policy making process (Nambisan, 2008: 11). Innovative policy solutions, or what the literature also calls policy innovations, should be interpreted as policy solutions that are radically different from their predecessors (in terms of policy understanding, policy vision, objectives, strategies and policy instruments). Therefore, *conceivably* they should be better able to deal with the intertwined policy context of these cross-cutting problems (Sørensen and Waldorff, 2014).

Despite these highflying expectations of policymakers in the innovative capacities of collaborative networks, some scholars argue that the extent to which collaborative networks can actually contribute to the development of policy innovations depends on how they are metagoverned (Montin et al., 2014). Metagovernance is a term used by scholars to denote, the endeavours of a central actor (i.e. the metagovernor) to facilitate collaborative networks, by shaping

the conditions under which these networks operate and the involved actors interact with each other (Voets et al., 2015: 983).

According to these scholars, the metagovernance of collaborative networks is necessary as involved organizations may hold different problem perceptions, may be reluctant to collaborate, or may paralyze the innovation process for strategic reasons. Therefore, they have claimed that in order to get a real sense of the value of collaborative networks as vehicles for generating policy innovations, we also need to understand the barriers metagovernors encounter in policy innovation processes that take place in collaborative networks, and how metagovernors can possibly overcome these barriers (Termeer and Nooteboom, 2014).

Empirical research on the metagovernance of policy innovation processes in collaborative networks has, however, remained scarce (Ansell and Torfing, 2014: 126; Sørensen, 2014: 10). This lack of research is striking because it means that we (i.e. the scientific community) do not fully understand how metagovernors can live up to their potential in processes of policy innovation that take place in collaborative networks. As such, in this article we review a unique case as a means to add new insights to the causal link between metagovernance, policy innovation, and collaborative networks. More specifically, we examine the efforts of a metagovernor, who only had limited authority to facilitate the policy innovation process, in a collaborative network that operated in a dualistic federal system.

We advance as follows. The next section briefly summarizes the current state of the art of the literature. Section three elaborates on the aim and approach of this study. Section four discusses the normative framework that we use to examine the practices of the metagovernor. Section five reports the chosen methodology. Section six addresses the policy innovation process and collaborative network the metagovernor had to facilitate. Section seven discusses the results of the case analysis. The final section reflects on the main lessons that can be drawn from this study.

Current State of the Art of the Literature

Although some refined theories and research exist on collaborative networks (Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004; Agranoff, 2006), policy innovation (Green and Orton, 2011; Mahroum, 2014; Marsh and Edwards, 2009; Morgan, 2010) and metagovernance (Meuleman, 2008; Sørensen and Torfing, 2009), there are limited studies on the metagovernance of policy innovation processes *in* collaborative networks (Ansell and Torfing, 2014: 126; Sørensen, 2014: 10). Yet, the few contributions that can be distilled from the academic literature have offered detailed accounts of possible strategies that can help metagovernors ensure the promotion of policy innovations in collaborative networks.

Termeer and Nooteboom (2014: 180-185), for example, from their research identified numerous metagovernance strategies that are useful for overcoming organizational boundaries¹ and institutional barriers² that uphold processes of policy innovation in network settings. To be more specific, building interpersonal trust, providing joint resources, and connecting (i.e. seeking to organize novel linkages between domains and organizations) were mentioned as metagovernance

¹ Contrasting organizational functions, lack of trust, no formal relationship between actors, etc.

² Fixed rules, strict procedures, lack of political support, etc.

strategies to deal with competitive formal relationships in networks (Termeer and Nooteboom, 2014: 181-182). Further, keying (e.g. rearrangement of existing routines and procedures), issue-selling or sense-making (e.g. attracting stakeholders by telling them how important the innovation is), and integrating (e.g. incorporating innovation processes in the formal political-administrative structures) were considered beneficial metagovernance practices to avoid innovation processes becoming bogged down in existing policies and procedures (Termeer and Nooteboom, 2014: 182-183).

In similar vein, Bason (2014: 216-225) discussed four design attitudes metagovernors should consider when managing innovation challenges and opportunities in collaborative networks. These four design attitudes are: questioning assumptions, centering on outcomes, stewarding the unknown, and concretizing the future. Bason writes:

...in the case studies the network managers used rather similar approaches to innovation and change; they explored the characteristics, dynamics and boundaries of the problem at hand and tried to challenge the premises of each of the involved actors ('questioning assumptions'), they kept the focus on the intended change in the innovation process ('centering on outcomes'), they managed the discomfort actors experienced in surrendering to the 'unknowns' of the innovation process, i.e. to embrace discontinuity and the break from the past ('stewarding the unknown'), and they continuously made and shaped the future state of affairs so concretely that you can see it, vision it, and sometimes even touch it ('concretizing the future').

Also, Doberstein (2015: 17-19) considered several features of management that enable the emergence of policy innovations in collaborative networks. Doberstein, inter alia, argued that metagovernance that is too restrictive and hierarchical will give rise to resistance and conflict, stifle policy innovation and reduce the willingness of policy actors to invest themselves in joint problem-solving, whereas metagovernance that is too flexible can easily lead to governance chaos and eventually failure.

Several of the findings of these earlier studies are also quite contradictory to each other. A good example is a finding of Bason (2014: 220) in comparison to an outcome of the study of Keast and Waterhouse (2014: 166). According to Bason, distortive metagovernance strategies (e.g. putting or even forcing organizations beyond their usual comfort zone) act as catalysts for creativity and innovation in collaborative networks. Keast and Waterhouse, on the other hand, argue that integrative strategies, which are about encouraging and stimulating the genuine sharing of information among actors without any form of coercion, are most beneficial to spur idea generation in processes of policy innovation.

