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Ongaro, Edoardo Multi-Level Governance and Public Administration. Oxford Encyclopedia of Public Administration

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Version: Accepted Manuscript

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Multi-Level Governance and Public Administration

Oxford Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Oxford University Press

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Summary

The literature on Multi-Level Governance (MLG) and the field of the administrative sciences and public administration (PA) can be fruitfully integrated in order to generate knowledge about ‘the administrative dimension of MLG’. MLG may be defined as ‘the simultaneous activation of governmental and non-governmental actors at various jurisdictional levels’ and perspectives derived from MLG may be applied to a wide set of issues spanning from political mobilization (politics), to policy-making (policy), to state restructuring (polity). It is along each of these sets of issues that it is possible to delineate the contribution that the field of PA can provide to the development of MLG. To MLG as political mobilization, the PA literature brings insights about participatory approaches and collaborative governance. To MLG as policy in multi-level settings, the PA literature brings insights about the functioning of multi-level administration and the role of a multi-level bureaucracy in policy-making processes occurring in compound political systems; the PA literature also contributes insights on public accountability in systems where decision responsibility is blurred, and issues of legitimacy arise. To MLG as polity restructuring, the PA literature offers insights on the administrative dimension of polity restructuring processes, as well as on the dynamics of systemic change and the change management of public governance arrangements. The study of MLG may benefit from drawing from a range of conceptual tools and models developed in the field of PA. Complementarily, also PA as an interdisciplinary field of scholarship may benefit from the perspective of MLG, which provides it with a platform to expand the

application of concepts like those of collaborative governance; bureaucratic influence on policy-making; public accountability in multi-actor, multi-level settings; or systemic-level change management. In this sense, the generation of knowledge about the administrative dimension of MLG is an addition to both MLG studies and to the field of PA.

Keywords: Multi-level Governance; Public Administration; Public Governance; Multi-level Administration; European Union; Regionalism; Intergovernmental Relations

Introduction

This work aims at outlining the links between the literature on Multi-Level Governance (MLG) and the field of the administrative sciences and public administration (PA) in order to further our knowledge about ‘the administrative dimension of MLG’.

Following Piattoni (2010a and 2015) we adopt a wide notion of MLG as ‘the simultaneous activation of governmental and non-governmental actors at various jurisdictional levels’.

Theoretical perspectives derived from MLG theory have been applied to a wide set of issues spanning from political mobilization (politics), to policy-making (policy), to state restructuring (polity). It is along each of these sets of issues that it is possible to delineate the contribution that the field of PA can provide to the development of MLG:

- To MLG as political mobilization, the PA literature brings insights about participatory approaches and collaborative governance;
- To MLG as policy in multi-level settings, the PA literature brings insights about the functioning of multi-level administration and the role of a multi-level bureaucracy in policy-making processes occurring in compound political systems; the PA literature also

contributes insights on public accountability in systems where decision responsibility is blurred, and issues of legitimacy arise;

- To MLG as polity restructuring, the PA literature offers insights on the administrative dimension of polity restructuring processes, as well as on the dynamics of systemic change and public governance change.

This contribution outlines a framework of analysis of the administrative dimension of MLG along these three dimensions. They are considered in turn, after discussing some introductory and defining issues in the next section.

Definitions and Domain of Application

The term MLG has been introduced in the scientific and policy debate in 1993 by Gary Marks (Marks, 1993): in that work, Marks notices the distinctive configuration of the European Union (EU) cohesion policy as involving ‘more than two levels of governance’ and encompassing both governmental and non-governmental actors all along the policy-making cycle. Literature elaborating on, or just referencing, the notion of MLG has then burgeoned (as a simple check on google scholar may show). Mostly, the notion of MLG has been applied to better describe and understand governance in the European Union, but it has not been restrained to this precinct.

