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AGNIESZKA ROTHERT

## Introduction: Power – a complex issue

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*Humanity will be saved only when it creates a supranational structure, based on law, which allows to eliminate military solutions.*  
Albert Einstein

**I**t is clear that it will be difficult to regard the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a continuation of the old order of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Virtually everything changes in front of our eyes – war, peace, environment, demography, culture, economics, technology, as well as politics and power structures. And although it may seem that there is nothing new and that everything happened before, the network of connections and interdependence is growing and thickening, systemic relations are becoming increasingly more important and they are producing new combinations.

The key to understanding the essence of the ongoing transformation is the connectedness of the world, not events, phenomena or actions. The world is changing and this fact is irreversible. A characteristic feature of our universe is a mixture of order and disorder, fusions and diffusions, aggregations and disaggregations. This means that the actual systems are characterized by a lack of balance, dynamics, transformations taking place in a cascade manner. The lack of the systemic balance is caused by a constant influx of energy or matter. Weather changes come from the impact of solar energy. Social systems operate in the same way; they are in motion – which of course does not mean that there cannot be periods of stabilization or even stagnation of the system. The reality may be perceived as a pile of sand. Let us imagine, that we make a heap of sand, grain by grain, until we have a cone size of a fist. How do we know when a sandslide will occur in the tiny pyramid? Of course, it is inevitable that when the heap becomes bigger and its sides steeper and steeper, a little sand will fall. Is it possible to predict when? Is it possible to predict how much? Simple

questions, very complicated answers<sup>1</sup>. Per Bak, a physicist and biologist, had a revolutionary idea connected with the pile of sand. He believed that after a certain time, during which the grains of sand shaped a cone, the entire pile will be organized into a state of instability – a state in which the addition of a single grain can cause an avalanche or nothing will happen. Radicality of this idea lay in the fact that the piles of sand which looked innocent and relatively stable, in fact, were so extremely unstable that it is difficult to know what might happen. It was not even known what to call it, because organized instability, stands in opposition to common sense.

Behaviours complex in their nature result from the fact that large systems evolve. Systems are referred to as “complex” because their internal dynamics is not easy to describe and difficult to predict. A change in a complex system is not a mild progress, but a sequence of disasters. Complex behaviour is a feature of large systems consisting of many parts, which evolve into a “critical” state of imbalance, in which even the smallest event can lead to an avalanche of events. This does not occur under the influence of anyone’s actions, but only under the influence of the dynamic interactions between individual elements of the system<sup>2</sup>.

All this means that complex systems are difficult to predict and difficult to control, but it is not entirely impossible. We must “only” understand that usually a complex system cannot be “forced” to certain behaviours by means of imposition. The system can be controlled from the “bottom” by affecting and/or changing conditions or rules of interaction. It is a bit like steering the course of a river, but this must be conducted in accordance with the flow, otherwise the water will eventually change the riverbed.

We should probably adopt a broader and more flexible perspective with regard to the mechanisms of governance. Not rejecting completely the hierarchical pyramid of power and political intervention, we must recognize that the consequences of such actions may be counter-intuitive and difficult to predict.

The book *The Processes of Transnational Governance* is the result of several years of work of the team of the European Institutions Unit of the Institute of Political Science, Warsaw University as part of the research project of the National Science Centre “Governance in the transnational space”<sup>3</sup>. The aim of the project was to determine what the most important mechanisms of governance in the transnational space are, as well as how they function in several important

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<sup>1</sup> P. Bak, *How Nature Works: The Science of Self-Organized Criticality*, New York 1996.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 1–2.

<sup>3</sup> The publications of this work was supported by a grant from the Narodowe Centrum Nauki (NCN) – research program 2011/01/BHS5/03268.

dimensions of this governance, namely: the regulatory and institutional dimension, associated with the performance of power at different levels, the legitimacy dimension, the economic dimension, the dimension of transnational citizenship, the dimension of relations between supranational governance and state authority on the example of the Polish eGovernment strategy. The European Union has been used as an example of multilevel governance in the transnational space, based on the concept of “good governance” and Poland as an area within which the processes run at several levels of governance in the EU.

The project addresses a very important for political science issue of governance in the transnational space. It is a vast topic, which is why researchers usually focus only on its selected aspects. Meanwhile, the transnational governance is a complex system without one, sovereign power, but with a network of interactions and relations between local, regional, national and supranational authorities, the public and private sectors. A big challenge is to study it as a whole. The authors of the articles in this collection have been researching various aspects and elements of governance in the transnational space for a long time, however, due to the fact that there is an increasing need to answer the question about the optimal model of governing the increasingly integrating and expanding European Union, there appeared a necessity to find such a model in the context of transnational governance mechanisms. However, in order to determine the optimal model of governance in the European Union, we must first define the transnational governance mechanisms together with their context, including issues of legitimacy and accountability of governance, transnational citizenship and economic aspects of governance.