An issue of concern to many of these studies, however, is the generalizability of the obtained findings. In point of fact, most scholars used the case study method to generate their research findings. The merits of case study research are that more accurate data and detailed information about real-life situations can be retained for analysis compared to many other research methods. Yet, due to the small-N problem only *context-dependent* generalizations can be made (Gerring, 2007). Hence, Sørensen (2014: 10) has argued that more empirical research is required that focusses on different innovation- and governance dynamics in collaborative networks, in order to get a *full*

sense of what strategies metagovernors most optimally use under specific institutional conditions to facilitate collaborative networks for the promotion of policy innovations.

The Aim and Approach of this Study

Considering the selected previous studies, we noticed that the focus of scholars has primarily been on the policy innovation dynamics and the practices of a metagovernor in collaborative networks that operate at the *subnational* and the *local* level, or the multilevel dynamics between these tiers of government. Termeer and Nooteboom (2014: 177), for example, *inter alia* studied the metagovernance of sustainable innovations in agricultural policies in the Venlo region in the Netherlands, whereas Agger and Sørensen (2014: 191) zoomed in on the metagovernance of a collaborative policy innovation process in the Danish municipality of Albertslund. Moreover, in many of these studies the metagovernor had a strong and influential position in the actor constellation, which made it easier to facilitate the policy innovation process (Montin et al., 2014: 117; Termeer and Nooteboom, 2014: 175; Agger and Sørensen, 2014: 205).

Against this background, we intend to contribute to existing body of knowledge by examining the efforts of a metagovernor who had only limited authority to promote the policy innovation process in a collaborative network that consisted of a multitude of actors from both the federal and regional level of government. Specifically, we look at the efforts of the Federal Department of Transport and Mobility (FOD M&V), as an acclaimed metagovernor, to facilitate the establishment of a National Plan for Sustainable Transport (NPST) – i.e. a policy innovation for sustainable transport – in a collaborative network that operated in the *Belgian* federal state.

The Belgian federal state offers a unique context to study (Yin, 2009: 48), as it is particularly known for its dualistic federal structure (Billiet et al., 2006: 3). Dual federalism, also referred to as divided sovereignty, implies that power and authority is divided between the federal government and the regional governments in clearly defined terms, with regional governments exercising the powers accorded to them without interference from the federal actors (Deschouwer, 2006). This means that there is no specific hierarchy among the levels of government in a dualistic federal system, as the regional competencies have the same legal value as the federal competencies.

With regard to the competence division in the Belgian transport domain, the three regional administrations (Flanders, Wallonia, and the Brussels Community) have over the years acquired the full competencies for issues regarding inland navigation and road transport *within* their separate territories, while the position of the federal administration has rapidly been hollowed out. The federal administration has only remained responsible for (a few) matters of rail transport (ICDO, 1998: 125). Hence, the federal department FOD M&V was a relatively small actor tasked with safeguarding the generation of a policy innovation for sustainable transport in a collaborative network, wherein the actors from the different administrations were more accustomed to working in isolation than working together.

Eventually, the actors in the collaborative network did not succeed in aligning their self-given aims in the pursuit for one common goal: making the entire transport sector more sustainable. Therefore, the FOD M&V decided in 2010, after thirteen years, to pull the plug on the policy innovation process in the collaborative network. As such, we raise the following two questions:

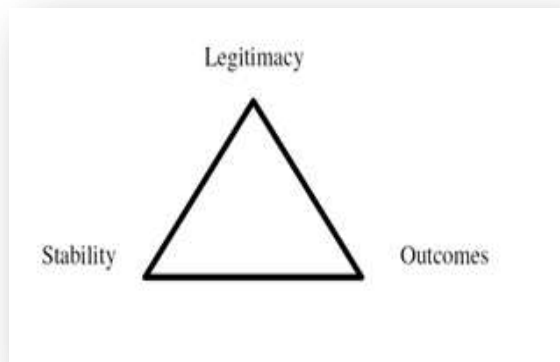
1. Why were the metagovernance efforts of the FOD M&V not sufficient to safeguard the generation of a policy innovation for sustainable transport in the collaborative network?
2. And what lessons can we learn from the metagovernance deficiencies of the FOD M&V in terms of how context influences the appropriateness of metagovernance strategies?

In order to answer these questions, we compare the metagovernance efforts of the FOD M&V to a normative framework. This normative framework captures the salient goals a metagovernor has to adhere to in order to sustain the collaborative network in which it participates. The discrepancies between the impacts of the efforts of the metagovernor on the collaborative network's policy innovation process and the normative standards allow us to discern why the FOD M&V was unable to ensure the establishment of the policy innovation for sustainable transport in the collaborative network. On basis of these outcomes, we are able to draw some general lessons about how a metagovernor, who has limited authority, can most optimally facilitate processes of policy innovation in collaborative networks that operate in complex institutional contexts, such as dualistic federal systems.

Normative framework

Within the academic literature, different salient goals have been mentioned by scholars to which a metagovernor has to adhere in order to 'successfully' facilitate collaborative networks (see Provan and Kenis, 2008; Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004; Coleman, 1990; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Alexander Gaus (2014) has devoted a paper to the different conceptualizations of these salient goals and has clustered them in what he calls the network management triangle³ (figure 1).

Figure 1: Network Management Triangle



In the network management triangle, Gaus (2014: 11) uses the salient goals of stability, legitimacy, and outcomes. According to Gaus, these salient goals have mainly been discussed and analysed separately in the academic literature. The triangle, in contrast, looks at the practices of the metagovernor in a more comprehensive manner, as the edges connecting the vertices highlight the interconnectedness between the goals (Gaus, 2014: 12).

³ We build in this paper on a strand of the metagovernance literature which views the concept as the management of (self-steering) collaborative networks (Voets et al., 2015). Due to this definition of 'metagovernance', we are of the opinion that the terms of 'network management' and 'the metagovernance (of self-steering networks)' can be used interchangeably, and thereby the network management triangle can also be used to examine the metagovernance practices of the FOD M&V.