Later on, the notion of MLG has been applied also outside its original domain. Gary Marks and Liesbet Hooghe have set up a research agenda about investigating types of MLG across jurisdictions all over the world (Hooghe and Marks, 2001a; Hooghe et al., 2010). They also introduced the distinction between a type of MLG which ‘conceives of dispersion of authority to multi-task, territorially mutually exclusive jurisdictions in a relatively stable

system with limited jurisdictional levels and a limited number of units' and a 'second type of governance [which] pictures specialized, territorially overlapping jurisdictions in a relatively flexible, non-tiered system with a large number of jurisdictions' (Hooghe and Marks, 2001 and 2003). They call these two types simply 'Type I MLG' and Type II MLG'. One purpose of the notion of type I and type II MLG as articulated by Marks and Hooghe is also that of enabling the application of the concept to institutional settings beyond the highly distinctive, if not outright unique, EU setting. Although both types of MLG can be found both within the EU and outside of it, particularly type II MLG seems to be a notion especially amenable to application across different institutional settings all over the world.

A powerful and structured argument has also been put forward to work out the conditions under which certain forms of global governance may be interpreted as manifestations of MLG (Zürn, 2010). At another level of analysis, Sbragia makes an attempt to tease out similarities and dissimilarities between MLG frames and the study of governance in multi-level settings in the strand of comparative regionalism (Sbragia, 2010a)

More recently, a dedicated special issue queries the significance of applying MLG to a political-administrative system so different from the EU like that of China (Ongaro et al., 2019). It is argued in the introduction paper of this special issue that frames derived from the MLG literature can contribute to explain certain dynamics of governance across institutional levels as well as across the public-private divide; it is also argued that the global level may functionally perform to some extent as the 'supranational' level in framing governance dynamics according to MLG in China, hence showing some ductility and adaptability of the notion, to the risk – or perhaps purposefully pursuing – some concept stretching (Ongaro et al., 2019).

Thus, in assessing the domain of application of the concept in terms of jurisdictions, it may be argued that on one hand the EU remains the main institutional setting where the notion gets used, both in scholarly works and in practitioners' parlance. Notably, MLG has been institutionally endorsed by the Committee of the Regions – an official organ of the EU – as one of the founding 'principles' of its political and administrative activity, followed suit by EU agencies like the European Training Foundation: an advisory agency supporting countries recipients of EU aid in developing vocational and educational training in their educational system. On the other hand, however, the notion has been and is being applied also beyond the institutional setting of the EU and seems to possess, at least in some sense, a 'global' reach.

The notion of MLG appears to enjoy wide currency in policy sectors in which the very nature of the issues at stake requires involvement of actors across the public-private divide, and along the spectrum from the global to the local (or vice versa). These include fields like environmental policy, where global architectures like international treaty-based arrangements for containing greenhouse emissions are flanked by local-level initiatives promoted by mayors of 'smart' cities striving to minimise waste production and other forms of pollutant consumption and encourage 'circular economies' that aim at recycling and re-using most of what they used to dispose of.

At another level, it may be argued that an implicit, 'ideological' element of MLG is its conception of political identities as inherently multiple – indeed: multi-level. So a citizen (or a resident, or at a minimum a 'stakeholder' in a certain governance arrangement who displays at least a minimal sense of belonging to the given governance system) is understood to belong contemporaneously and in a non-conflictual, rather quite at the opposite in a shared

way, to her/his local and regional community, to her/his country (the national level of governance), and to a supranational arrangement of governance – which in the case of the EU takes the form of a proper supranational institutional layer (however intergovernmentalist a number of its arrangements may be), protecting the rights and duties associated with an inchoate, yet far from insignificant (*Brexit docet*) European citizenship. In the political climate of the second decade of the 21st century, this notion of multiple identities may be seen as antithetical to the notion of one identity taking absolute precedence over any other, indeed being defined only by its antagonism with other identities, that characterises sovereigntist political parties, movements and leaders. In short, MLG may be seen as inherently at odds with nativism and identity politics at large.