The basic premise is the claim that a profound political transformation of a global nature is taking place, and it results, among others, in changes in the sphere of governance. What unites us is noticing that the changes taking place in our world are complex, multi-layered, multi-dimensional and dynamic. Therefore, we must use a variety of research tools that analyse these types of systems. Theoretical speculations on the mechanisms of transnational governance and the concept of multi-level governance have been accompanied by different methods of analysis of political reality (system analysis, comparative study, case study), but at the same time it must be underlined that to a large extent the whole concept is based on the systems theory, or rather its next generation different from the classic Easton concept used in the social sciences.

A system is defined as a complex whole made up of groups of various actors, dynamically interacting with one another, causing a loop after loop of feedback. It is a system rather than a collection of unrelated activities – a dynamic and complicated system. It is characterized by an order of interconnected parts that

can potentially be independent entities/actors/agents. Autonomous individual activity has an impact on the activities of other individuals, and all together show a certain model of behaviour, having the nature of either routine or a break with it, when new requirements must be met and new behaviours generated. The ability of entities/actors/agents to change their behaviour, and thus induce a positive feedback loop – something that is different, new, unknown makes the system complex. It is the opposite of simple systems where everybody behaves in a predictable way. Adaptation of the system means the ability of collective coping with new challenges. Such are, without a doubt, political systems, such as the state or international system, characterized by a certain structural organisation that can be transformed, either under the influence of external or internal stimuli.

We have decided that the space of the analysis is changing. The processes of globalization have caused blurring of the time and space boundaries. The processes of globalization imply an increase in the number and density of borders transgressing interactions, which engage almost all societies, states, organizations, groups of entities and individuals – of course in varying degrees of involvement – in a complex system of mutual dependencies. The world is becoming increasingly difficult to divide clearly into the local and global sphere, the national and international sphere. Solving various global issues, like for instance counteracting the effects of global climate changes or the fight against transnational terrorism and transnational organized crime, is not possible at the national level. Local issues become global, and the world's problems become "localised".

Research parameters are also changing. Political activities cross borders when events happening in a place and decisions related to them result in consequences, intended or unintended, in another place. In addition, the number of connections, is also growing; in other words, the world is becoming a thickening grid of connections and political interactions. Instantaneity of the flow of information, the role of the media and modern communication technologies allow for coverage and tracking of events almost in real time. The global flow of information affects the acceleration of political processes, spread of specific concepts and political decisions, and thus the formation of a global cascade of consequences. The structures of power become decentralised, and the political reality is undergoing a transformation – the state must increasingly compete with such kinds of power that are elusive and undefined. These are networks of capital, production, communication, crime, international institutions, transnational private armies, NGOs and transnational religious movements. It results in the natural process of social evolution, adaptation to changing circumstances.

Governments of individual states have an increasing problem with developing and executing policies independently due to globalization, immigration and new information and communication technologies. "The construction

of transnational and global networks of relations between corporations, governments, NGOs, international organizations, coalitions of elites may have a profound impact on the new order, because it exceeds the boundaries of public and private spheres, national borders and interests. It might be even presumed that the multi-level governance system composed of collective actors, with the overlaps of power, could be as functionally effective as a centralized system”<sup>4</sup>.

A lot of doubts are raised by the question whether uncontrolled decentralization and uncontrolled networks may replace the well-known international order determined by laws and obligations; what is meant by the concept of governance on a global scale? “Government” signifies an authority of a formal nature and the possibility to use coercion, “governance” is not necessarily based on domination or coercion, it is about pursuing some common goals. Today, the participants of the system of governance treated in transnational terms are not only individual states, but also non-governmental organizations, interest groups, the world of science, the private sector (transnational corporations and the global capital market). Governance involves a collective capacity for action and performing social functions. It is a social process taking place in many places, in different (though sometimes the same) time, attended by a variety of organizations – it is a control mechanism.

Characteristic features of governance, defined on the basis of preliminary studies are: a multiplicity of decision centres, the structure is designed to manage social conflicts without a sovereign governing centre; the structure is open and fluid, which means lack of territoriality and access of a wide variety of actors, and the fact that consequences of decisions are of a distributed nature; the governing entities are experts, representatives of government and government administration, representatives of the private sector (business, volunteering); in decision-making processes and networks, issues and preferences are determined by collective actors; there are different ways of control and coordination, negotiations dominate; all of this taken together leads to creation of less formal ways of decision-making within structures that are not transparent to the public opinion and do not fit into traditional institutions of representative democracy.

All the analyses included are an attempt to verify previous approaches to the issue of governance in each of the above mentioned dimensions in the context of the mechanisms of the multi-level political system of the European Union. Our project makes use of Internet technologies researching phenomena such as transnational citizenship, the activity of interest groups and the degree of implementation of e-government strategies.

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<sup>4</sup> R.D. Lipschutz, J. Meyer, *Global Civil Society and Global Governance: The Politics of Nature from Place to Planet*, Albany 1996, p. 252.

The principal goal of our book is to encourage innovative thinking about the processes of governance. We tried to do that through analysis and the use of very different research approaches, “conventional” ones like: the neo-institutional analysis, classic system and comparative analysis, case study; but we also used the complexity theory and the network analysis, especially useful for the study and understanding of dynamic evolving phenomena. It seems that such a convergence of research tools allows to capture what is constant and repetitive in the system (any, not only a political one) and understand what is random and unpredictable.