In this article, we do not use the triangle for theoretical purposes but rather as a normative framework to examine whether the FOD M&V was able to comply with all of the salient goals, and if not, investigate what restrained the metagovernor from reaching them. In this way, we can gain a comprehensive notion of why the metagovernance strategies and practices of the FOD M&V were not sufficient to safeguard the generation of the policy innovation for sustainable transport in the collaborative network. First, we elaborate on the meaning of each of the salient goals and determine what normative standards can be deduced from the triangle.

The Metagovernor's Goal of Stability

Stability, which entails creating a situation where collaboration can flourish, is the first vertex of the network management triangle. Gaus (2014: 12) writes that the salient goal of stability encompasses four different aspects.

First of all, stability relates to resilient and close connections between involved actors. Social network analysis has introduced a number of metrics, such as network density and connectivity, which are measures for the scale of connections among network members and their robustness. In this branch of research, dense networks are credited with a faster flow and better utilization of information (Coleman, 1990). Further, networks with high connectivity have brokers and boundary spanners that are able to bridge missing connections among members (i.e. structural holes) and facilitate the link between the network and its environment (Burt, 1992). One of the sub goals for the metagovernor is, therefore, to strengthen the (non-)existing relationships between the actors in the collaborative network (Gaus, 2014: 12).

Second, stability is about establishing shared goals and a common understanding of the overall purpose of working together. The absence of a common mission and vision is often considered an impediment to successful policy innovation (Bommert, 2010) as it leaves room for free-riding behaviour. As such, the metagovernor should ensure socializations (i.e. an open exchange of views, concerns and interests) in the collaborative network as a means to overcome problems of collective action (Gaus, 2014: 13).

Third, the metagovernor must ensure that actors in the collaborative network consider and establish clear rules of the game to constrain self-interested actor behaviour (North, 1990). These can include rules about decision-making, information sharing, process steps, etc. (Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004). Gaus (2014: 13) calls this the institutionalization of the collaborative network.

The fourth and final aspect of stability refers to high levels of trust (Gaus, 2014), which can be affected by purposive conflict management (Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004). Ultimately, the metagovernor makes sure that conflicts are mitigated and that trust is fostered among involved actors (Oliver, 1991).

The Metagovernor's Goal of Legitimacy

Legitimacy is the second vertex of the network management triangle. Legitimacy can be broadly defined as 'a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions' (Suchman, 1995: 574). Only a few studies have elaborated on the issue

of legitimacy at the network level (Provan and Kenis, 2008). These scholars argue that the legitimacy of such collaborations exist at two levels: internal and external legitimacy. This means that a metagovernor must ensure that both the involved actors (i.e. the insiders) as well as the network's environment (i.e. the outsiders) perceive the actions of the collaborative network as appropriate.

At the *internal level* this requires a convergence of views around desirable network outcomes and the most suitable approaches and processes for achieving these outcomes (Gaus, 2014: 14). This view of legitimacy, according to Driori and Honig (2013: 347), highlights the importance of authority and governance and has its origins in the Weberian notion of legitimacy as a conscious acceptance of certain behaviours and beliefs by social actors. Hence, the task of the metagovernor is to support such a convergence among potentially disparate network members using appropriate management strategies. *Externally*, the metagovernor has to make sure that the collaboration demonstrates its legitimacy and value outside of the actors' constellation by conforming to the expectations and attached norms of organizations, citizens' groups, organizational fields, transnational institutions, etc. (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983: 150-151).

The Metagovernor's Goal of Outcomes

The vertex of outcomes is about efficiently generating concrete and effective results attributable to the collaboration (Gaus, 2014: 16). As it simply refers to the production of results, outcomes may be perceived as the most tangible of the three salient vertexes. Yet, 'goal attainment' in a collaborative network is much harder to achieve than one might think (Provan and Milward, 2001).

In fact, decisions made in multi-organizational arrangements are often prone to subjective interpretations (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979). This means that every involved actor will make a cost-benefit calculation with which they balance the relevance of the arrangement's activities and corresponding payoffs to their self-given aims. Actors are likely to collaborate as long as this assessment demonstrates that it is in their best interest to participate. If the assessment turns out negative, the actors will presumably no longer take part in the joint venture. As such, the salient goal of outcomes asserts that the metagovernor must be able to assure that all interests are included and treated with the same value and respect in the collaborative network. Simultaneously, the metagovernor has to safeguard the continuity of the (innovation) process because setbacks will have an immediate effect on the actors' cost-benefit calculation when they value the usefulness of the collaboration (Gaus, 2014: 16).

The Confluence of the Metagovernor's Salient Goals

The triangle does not imply a hierarchy among the three salient goals and corresponding sub goals. All goals are equally important in facilitating collaborative network processes. Based on the network management triangle insights, we defined the normative standards to which we compare the practices of the FOD M&V in section 5. Table 1 offers an overview of these normative standards. Now we turn to the methodological section.

Table 1: Normative Standards Compared to Metagovernance Practices of the FOD M&V

Vertex:	Sub goal	The metagovernor's actions must result in...
Stability	<i>Connectivity</i>	a strengthening of relationships between all actors.
	<i>Socialization</i>	an open exchange of views, concerns, and interests between actors.
	<i>Institutionalization</i>	the establishment, support, and consideration of shared 'rules of the game'.
	<i>Conflict management</i>	a mitigation of existing tensions and the fostering of trust.
Legitimacy	<i>Internal legitimacy</i>	a shared internal appreciation for the way 'integration' is sought.
	<i>External legitimacy</i>	a confirmation of the collaboration to all outside norms and expectations.
Outcomes	<i>Goal attainment</i>	the 'efficient' generation of a 'shared' agreement.