From a theoretical standpoint, since the outset it has been queried the extent to which the notion is eminently – if not exclusively – a descriptive concept (MLG as descriptor), or whether it also carries explanatory power. This is probably the main criticism moved to MLG: that it lacks explanatory power. As aptly summed up in a ‘critical friend’ fashion by Zito: ‘One of the most devastating and pithy [...] critiques that I have heard uttered was about the Correlates of War research programme [the critique was:] ‘Twenty years of grant money and data collection, and still no dependent variable’. The study of multi-level governance has had a very different trajectory in terms of its epistemology, ontology and grant support, but the same fundamental issue arises’ (Zito, 2015, p.16). As a way to respond to this critique, a collective effort has been made by a number of authors through an edited volume (from which this excerpt of Zito is drawn) aimed at addressing ‘the missing linkages’ between MLG studies and theoretical frameworks proper – theoretical frameworks like principal-agent theory, or organisation theory, or learning theories, or management studies, and the like (see the volume edited by Ongaro, 2015). The main argument in this and other books

which delved into the issue of the theoretical status of MLG can be summed up as follows (in a schematic way): MLG can be seen more like a scaffolding: it enables the beholder to reach out to and include in the analysis all the various categories of actors influential on the phenomenon to be studied, that is, influential on the 'dependent variable' (be it: a form of political mobilisation, or a policy-making process, or an instance of polity restructuring). These categories of actors may be located across levels of governance, and they can be either governmental or non-governmental entities. However, in itself, this mapping of the wider range of actors and processes pertains to the logical level of the description of a phenomenon, not of explaining causation. The causal influences wielded by actors individually and notably by the interaction of actors simultaneously acting at different levels of governance and across the public-private divide must be explained by applying theories proper, often more than one in combination. This way, MLG may be(come) theoretically informed, alongside retaining its widely recognised descriptive power.

It is based on this approach that Zito (2015) has suggested a set of propositions about MLG, which aim at linking some descriptive traits of an MLG system with theoretical sources that may contribute to explain the dynamics of the MLG system when these features are displayed. These propositions include: that the core explanatory framework when novel solutions are contrived for addressing new problems in MLG settings lies in learning theories; that the more contained (smaller) the governance network is at each horizontal level and the less stretched vertically it is, the more likely that Principal-Agent theory can be employed; that the broader the governance network is horizontally and the further stretched vertically, the more some public institution with some grounds in constitutional legitimacy as well as organisational resources will be required to ensure learning and coordination around a set of objectives/outcomes (economic and organisational theory about the level and nature of

resources enabling certain transactions to occur, and organisational interdependence) (see Zito, 2015, pp.33-35).

In this perspective, the analysis of causal influences is provided by a varied range of theories from different strands of the social sciences, and the analysis of the observed phenomenon that is to be explained (be it a form of political mobilisation, or a policy-making process, or an instance of polity restructuring) is guided by the consideration of the simultaneous relevance of both governmental and non-governmental actors at different levels of governance. If in the course of the analysis it arises that a less encompassing frame is sufficient for explaining the phenomenon (e.g.: that only two levels of governance are influential, or that only governmental actors are influential), then it is not necessary any more to conceptualise the phenomenon through the lens of MLG; if on the contrary the governmental and non-governmental actors simultaneously acting at various jurisdictional levels appear to be influential, then the phenomenon can be read through the lens of MLG, and a combination of theories will then be employed to explain the outcomes (a certain policy outcome, or the restructure of a certain polity, and the like).

An interesting approach to querying the descriptive and explanatory power of MLG has been through testing it also in comparison to other analytical frameworks, as they manifest themselves embedded into the study of different administrative systems. To this purpose, two collective studies aim at disentangling similarities and dissimilarities in the analytical apparatuses of 'European' MLG, on one hand, and the strand of research on intergovernmental relations which has developed over the decades in the US, on the other hand, through a Europe-US transatlantic comparison (Ongaro et al, 2010; Ongaro et al., 2011). Within this frame, Sbragia (2010a) explicitly focuses similarities and dissimilarities in

power division and the mechanisms of representation in, respectively, the EU and the US to discuss both theoretically and empirically how certain differences between the two frameworks play out.