The very concept of governance in the transnational space indicates that it is necessary to construct new research models that assume and accept uncertainty and indeterminacy, which in turn allows us to understand these elements of the world that were previously impossible to comprehend<sup>5</sup>.

Open dynamic systems are unpredictable and are in a state of imbalance, they consist of many entities/actors/agents (individual and collective ones) behaving in a purposeful and reactive way, but not in a rational way (entities/actors/agents are not able to predict the results of their actions, their behaviours are individually tailored to the situation – rationality is of a subjective or “non-rational” nature. Causality is not linear – when the system becomes more and more complicated, it is not possible to isolate a few causes to conclude about the effects, as an oversimplification of the model leads to the dangerous belief about the applicability of “simple solutions.” In the globalizing complex world, many factors symbiotically take effect. We should observe not a single event, but the evolution of systems. In ontological terms social life is a continuous and open process of mutual and often conflicting interactions.

The assumed concept of “governance in the transnational space” treated as a whole is an analysis of an adapting complex system. Its advantage is the perception and study of the processes and mechanisms of power not in the confined space of a national state, but in the dynamic space “in between”. Of course, it requires departing from conventional assumptions made in social sciences, especially regarding the system balance, hierarchicality of the structures of power and linearity of the occurring phenomena. In the world of science there is an anecdote about a geologist who came to the edge of the Grand Canyon (United States), looked and stated that “something is happening there”<sup>6</sup>. Political

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<sup>5</sup> Among others Werner Heisenberg, Kurt Gödel, Alfred Tarski (unpredictability in mathematics), Benoit Mandelbrot (dynamics of fluids), they all proved that not only is it possible but also useful. Problems untouchable by traditional methods, ceased to be so puzzling – radioactivity, antimatter, movement of light.

<sup>6</sup> J.H. Miller, S.E. Page, *Complex Adaptive Systems: An Introduction to Computational Models of Social Life*, Princeton, Oxford 2007, p. 213.



science is particularly tied to a heavily “fenced” landscape and it could be good to venture into new territories “in between”, however in our project we tried not to lose sight of familiar and well-trodden paths of research.

The realisation of the research project on governance processes in the transnational space shows very clearly that we are dealing with a multi-dimensional, open and dynamically changing structure of political power. The subject and object of the research is a network of interactions and stimuli affecting both the elements of the system (countries, governments, institutions and individuals), and the whole system. This constitutes a powerful research challenge, but also opens up theoretical and practical fields to think about challenges and potential solutions in the new emergent forms of governance in the transnational space related to issues such as legitimacy, accountability, cooperation and collaboration between political and private entities, characteristics of transnational citizenship, efficient provision of public services to citizens in the new “transnational” reality.

Useful, thus, is an open and more flexible perspective when we deal with the analysis of the mechanisms of governance. The emergence of new network/non-hierarchical forms of political governance is a kind of system necessity, and at the same time it increases diversity in the system. Poorly differentiated systems become predictable. Predictable ordered systems become exploited. Ordered systems produce space for innovation. Innovations dynamise space and increase the complexity of the system. On the other hand, too diverse systems produce chaos or randomness, which can lead to a slow-down of adaptation processes or simplification of behaviour strategies – and as a result to reduced complexity.

Governance in the 21st century should perhaps to a greater extent resemble actions of a gardener looking after his garden rather than a craftsman bending material<sup>7</sup>, what in fact is a revolutionary change because it means moving away from coercion and control to a specific method of “pampering”.

I emphasize the importance of diversity because it is crucial not only from the point of view of the functioning of a complex system and its liveliness, but it also emerges from our observations and analyses as a constitutive feature of transnational governance. While observing very different models of complex systems one can notice a kind of synergy, the benefits of which can be seen only at the aggregate level. At the same time the system itself can be livelier, more efficient and more innovative, but it does not have to interact with the behaviours of individual actors, who can undertake actions favourable to themselves, and not to the whole. Therefore, possible are pessimistic scenarios

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<sup>7</sup> This is a paraphrase of the words of the economist Friedrich August Hayek spoken at a banquet on the occasion of awarding him the Nobel Prize which comes from the book by J.C. Ramo, *The Age of Unthinkable*, New York, Boston, London 2010, p. 39.

– a disintegration of the system. However, there are many indications that when diversity produces results, the actors remain, a synergy is created and there is less chance of breakdown of the system.

Comparisons of course may seem unreliable, because in our case we are dealing with a complex social system, which is a combination of many different actors, and not a result of a long process of selection. No wonder it does not work (yet?) best. If we created for example an ecosystem consisting of random elements, probably in the early period part of them would be destroyed<sup>8</sup>. The most fascinating and useful analytical tool for the study and design of processes of governance will be just understanding the network “assembly” of interacting with each other types of entities. Sticking to biological poetics, new “species” induce a process of non-violent creative destruction.

Finally, for all the doubting and sceptical one more portion of Albert Einstein’s words:

*Serious problems that we face cannot be solved at the level of thinking we were at when we created them.*

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<sup>8</sup> S.E. Page, *Diversity and Complexity*, Princeton, Oxford 2011, pp. 250–251.