Methodology

We used a case study methodology to study the attempts of the FOD M&V, from 1997-2010, to facilitate the establishment of the NPST in a collaborative network. This network included a multitude of actors from federal and regional levels of government. We acknowledge the inherent limitations of using single case studies for extrapolating findings, as was described by George and Bennett (2005). Yet, we also agree with Flyvbjerg (2011: 305) when he argues that a case study can further scientific development by the force of example. To this end, we do not pretend that our findings are fully generalizable or highly theoretical. However, we are convinced that our reflections are helpful in substantiating the development of theory on the impact of metagovernance on the innovative capacity of collaborative networks.

For the data collection we drew on a detailed process mapping based on an analysis of documents and a series of interviews (Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004: 136-137). The document analysis included parliamentary and policy documents, meeting minutes, position papers, FOD M&V annual reports, and long-term policy plans of other organizations involved. The relevance of the documents was determined by making a selection based on whether the information in the documents said something new or extra about: the different stagnations and breakthroughs of the policy innovation process, the various activities of the metagovernor, the positions of the actors with regard to the problem situation and possible solutions, and the morphology of the actor constellation. The document analysis was complete once we reached data saturation.

Subsequently, the interviews helped us gain more insight into the behaviours, ideas, attitudes, and experiences of the actors with regard to the development of the policy innovation process. The interviews were semi-structured and the questions concentrated on the key events that followed from the document analysis. In total, we interviewed seven high-ranking policy officials. Five of the respondents worked for the FOD M&V. This allowed us to capture the metagovernor's view on the innovation dynamics in the collaborative network and discuss its metagoverning efforts in detail. In the FOD M&V respondent interviews we noticed that the Flemish region VMMOW department (see Table 2) was especially opposed the actions of the FOD M&V. As such, we made the decision to also interview two relevant officials of this Flemish department.

The interviews typically lasted for 1.5 hours. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. We promised our respondents anonymity. Therefore, we numbered the interviews and used the phrase ‘respondent (number)’ to report quotes from the interviews in this article. We were aware of the possibility that memory errors⁴ could prevail in the interviews, given that the process started more than 18 years ago (Tourangeau, 2000). Therefore, in order to minimize the impact of (possible) memory errors, we made two deliberate choices. First of all, we only selected respondents⁵ that had been key figures in the policy innovation process or were known for their expertise on the policy developments of the different modes of transport during the period of 1997-2010. In this way, we expected that we would collect more accurate data than if we had interviewed respondents that were not, or only partly, involved in the collaborative network. Secondly, we triangulated the data by comparing the interview responses to each other and to the document analysis findings. We followed-up with respondents if we ran into inconsistencies to ask for clarification.

Eventually, we used the normative standards of the network management triangle as *grounding concepts* to reflect on the process mapping. This allowed us to gain a notion of if, during the policy innovation, the FOD M&V was able to live up to these normative standards, and if not, why the metagovernor was unable to do so. Finally, we organized a stakeholder meeting with 25 end-users⁶ of transport policies to see whether they recognized our reflections on the policy innovation dynamics from their past interactions with involved governmental actors. This stakeholder meeting allowed us to cross-validate our findings. The results of the performance of the FOD M&V in comparison to the normative standards of the network management triangle are presented in section seven. Before we do so, section six elaborates on the policy innovation process and collaborative network the FOD M&V had to metagovern.

The Case

During the late 1990s politicians in the Belgian federal state began to realize that their transport policy strategies were no longer compatible with the sectorial context (ICDO, 2000: 437). As a result, in 1997, a multitude of political actors from different tiers of government (federal and regional level) agreed to come up with a National Plan on Sustainable Transport (NPST). The NPST would radically alter the objectives, strategies, and policy visions underlying the conventional governmental actions and interventions (ICDO, 1998). The envisioned policy change proposed a shift of more than 15 per cent of the transported freight from the roads to railways and interland waterways by 2010. These modes of transport were considered to be more sustainable, environmentally-friendly, and much underused with respect to their capacity (ICDO, 2000). Moreover, the politicians wanted to invest in intermodal forms of transport instead of continuing to focus on the development of a single mode of transport (ICDO, 1998).

It was decided that relevant departments and agencies (i.e. administrative actors) from the different tiers of government would collaborate to concretize the policy actions for the NPST and ensure that joined strategies were developed. These were not only departments and agencies that were directly involved in the transport domain (FPDO, 2000: 76), but also entities that had an

⁴ There are different sorts of memory error. Respondents can, for instance, ‘forget things’ or reinterpret aspects of the case differently when reflecting back on the case dynamics.

⁵ Only seven respondents could be selected on basis of these (strict) selection criteria.

⁶ Shipping companies, transport companies, harbors, railway companies, steel companies, etc.

interest in the development of transport policies (from the policy fields of environment, spatial planning, and economic affairs) or which were necessary for the execution of agreed policy actions (from the policy field of finance). The FOD M&V was assigned as metagovernor. The department was therefore not only a participant but also responsible for the advancement of the policy innovation process in the collaborative network. Table 2 provides an overview of all involved administrative actors (and their abbreviations) clustered according to the administrations and the policy field to which they belong. The actors with an asterisk after their abbreviation are semi-autonomous organizations.

However, the joining up of administrative actors in the collaborative network, was not an easy exercise. The administrative actors did not manage to agree on a holistic and innovative government strategy that would encompass the different levels of government. Therefore, in 2010 the FOD M&V made the decision to terminate the collaborative network. The policy innovation process burnout was seen as early as 2005, when each of the regional administrations decided it was in their best interest to devote less attention to the NPST and instead work on their own innovative policy strategies for sustainable and intermodal transport (ICDO, 2004: 197). As such, in our data analysis we paid particular attention to the metagovernance dynamics between 1997 and 2005.