Within the burgeoning literature on MLG in the EU polity and the more contained yet significant literature about MLG in institutional settings beyond the EU, there appears to be a smaller number of studies that have directly focused the administrative dimensions of MLG, a phenomenon that sometimes goes under the label of ‘multi-level administration’ or similar denominations. However, it may be argued that the bridges between the field of PA and the field of MLG go also beyond the – important – studies on multi-level administration: there are multiple ways in which PA as a field of research and practice may enhance knowledge and understanding of MLG, including but not confined to illustrating the influence of public bureaucracies on policy-making in multi-level settings (which is usually the main analytical focus of studies about multi-level administration). It is argued that by adopting the notion of MLG as having the nature both of political mobilisation *and* of policy-making *and* of polity restructuring, as suggested by Piattoni, 2015 (building on Piattoni, 2009 and 2010), a broader analytical framework may be generated that can enable taking a broader view on the interconnections between PA and MLG. It is this framework that is developed in the rest of the contribution.

The Administrative Dimension of MLG as Political Mobilisation

MLG as political mobilisation refers to lower levels of governance – regional, local governments - gaining influence, and to societal, intermediary bodies acquiring involvement and a stronger say in public governance.

The public governance turn in PA (Pierre and Peters, 2000) and particularly the strand of studies that goes under the labels of collaborative governance (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Huxham et al., 2000) and interactive governance (Torfing et al., 2012) have catalysed interest and brought about a focus on a form of political mobilization within the realm of PA studies. Emphasis has been placed on the role of public authorities in enabling these processes by creating platforms for political mobilisation (Ansell and Gash, 2017), on the interactions between state and society as a crucial dimension of public governance, on governing through mixtures of state action and the action of other entities (Torfing et al., 2012), and even more radically for rethinking PA as inherently an exercise in interacting with society and steering society, as inherently governance (for a very effective review of the meanings of the notion of public governance, see Peters and Pierre, 2000). This approach gets sometimes suffused with normative – at times even salvific – tones, e.g. through the notion of the ‘new’ public governance (Osborne, 2006; for a systematic review of the themes of the new public governance see the edited volume: Osborne, 2010). In the rest of this contribution we use the term ‘collaborative governance’ as umbrella notion for a variety of strands of inquiry in public administration about the significance of engaging non-governmental actors in public governance and exploiting the advantages of collaboration, thus ultimately – so the argument goes - enabling outcomes that otherwise would not occur.

The literatures on collaborative governance and the MLG literature have a high potential for cross-fertilisation, even if these two strands have so far mostly grown along parallel paths. Indeed, the ‘governance as mobilising society’ strand of studies in PA may be expanded to shed light on MLG as political mobilisation, and in a reciprocal fashion MLG can provide a framework to advance notions of collaborative governance in multi-level settings. The key linkage here is the ‘multi-level’ dimension: MLG is about ‘the simultaneous activation of

governmental and non-governmental actors at various jurisdictional levels' (Piattoni, 2010b, p159), and notably when these levels are at least three (Piattoni, 2015, p. 326). Most studies of collaborative governance tend to rather have a more micro focus, on relatively specific and localised processes of governance where forms of collaboration across the state-society border occurs, rarely involving a multiplicity of levels of governance (from the infra- to the supra-national). However, insofar as forms of collaborative governance also have a multi-level dimension, the bridge between collaborative governance and MLG can be established. MLG studies can then shed light on the dynamics of cross-levels interactions, while studies on collaborative governance may help expand the horizontal (state-society) dimension in MLG.

In this research agenda, the notions of platforming (Ansell and Gash, 2017), collaborative advantage (Huxham and Vangen, 2005), and related concepts may have wide applicability to better our understanding of political mobilisation also across levels of governance. Hence, this body of thought developed in the PA literature may provide an outline of the administrative dimension of MLG as political mobilisation.

