EU Multi-Level Governance
Does It Work?

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Does MLG Work?

• MLG mainly intended as descriptive – though certainly not a-theoretical
• However, when it comes to “promoting MLG”, within the EU as well as a model for partner countries, the question that arises is “Does MLG Work?”
• To better frame the question: “Under what conditions does it work?”
• Indeed, there may be a plurality of MLG arrangements (within Type I as well as Type II), whose “performance” will depend on context conditions, in a dynamic - not a static - way
(Alleged) Strengths of MLG
(Benefits potentially to be harvested)

• Participation
• Representation (political mobilisation)
• Widespread sense of ownership
• Knowledge base for policy decisions
• Efficacy(?)
(Alleged) Costs/Problems

- Lengthy decision processes
- Risks of “Lowest Common Denominator” type of decisions? (frame elaborated in another context, that may well apply)
- “Costs” of participation – and more generally a need for abundant rather than scarce resources – and trust as a pre-condition
- Accountability (who is in charge)?
- Inefficacy (more talk than action)?
Does MLG Work?

Conditions for success

• Does it work? As noted elsewhere (Bardach 1994) here there are two questions in one:
  – How does the system work (in our case: what are salient features of the contexts in which MLG arrangements are at work)?
  – How does the practice tries to exploit the opportunities the system provides (in our case: what MLG arrangements may best exploit the opportunities provided by the societal context)?
Revisiting the “Does It Work” Question: Back to Defining Issues (Governance)

• Governance is the key... Also because the EU lacks any conventionally defined government:
  – ‘The EU, in fact, has a governance system which simultaneously incorporates traditional national governments and the decision-making process of the EU’ (Sbragia 2002)

• (politics dimension) MLG as political mobilisation (governments do not keep all the gates: centre-periphery, state-society, domestic-foreign)

• (policy) MLG as policy-making style (never forget the crucial questions: 1. are societal actors really influential on policy processes? 2. does the ‘third level’ –regional/local- have any real influence on policy outcomes?)

• (polity) MLG as state-restructuring: Type I and Type II MLG

(from Piattoni 2010)
Revisiting the “Does It Work” Question: A Transatlantic Comparison (Multi-Level)

In a comparison with the US system of governance, Sbragia highlights some key differences (hence defining features of EU MLG)

• What is represented: territorial or functional interests?
• Regional/Local governments: privileged or ‘just one lobbyist amongst the others’?
• ‘Competitive’ federalism: is MLG fundamentally different?
• The overarching ‘rules of the game’ on financial issues: the (no) bailout clause?

(from Sbragia 2010)
Revisiting the “Does It Work” Question: The Current Euro-crisis

• Is MLG still an alternative, a third theoretical frame beyond liberal-intergovernmentalism and neo-functionalism (supranational governance), or is what we are observing during the crisis readable through the above two lenses?

• Is MLG (in its ‘prescriptive’ version) apt to interpret ‘cutback management’ and ‘policy termination’, or is it just fitting (re-)distributive policies?

• Empirically, is the cleavage between euro-members and non-euro-members beyond the no-return point? Are the governance arrangements of the two clusters so differentiated to form de facto two different systems, set on two distinct paths?
The (under-investigated) Role of Non-Majoritarian Institutions

• MLG seems to have been limitedly concerned with the role of non-majoritarian institutions (institutional and interinstitutional bodies, agencies, ....) – a limitation?
• The European accumulated administrative order (Egeberg) is nowadays replete with such institutions...
• ... and many commentators would assess their contribution (‘performance’) positively – indeed more positively than ‘representative’ institutions
• Does this bring us to a (possibly updated) version of ‘Supranational Governance’ (Sandholtz and Stone Sweet)?
Conclusion

The intervention aimed at raising some key questions about adequacy/conditions of functioning of potential MLG arrangements, based on revisiting some key features of it

Also to be equipped to answer the other central question: is MLG a model to export?

To end on a positive tone, the direct answer is ‘YES’

But the issue of the multiplicity of MLG arrangements and context conditions requires investigation as well as ‘guided experimentation’ in different contexts
Selected references