Table 2: Involved Administrative Actors in the Collaborative Network

	Department of Mobility	Department of Spatial Planning and Environment	Department of Economic affairs	Department of Finance
Federal administration	FOD M&V Infrabel* (rail infrastructure manager) NMBS* (Belgian Railway Company)	FOD VVL	FOD EKME	FOD FIN
Flemish administration	VMMOW	VMRWO and VMLNE	VMEWI	VMFB
Walloon administration	WDGMOB	WDGSP and WDGENV	WDGECO	WDGF
Brussels administration	BRM	BRSO	BREW	BRBF

The Case Results

In the following section, the results of the data analysis process are presented. We start by presenting the results of the performance of the FOD M&V in comparison to the sub goal of connectivity.

Connectivity

The sub goal of connectivity considers, as earlier indicated, the relationships between the collaborative network actors. Ultimately, the metagovernor’s role is to ensure that there are close connections between the actors involved, as this allows for a more efficient and transparent way of

working together. In the case, however, developing strong ties was rather difficult for the FOD M&V to achieve. Developing strong ties with the affected regional departments and agencies proved to be a particular challenge (FRDO, 2004: 24). There were two reasons for this.

First of all, the FOD M&V had the overall tendency to routinely interact and engage with its network of federal actors, and expected only reaching out to the regional departments of Transport and Mobility to be sufficient to obtain the full support of the regional administrations for the policy innovation (ICDO, 2001: 46; FRDO, 2004: 24). The metagovernor thus viewed the BRM, VMMOW and WDGMOB as carrier pigeons of their regional administrations, and did as such little effort to include more regional parties in the structural deliberations on the NPST. The main reason was that the FOD M&V was afraid that too many stakeholders around the innovation table would reduce the effectiveness of the collaborative network in terms of quickly finding a policy solution for the promotion of sustainable transport (ICDO, 1997).

Second, the regional administrations themselves did not make a real effort to become more involved in the collaborative network (ICDO, 2000: 9). The regional administrations only wanted to join the dialogues when there were opportunities to reap the benefits from the collaboration. In point of fact, the BRM, VMMOW, and WDGMOB mainly used the policy innovation process to advocate the need for a new state reform discussion in the transport domain (respondent 2). These departments argued that a sustainable transition in the transport domain could only be achieved if competences of rail transport were transferred to the regional levels (Vlaamse Regering, 1996: 39). In this way, the regional actors strived for full authority over the development of all modes of transport within their responsible territory.

Socialization

The relatively weak ties between the federal and regional administrations also had an immediate effect on the socializations within the collaborative network. While the actors within each of the administrations attempted to get a shared understanding of the policy problem and possible solutions, the dialogues transcending the governmental levels were mere discussions on conflicting policy priorities (FRDO, 2004: 6).

The Walloon departments, for example, agreed in 1999 to support the ambition to make transport more sustainable, but not at all costs. The structurally poor economic performance of the region made the Walloon government focus on mere economic revival. Too many obligations towards the goal for sustainable transport would then only reduce the possibility of maintaining an economic focus in relation to issues of transport and infrastructure (Happearts, 2011). The federal departments and agencies, in contrast, adhered to the opinion that each of the actors in the collaborative network had to go the extra mile for sustainable transport (respondent 5). In consequence, there were numerous disputes between the WDGMOB and the federal departments with regard to the ambition level of the envisioned transition (FOD M&V, 1999: 100).

If we specifically consider the metagovernance actions of the FOD M&V in relation to the sub goal of socialization, a 2004-progress report suggests that it would have been better if the FOD M&V had given more direction to the deliberations in the collaborative network, instead of relying too much on the self-governing capacity of the actor constellation (FRDO, 2004: 41). In fact, the metagovernor mainly influenced the operative conditions of the interactions (when and in what constellation the actors would meet) but left it up to the actors themselves to discuss and overcome substantive differences with regard to the generation of the policy innovation (ICDO, 2001). The

involved actors, however, did not really take any initiative to achieve greater coherence (FRDO, 2004: 23). According to minutes of a meeting that took place in January 1999, “departments and agencies rather used the (clear) delineation of authority as an alibi to not discuss issues that were harmful for their organizational and administrative interests.”

Arguably, the FOD M&V was in a difficult position to stimulate the actors from the different administrative levels to give up on their positions. The metagovernor had to balance two opposites. On the one hand, the FOD M&V wanted to look after its own interests in its role as collaboration network participant. On the other hand, in its role as metagovernor, the FOD M&V had to prevent the other organizations from perceiving its interventions as favouring certain interests over others.

To this end, the departments and agencies in the collaborative network did not really get into a dialogue on the requirement that if they were serious about enabling a sustainable transition in the entire transport sector, they had to get in same boat and start rowing together (FRDO, 2004: 23).

Institutionalization

With regard to the sub goal of institutionalization – which is about making sure that the metagovernor sees that rules of the game are established, supported, and considered by all actors – the FOD M&V did more harm than good by unilaterally deciding what procedures were to be followed and how the decision-making would be organized. The negative effects of these metagovernance actions became particularly evident in a first stage of the policy innovation process. The metagovernor had promised the political actors that an agreement on the NPST would be reached by January, 2000 (FRDO, 2004: 15). In order to comply with this deadline, the metagovernor made the decision to first ensure that the departments and agencies at the federal level reached consensus before the BRM, VMMOW and WDGMOB were to be consulted on the content of the document in five roundtable meetings (ICDO, 1998: 128).

This procedure was, however, not very fruitful. By the beginning of 2000, the FOD M&V was merely able to send a small document to the political actors. The document included neither concrete policy actions nor did it go into detail on the allocation of resources and coordination mechanisms for ensuring the implementation of the NPST. The metagovernor wrote in the document that there were some nuanced differences between the regional and federal administrations, and therefore the FOD M&V was unable to deliver what was promised (FPDO, 2000: 76). Hence, the FOD M&V requested more time for the innovation process in order to not disrupt the fragile collaboration on the NPST between the federal and regional departments and agencies.

