

Chapter 71

Local Government and Governance in Mexico

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ABSTRACT

After the 1983 constitutional amendment, which devolved public services to local governments, Mexican municipalities have been studied extensively. Much of this literature has focused on the consolidation of local policy sectors, professionalisation, and administrative innovation. These matters share a concern on self-government, traditionally considered as the constitutional ideal for the municipality. More recent developments, however, have focused on the growth of citizens' and inter-organisational networks, and over its influence in the production of horizontal interactions amongst local actors. Although the evidence suggests that these networks are mostly subordinated to governability objectives, a certain shift from government to governance can be argued. This chapter proposes that both approaches, the traditional government one and the governance one, are necessary in order to understand the multiplicity of municipal conditions in Mexico. This is especially relevant for generating differentiated accounts of local governance with a reach beyond the usual legal definitions.

INTRODUCTION

As it is well known, the academic literatures on governance are not only numerous, but complex and fast changing. They offer multiple meanings, approaches, levels of analysis, and theoretical, as well as empirical assumptions, thus making the use of this concept a problematic one.

In this general context, the “Anglo-Governance School” (Marinetto, 2003) has played an important role by advancing an understanding on governance that underlines its qualitative differences with traditional government. In particular, being the most conspicuous member of this school, R. A. W. Rhodes’s (1997) definition of governance as inter-organisational networks maintained around public issues, with a certain degree of autonomy from direct governmental control, established one of the canonical references in political theory. Rhodes’s assumption that networks of individuals and institutions define governance, while traditional government resides in hierarchical interactions with public institutions,

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has also been instrumental in re-organising the different bodies of academic literature. For example, the works on democratisation of governance networks (see Sørensen & Torfing, 2007), as well as the meta-governance contributions (see Torfing & Triantafillou, 2011) have developed from Rhodes's argument. The former analyses how to improve public-private networks' influence on public policy; the latter how to increase the steering capabilities of the state. Pierre and Peters (2000) argued persuasively that the government-governance conceptual and empirical gaps are not as wide as originally presented by the Anglo-Governance School. However, the assumption that governance is different to government in theoretical, empirical, and methodological terms is already a well-established proposition in political science, particularly in public administration studies.

The current tendency regarding these differences points towards treating them as variations in a government-governance continuum, displaying various policy conceptual definitions and instruments (Torfing, Peters, Pierre, & Sørensen, 2012). The main difficulty does not lie in choosing between governance networks and governmental hierarchies in order to address a public issue, but rather in determining the appropriate mix of hierarchies, networks, and markets to improve governmental steering capabilities and society's influence in policy-making. As Skelcher, Klijn, Kübler, Sørensen, & Sullivan (2011) argue, hierarchies and networks are hypothetically complementary, but incompatibility, instrumentalisation of governance networks and other transitional states can also be a possibility in real-life situations. In any case, it is increasingly evident that both government and governance categories are indispensable to understand, or even to explain, the complex conditions of modern public administration.

This chapter analyses the state and more recent developments of Mexican municipalities using both approaches. The governmental approach focuses on the organisational capacities of municipalities, including legal changes, their implications on local administration and management, devolution of public services, the general structure of local bureaucracies, and the relations with other levels of government. This is a well-established approach in Mexican academia that has resulted from the study of succeeding amendments to the federal constitution (see Ziccardi, 1995). These legal changes enabled the introduction of new administrative and managerial practices, including the reformation of bureaucracies, the enlargement of policy sectors supervised by local governments, and the increase of local-tax revenue. The governmental approach is useful in order to establish general conditions for governability, which is especially important in the highly variable local contexts that are common in Mexico.

In typical style, Deloya (2008) and Arce (2006) argue that, in order to improve conditions for democratic governability, Mexican governments should develop solid public agendas in economic and social issues, public safety, political support and legitimacy, effective electoral platforms, democratisation of everyday governmental processes, and, in the case of the federal government, a human rights-based foreign policy and the reformation of the judiciary. It would be unfair to assume that these authors define the above-mentioned policy sectors disregarding citizens' networks or participation. In the long run, even traditional approaches to public administration do assign a role to citizens without which legal norms, plans, and budgets cannot operate. Nevertheless, it is evident that their proposal relies basically on traditional policy instruments grounded on command and control mechanisms. This seems to imply that governmental institutions, actors, and resources are considered the determining, or even the sole, factor in solving a public problem or creating an opportunity (see Kooiman, 2010). As a result, the completion of governmental objectives is placed at the centre of collective action processes, as Olivo, Alaníz, and Reyes (2011) have argued.

This approximation to public problems and policy, even if useful to understand results and processes in some areas, is insufficient both in theoretical and empirical terms to provide differentiated and detailed

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