The Administrative Dimension of MLG as Policy-making in Multi-level Settings

MLG as policy-making refers to MLG as a framework for understanding – or at least describing - how policies unfold in systems where three or more levels of governance are influential (these are generally intended as the regional-local, the national, and the supranational), and where the borders between government entities and socio-economic actors are blurred and non-governmental actors are influential in policy-making. The typical example is the case of the EU structural funds/cohesion policy, where historically policies have been formulated and implemented through participatory processes involving non-

governmental actors and according to a framework whereby the broad outline of the policy is formulated at the supranational level (with participation from the national and, in varied degrees, the infra-national levels of governance), the more detailed programmes are formulated at the national level (with participation by both the supranational European Commission and the regional and local governments, in varied ways), and the detailed, ‘implementable’ (in the EU terminology) plans get formulated at the regional-local level.

The administrative dimension of MLG as policy-making in multi-level settings represents probably the main crossroads between MLG studies on one hand and PA studies on the other (especially if we intend PA studies to encompass more broadly the interconnection between public policy and public administration). The role of the civil service and public bureaucracies across all levels of governance in the policy-making process takes centre stage in this field of study; in this regard, PA studies, notably the strands studying how bureaucrats affect policy-making (for exemplars, Peters, 2010; Page, 2012; Page and Jenkins, 2005), can provide a central contribution to understand how a certain MLG system works. It is at this intersection that reference is made to notions such as that of ‘multi-level administration’: the EU and its member states, notably in the implementation of EU policies, especially under governance arrangements like the structural funds policy, form a multi-level administration in that three or more levels of governance – the supranational, the national and the regional-local, the last one varying widely in configuration across the EU – are required to administer such policies. Given that in at least some of these policies a variety of non-governmental actors are required to partake to the policy process, such multi-level administration is engaged in governance processes. In this frame, PA studies about bureaucratic influence on policy-making may contribute to the understanding of policy-making dynamics.

The administrative dimension of the subnational to supranational links (that is, the attempt by both the supranational EU institutions to establish direct connections with regional and local governments, and the other way around), and the ways in which these links are part and parcel of attempts to influence European public policies, can be seen in the case of the regional representations to the EU (Kassim et al., 2003): the offices set up in Brussels by regional and local governments for representing the interests of the territories at the EU level, in a direct and dis-intermediated way (in the sense that national administrations are not seen any more as collectors and integrators of these interests, and rather get at least partly bypassed by these direct representations in Brussels). Empirical research has shown that these offices are set up for a plurality of reasons, in a variety of organisational configurations and formats (for example in some cases joint offices are set up by more regions, also from distinct countries), and enjoy varied fortunes, not least because of the institutional power basis that regional or local governments enjoy under the national constitutions, and display varied efficacy (Ongaro and Valotti, 2002); and yet they embody an administrative dimension to MLG in the EU, and its multiple, dynamic configurations (Jeffery, 1996). MLG arrangements are seen by both subnational and supranational actors in the policy arenas (also) as means to bypass national institutions and reach out to (respectively) EU institutions and regional-local institutions directly, to ultimately affect policy-making.

Another way of conceptualising the EU multi-level administration is by conceiving of it through the lens of the European administrative space, whose main properties are outlined by Trondal and Peters (2015), who develop a sophisticated interpretation of the profiles of the European Administrative Space, and how it has been studied over successive waves of scholarship works. The European administrative space is characterised by three main features: the institutionalisation of some level of independent administrative capacity at the