According to respondent 2, however, there was another main reason why no agreement was reached on the NPST at the initial deadline: the regional departments and agencies had the feeling that due to the procedures and decision-making rules there was little room for them to raise their concerns in the collaborative network. Consequently, they insisted that the FOD M&V change its dominating way of metagoverning. Or as respondent 2 mentioned, “the regional departments and agencies no longer wanted a federal stepmother that did not treat them as equals in the collaborative network.”

Conflict management

In terms of conflict management, initially, the FOD M&V did not undertake specific action to mitigate tensions and foster trust among the actors in the collaborative network. The metagovernor simply thought that every administrative actor acknowledged the need and urgency for establishing the NPST and therefore expected that these actors would be pragmatic about finding a common solution for the sustainable transition (FOD M&V, 1999: 7-8). However, after failing to reach the first deadline the metagovernor realized that a lot of dissatisfaction existed, particularly among the regional actors, with regard to the procedures in the collaborative network and the course of the policy innovation process. Hence, the FOD M&V wanted to make amends with the regional departments and agencies in order to take some pressure of the collaboration. Specifically, the metagovernor utilized two metagovernance strategies.

First of all, the metagovernor tried to re-engage with the regional administrations by providing the regional carrier pigeons with a bigger role in the deliberations (ICDO, 2001: 26). This meant that the BRM, VMMOW and WDGMOB became more directly involved in the policy innovation process, instead of only being consulted after a federal agreement was reached. Secondly, the FOD M&V decided to split the deliberations on the NPST up into smaller games and subsequently try to reach an agreement on greening rail transport first (ICDO, 2002; respondent 3). The FOD M&V realized that the regional administrations wanted to have more control over the development of rail transport specifically. As such, the FOD M&V hoped to regain the trust of the regional departments and agencies by organizing the deliberations in the policy innovation process according to these specific wishes and demands (respondent 3).

The metagovernor presumably expected that these mitigating efforts would be sufficient to get the involved actors on the same wavelength for the sustainable transition. In the new planning, the deadline for agreeing on the NPST was postponed to August, 2001. The NPST was, however, not yet adopted by the beginning of 2002. In fact, the promise to agree on the policy innovation remained a dead letter. The involved actors were not very willing, or had a lot of difficulty, adapting to the novel situation where they were supposed to work together to achieve mutually beneficial solutions (FRDO, 2004: 23). For that reason, a member of the stakeholder meeting, which we organized to cross-validate our research findings, made the suggestion that it would have been better if the FOD M&V had not only responded to conflicts, but also had tried to proactively manage the discomfort the actors experienced with working together on concerted innovative policy strategies.

Internal legitimacy

The FOD M&V wanted to avoid actors in the collaborative network feeling disadvantaged by its metagoverning efforts (FRDO, 2004: 25). Nonetheless, we already discussed several examples where especially the regional departments and agencies perceived the actions of the metagovernor as being off base. In terms of the sub goal of internal legitimacy, this meant that sometimes the FOD M&V was unable to find appropriate ways of steering for integrated policy action. However, the position of the metagovernor was not challenged in any of the earlier encounters.

This changed after the FOD M&V decided in 2002 to flutter the dovescotes and make a draft document for the NPST on the basis of measures that were still being discussed but for which there seemed to be some general consensus (FOD M&V, 2000: 19; ICDO, 2000: 29). The FOD M&V

hoped that this draft document would work as an incentive for the departments and agencies involved to bring the deliberations on the NPST to a good end. Yet, the regional actors interpreted the good intentions of the FOD M&V as a form of paternalistic behaviour (respondent 2). According to them, the metagovernor was overstepping its mandate by making decisions on issues that neither fell within the breadth of the competencies of the FOD M&V nor the competences of other federal departments.

As a result, the metagovernor's mandate became an area of conflict in the collaborative network. The big question in this conflict was in what situations was the FOD M&V allowed to ignore ongoing discussions and struggles for the safeguarding the continuity of the policy innovation process. The conflict was solved when, in the beginning of 2004, the actors agreed on four principles to which the metagovernor henceforth had to adhere (FRDO, 2004). These were the principles of complementarity, interaction, added value, and synergy (IMCDO, 2005: 3). Specifically, this meant that the FOD M&V, in its role as metagovernor, was only allowed to resolve trench-wars in the collaborative network when the solutions the metagovernor offered: aligned with the policy objectives of all involved actors (i.e. complementarity), took into account the existing competence division (i.e. interaction), were an improvement of operational policy strategies (i.e. added value), and contributed to the goal of creating an innovative and holistic government strategy for the transport domain (i.e. synergy).

External legitimacy

The demand for restricting the FOD M&V's metagovernance behaviour was not only fuelled by issues related to the internal legitimacy sub goal, but also by the little acknowledgement the FOD M&V had with respect to other external obligations than its own. The FOD M&V was foremost responsive to the commitments of Belgium towards the 1992 Rio Protocol. The Rio Protocol urged the signers of the treaty to make their freight transport more sustainable by the year 2010. Moreover, the Rio Protocol outlined a long list of objectives to which the signers of the treaty had to conform. To this end, the FOD M&V wanted to use the deliberations on the NPST to also comply with these international expectations.

The collaborative network was, however, not an entity in its own right. Rather, it was a collaboration of departments and agencies that felt the need to work together. In practice, each of the participating actors also had to deal with their own external stakeholders. Within the deliberations on the NPST there was little room to talk about other external demands than the objectives of the Rio Protocol. As such, there were some fierce struggles about measures that may have been effective ways to conform to the objectives of the Rio Protocol, but at the same time would harm the interests of the involved departments and agencies' stakeholders.

A good example of such a struggle was the discussion on fiscal measures directed at burdening the road haulage system. According to the FOD M&V, this measure would make companies more aware of the negative effects of their transport activities and stimulate them to use more green modes of transport (Blauwens and Thiry, 1998: 64). The VMMOW, however, heavily opposed this idea of taxing road transport. According to respondent 6 and 7:

...the ports are important for the Flemish economy. Companies in the port areas want to get their products as quickly as possible to the hinterland. The fastest way to do so is by road transport. To transport them by inland navigation or rails is not a real solution as only minimum infrastructure capacity exists. Financial measures directed against the use of road transport can thus harm the economic position of the Flemish ports, as companies will probably move to other ports to unload their goods.

Eventually, the measure became a taboo topic in the collaborative network (FPDO, 2000). In terms of the external legitimacy sub goal this means that the FOD M&V, in its endeavours, was unable to ensure that the collaboration conformed to all outside norms and expectations.

Goal attainment

In reference to the normative requirements of the goal attainment sub goal, we can state that the actions of the FOD M&V were inadequate to assure the efficient generation of a shared agreement. In point of fact, in 2005 each of the regional administrations decided to merely focus on their own intermodal and sustainable freight transport plans and spend less time on the generation of the policy innovation (ICDO, 2004: 197). There is one last shortcoming of the FOD M&V that contributed to this negative process outcome: the ambition of the metagovernor to attain an innovative policy solution as quickly as possible.

The FOD M&V literally stated in its 1997-annual report that it wanted to secure a quick win. The FOD M&V, however, did not realize that the only certainty involved actors had upfront was that the policy innovation was meant to be a game-changer⁷. It seems, in this sense, logical that most participants were hesitant and prudent to immediately concentrate their efforts on agreeing to a radical new policy solution, as they did not know exactly how the policy innovation would eventually affect their organizational practices. This was evident in a 2004-progress report which stated that it would help if the FOD M&V, in its catalytic role, takes more time to provide transparent communications and promote shared ownership among the actors (FRDO, 2004: 23). In this way, it was expected that the involved departments and agencies could be stimulated to move beyond probing each other and instead progress towards the mutual development of new ideas and solutions for the cross-cutting policy issue of sustainable transport.

Conclusion

To conclude, research on the metagovernance of processes of policy innovation in collaborative networks has so far been quite scarce. Therefore, in this article we decided to examine a case with unique features as a means to add new insights to the causal link between metagovernance, collaborative networks, and policy innovation. What was specifically unique about this case was that the collaborative network operated in an institutionally complex context with clearly delineated powers and responsibilities between the involved actors from the different administrations. Further, the metagovernor only had limited authority to facilitate the policy innovation process. Hence, our final reflections mainly apply to cases with similar specificities.

Overall, we can state that the performance of the FOD M&V was not very successful (see Appendix I). Of course, the FOD M&V is not the only actor to blame for the policy innovation

⁷ Remember the radical policy objectives that were envisioned by the political actors by establishing the NPST.

failure. Among other reasons, the reluctance of the regional departments and agencies to fully participate also contributed to the negative process outcome. Yet, from a managerial point of view the claim can be made that some metagovernance actions and strategies of the FOD M&V were not advantageous given the innovation- and governance dynamics in which the collaboration took place. On the basis of these metagovernance deficiencies, we draw some general lessons about what metagovernance strategies are most appropriate to facilitate policy innovation processes in complex institutional contexts, such as dualistic federal systems. A first lesson that follows from the empirical analysis is that a metagovernor, who facilitates policy innovation processes in dualistic federal systems, should be cautious with ignoring the existing competence division in the collaborative network and overstepping its given mandate. In this case, it seemed as if the actors from the different administrations viewed their competencies as sacred, and perceived anyone who overlooked these as invaders. In fact, a general response of many of the regional actors was that the FOD M&V and other federal actors were not allowed to intrude in their conduct of business without any consent. Moreover, we saw that the position of the FOD M&V became a conflict issue in the collaborative network – and eventually the behaviour of the metagovernor was constrained – after the department decided without any notification to make a draft document of the NPST in the hope of resolving tensions in the collaborative network and overcoming a social impasse in the deliberations on the policy innovation.

As such, we argue that the extent to which a metagovernor is consciously aware of the boundaries of its own position and is capable of keeping its operations within the breadth of its given mandate, in large part determine how ‘innovative’ collaborative networks that operate in dualistic federal systems will be.

This first lesson is quite contradictory to the findings of Montin et al. (2014: 117). These scholars elaborate in their article on an effective strategy the metagovernor utilized in one of their cases to spur the development of a policy innovation in the collaborative network. Specifically, the metagovernor decided to neglect the power positions in the collaborative network and take on the role of preacher, by telling the involved actors how they should think and respond to each other in order to construct a unanimous approach to regional development. According to Montin et al. (2014: 117), “this preaching strategy injected some fresh energy in the deliberations and eventually became a significant trajectory element to get the work moving to the next stage of the policy innovation process.”

We doubt, however, that such a preaching strategy would have been appreciated by the actors in our case. In fact, we expect that the stakeholders would perceive such a behaviour as pedantic or even arrogant. Especially considering the limited authority the FOD M&V had in the collaborative network. In addition, it seems unlikely that the FOD M&V would even consider such a metagovernance approach, as the department tried to avoid having its metagovernance actions limit its possibilities, as participant, to influence the deliberations on the policy innovation.

As such, we rather agree with Agger and Sørensen (2014: 206) when they argue that a metagovernor should not do everything in its power to steer and depoliticize the innovation process. Instead they should focus on the design and maintenance of policy arenas that are ‘safe-spaces’ where, in a friendly atmosphere, contestation can take place among the actors on the policy innovation. According to Agger and Sørensen (2014: 206) “a skilful staging and processing of political contestations in these safe-spaces can even transform conflicts among actors in the collaborative network from barriers into drivers for collaborative policy innovation.”