European (i.e. supranational) level; some degree of (however patchy) internal integration of administrative systems across levels (notably between the European Commission and Member States administrations); and a degree of co-optation of administrative sub-centres by the European administrative centre, that is, the European Commission (this final feature refers to aspects like the ways in which semi-autonomous public agencies at the national level become more and more networked into Commission-driven processes of implementation of EU legislation). These interplays have transformative effects on the very multi-level administration of the EU (Bach and Ruffing, 2018; Egeberg et al., 2015). To the extent the EU can be depicted as a system of interconnected or nested MLG arrangements, or to the extent the EU can be said to be an MLG system as a whole, then the European administrative space may be seen as one way of interpreting the administrative dimension of the EU as MLG: notably, the property of the European administrative space having an independent ‘centre’ at the supranational level of governance fits the notion of MLG being characterised by at least three levels of governance, each endowed with sufficient degree of autonomy not to be possible for it to be subsumed into any of the other levels of governance; and administrative integration and co-optation fit with the notion of MLG as simultaneous interactions of actors at multiple levels of governance. The two notions – ‘European administrative space’ and ‘administrative dimension of MLG’ – thus to some extent overlap in the special case of the EU.

Empirically, a well-consolidated stream of studies has probed into the dynamics whereby disaggregated bodies (public agencies) at EU, national and subnational levels of governance interact not just with their respective ‘parent administration’ at the same level of governance but enter into multiple relations across levels and across the ‘parent administration – executive agency’ divide (Egeberg and Trondal, 2009; Egeberg et al., 2015). As both

agencies and governmental administrations at all levels of governance are hubs or parts of complex policy networks involving also non-governmental actors (chiefly, the European Commission is a major hub of European policy networks), these situations configure varied MLG arrangements, widely investigated empirically.

Other strands of eminently empirical inquiry focus the local and regional level, within multi-level governance arrangements: we may consider for example studies delving into the role of transnational networks of cities and the role they have in affecting environmental policies, notably regarding initiatives to tackle climate change (Kern and Bulkeley, 2009); or the issues of legitimacy and democracy raised by EU influence, via European directives, into the water management policy (Lundquist, 2011). In these studies, the framework is that of MLG, in the sense that more than two levels of governance are influential on the investigated processes, but the analytical focus is on the regional and local dimension of it.

What these various streams of empirical inquiries show is the richness of studies investigating the variety of Multi-Level Governance arrangements. These studies show interest in a range of profiles, including notably the dynamics of Multi-Level Governance arrangements: both how actors interact within MLG arrangements to influence public policy, and how their interactions may shape and reshape the very MLG arrangements. In sum, MLG is a vibrant field of study oscillating between the two poles of, on one hand, attempts to systematise and theorise the field, and on the other hand the mushrooming multiple empirical studies that ‘pull’ it in different directions and, often, stretch the concept to its limits, or at times outright beyond. A major contribution to both poles of the MLG field of study may derive from the systematic applications of notions drawn from the field of the administrative studies, which is the rationale of this contribution.

There is another, and important, analytical level at which a substantive strand of research in PA (more precisely: spanning PA, political science and public policy literatures)—is being carried out and which may contribute substantively to the field of MLG: public accountability (Bovens et al., 2016, for a systematic review). This strand may be brought to bear a significant function for the understanding of the administrative dimension of MLG. Research agendas in PA interested in ‘how to’ put into effect public accountability under conditions of interdependent responsibility (that is, under the very frequent conditions in which more levels of governance wield influence over a certain policy, and in which non-state actors also have a say in policy processes) may contribute to addressing what is probably a key issue in MLG: the (in)capacity of MLG arrangements to be held to account for both the outcomes of public policies and the procedures whereby decisions are brought about, given their inherently ‘distributed’ public governance. The strand of inquiry on public accountability may therefore contribute to explore the accountability of MLG systems: an important contribution to this regard is represented by the work by Bovens et al. (Bovens et al., 2010), addressing the topic of the accountability of the EU.

PA studies on public accountability may contribute to MLG both descriptively and normatively. Descriptively, by outlining the profiles of accountability relations: in fact, MLG systems are purported to inherently display blurred accountability lines, hence represent in a sense a critical case for a conception of public accountability based on linear relations between the subject held accountable and the forum to which the subject has to account. Normatively, by providing means to address the issue of the legitimacy of MLG arrangements as a form of governance (see Ongaro, 2017a, chapter 5, for a discussion of the

philosophical underpinnings of the legitimacy of a public governance system; and Ongaro, 2017b, for an application to a range of policy problems).