A second lesson that follows from our case study is that it takes time before actors are willing, and most of all, prepared to join forces in policy innovation processes. We observed quite a bit of hesitance among many departments and agencies to collaborate for the NPST. These organizations did not know exactly what to expect. The only certainty they had upfront was that the policy innovation was meant to be a game-changer and radically alter the way in which the policy problem would be addressed. Therefore, we advise metagovernors not to immediately press for results, but instead to first clearly manage expectations and establish a strong foundation of mutual trust. In this way, we expect that the actors in the collaboration can really establish a situation in which they work together on the development of innovative policy solutions.

When the departments and agencies get to this next level, the metagovernor must avoid the involved actors remaining as mere passive actors, as was the case in the deliberations on the NPST. At the same time, the departments and agencies in the collaborative network should not be given the feeling that the policy innovation is forced upon them.

This second lesson has some similarities with what Bason (2014: 222) describes as the metagovernance strategy of managing discomfort. According to Bason (2014: 222), one of the biggest challenges in innovation processes is to get involved actors from one state of affairs to another in a radical transition. Bason also recognizes that particularly at the beginning of an innovation process actors are faced with a lot of uncertainty. Therefore, he (2014: 223) argues that metagovernors should take sufficient time to help involved departments and organizations get used to the novel situation and adapt to the ‘unknowns’ of the innovation process.

However, in regard Bason’s statement we do want to make the important disclaimer that the concept of ‘sufficient time’ should not be used as an excuse to delay the policy innovation process. In the end, ‘innovation’ entails a clear break from the past and not exactly knowing what the future will bring. As such, we do also agree with Michlewski (2008) when he argues that not all uncertainty can be managed and at a certain point the metagovernor and actors should simply embrace the discontinuity and open-endedness of the innovation process in order to get things going.

The third and final lesson that can be drawn from the empirical study is that metagovernors must avoid falling back into old habits and administrative routines. In our case, the FOD M&V had the tendency to routinely turn to its existing network of federal actors and expected that only reaching out to the carrier pigeons of the regional administrations would be sufficient to generate the policy innovation for sustainable transport. In addition, the FOD M&V’s metagovernance style was rather traditional or bureaucratic (Termeer and Nooteboom, 2014: 182), in the sense that the department had an inclination to unilaterally structure tasks, manage crises, control the process, and decide on the planning in the collaborative network.

This study reveals that these customary practices of the FOD M&V had a negative (and enduring) impact on the relationships between the federal and regional actors in the collaborative network. In fact, at a certain point the regional actors were completely fed up with the federal stepmother that did not treat them as equals. Furthermore, these metagovernance acts did not contribute to the emergence of an innovative culture within the collaborative network, i.e. a situation wherein the involved stakeholders are encouraged to establish new work practices,

procedures and experiences for the generation of innovative policy solutions in close partnership (Termeer and Nooteboom, 2014: 184).

Hence, we agree with Agger and Sørensen (2014: 196), Keast and Waterhouse (2014: 159), and Termeer and Nooteboom (2014: 184-185) when they state that policy innovation processes flourish when the metagovernor gives room to the self-organizing capacity of the actor constellation, is not tempted to develop too strict process schemes, and is foremost attentive and adaptive to possible negative developments (e.g. tipping points, cascade effects and thresholds) that can hamper the deliberations among the stakeholders in the collaborative network.

Of course, this research also has certain limitations. In the article we already addressed the small-N problem of a single case study, and thereby the issue of *context-dependent* generalizations. Additionally, because we only studied the metagovernance of a failed policy innovation process in a dualistic federal system and we did not compare our findings to a case where the actors with the help of a metagovernor did agree on a policy innovation, our results and final reflections on useful metagovernance strategies can have some bias. That is to say, the impact of the impediments on the metagovernance dynamics in the collaborative network might be overrated, due to the negative process outcome. In consequence, the metagovernance approaches that we suggest to be most beneficial given the complex institutional dynamics, might have a smaller *positive* influence on the interactions among stakeholders in collaborative networks that operate in dualistic federal systems than we proclaim.

Therefore, we first of all propose that prospective studies examine the metagovernance of collaborative networks in dualistic federal structures where the involved actors did succeed in generating a policy innovation. Such an analysis would verify or falsify our research findings. Secondly, in line with Sørensen (2014: 10) we encourage scholars to also look at other complex innovation- and governance contexts. It would, for example, be interesting to see how the metagovernance dynamics for the promotion of policy innovations in collaborative networks that operate in cooperative federal structures, like the federal system of Germany, differ from our case findings. In this way, the research niche of the metagovernance of policy innovation processes in collaborative networks can further mature, and thereby enrich the scholarly debates on innovation in the public sector.

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Appendix I: The metagovernance performance of the FOD M&V

Sub goal	Performance FOD M&V:	Explanations:
Connectivity	-	<i>The FOD M&V primarily turned to the network of federal actors and barely included regional actors in the structural deliberations.</i>
Socialization	+/-	<i>The FOD M&V influenced the operative conditions of the innovation process but left it completely open to the 'passive actors' to decide upon the overall objectives of the policy innovation.</i>
Institutionalization	-	<i>The FOD M&V did more harm than good by unilaterally deciding what process steps and decision-making procedures were to be followed.</i>
Conflict management	+/-	<i>The FOD M&V responded to conflicts, but did not proactively manage the discomfort the actors experienced with working together on a policy innovation.</i>
Internal legitimacy	-	<i>The FOD M&V regularly overstepped its mandate, without notifying or having consent of the other involved actors.</i>
External legitimacy	-	<i>The FOD M&V hardly acknowledged other external obligations than its own.</i>
Goal attainment	+/-	<i>The FOD M&V directly pressed for results, without managing expectations or promoting shared ownership among the involved actors.</i>