The Administrative Dimension of MLG as Polity-restructuring

MLG as polity restructuring refers to transformative effects of the operating of MLG arrangements on a given polity. Where multiple levels of governance get mobilised (MLG as political mobilisation) and policy-making occurs across such multiple levels of governance (MLG as policy-making), the very institutional setting may over time get to be reshaped. For example, the mobilisation of regional-local actors and the empowerment of regional governments in the EU regional policy has over time led to the regional tier of governance to be rediscovered, or outright brought into existence, in a number of EU countries, to then consolidate, catalyse new political identities, and demand at least some extent of political allegiance – and ultimately reach out beyond the national level of governance, to leverage on the EU level of governance to gain further influence also in domestic politics. (It goes without saying these attempts have often been stemmed by central governments, with the result of triggering interesting polity reshaping actions and counter-actions). It is in this sense that MLG may also be seen as polity restructuring.

There is a parallel between processes of polity restructuring and the restructure of PA, which is ubiquitous in any form of public governance. So PA studies can flesh out the administrative implications of polity restructuring processes, as in the textbook case of the EU shaping the domestic polity of member countries through strengthening or outright re-introducing (notably in central eastern European countries) the regional and local levels of governance: the ‘Europe of the regions’ movement pushed forward by EU institutions and notably the European Commission especially during the 1980s and 1990s can be interpreted

also as a case of polity restructuring. The implication of this has been a new layer of administrative apparatuses (be they to the service of elected officials in devolved administrations or appointed in deconcentrated administrations). The field of PA thus contributes to a better understanding of the administrative dimension inherent in the multi-level polity – by way of examples, e.g. by studying the visions of governance of regional/local officials active in MLG arrangements, or by theorising the significance of the administrative dimension in multi-level polities (Trondal and Bauer, 2017).

Moreover, polity restructuring demands change management – at least if and to the extent the process becomes deliberately led by political and public leaders and does not occur only in a more spontaneous way through self-sustaining dynamics. In this regard, strands of PA literatures concerned with how to manage change processes (streams of studies often located within the field of public management, and often drawing from the generic management literature on change management), especially those streams focusing systemic level change, may furnish a significant contribution to the literature on MLG as polity restructuring.

Multi-Level Governance and Public Administration: Framing the Administrative Dimension of MLG

PA and MLG are two different creatures. PA is an interdisciplinary field of scholarship, as well as a profession and a practice (Frederickson, 1980; Ongaro, 2017a; Ongaro and van Thiel, 2018; Perry and Christensen, 2015; Pollitt, 2016; Raadschelders, 2011; Rainey, 2003; Riccucci, 2010; Waldo, 1948/84). MLG is an interpretation of public governance under certain conditions (presence of more than two levels of governance, involvement of non-governmental actors in public policy-making), and an approach to understanding political mobilisation, policy-making and polity restructuring under those conditions (an approach

more or less descriptively or interpretatively or normatively charged depending on the author and school of thought).

Partnering PA and MLG may thus appear a bit of an asymmetrical coupling of objects of different nature. However, this slightly weird partnering may bear fruits to both fields. To MLG, the knowledge generated in the field of PA may provide theoretical and empirical flesh to its bones and add substance to the study of MLG arrangements: how they work, what they mean as a form of political mobilisation, policy-making and polity restructuring. To PA, the perspective of MLG may provide a platform to expand the application of concepts like those of: collaborative governance (and associated notions: collaborative advantage, platforming, and the like); bureaucratic influence on policy-making; public accountability in multi-actor, multi-level settings; systemic-level change management; and others. In this sense, the generation of knowledge about the administrative dimension of MLG is an addition to both MLG studies and to the field of PA.

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