Chapter 13

Security Networks: Applying the Normative Practice Approach to Nodal Governance Theory

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ABSTRACT

Studies into organizational networks and governance tend to analyze professional behavior through the lens of rational (self)interest, resources, conflict, and power relations. However legitimate, this viewpoint overlooks the normative dimensions of networks. Therefore, in studying nodal security governance, the authors introduce the concept of “social practice,” which highlights the intrinsic normativity of what networked actors do. Social practices, they argue, deepen the theory of nodal governance by focusing more precise attention on the mentalities and value-laden characteristics of actors in highly complex settings. Drawing on this insight, the chapter presents a theoretical framework for analyzing social practices in nodal security governance, after which an empirical example concretizes our rather abstract line of reasoning.

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THE NEGLECT OF NORMATIVITY IN NETWORK GOVERNANCE

In criminology and political science, it is common knowledge that the police are increasingly surrounded by a host of organizations on local, regional, national, and international levels. We think of (multinational) private security firms and municipal law enforcement agencies, for example, but schools, businesses, housing associations, health care services, civil society initiatives, NGOs, and active (groups of) citizens are also important. These “nodal” actors, defined as “sites of governance” (Burris et al., 2004), ideally make up security networks: “a set of institutional, organizational, communal, or individual agents or nodes that are interconnected in order to authorize and/or provide security to the benefit of internal or external stakeholders” (Dupont, 2004, p. 78). Nodal actors themselves may consist of smaller nodes, with single people as the ultimate units of analysis: “firms, for instance, can be seen as a product of networks within the firm” (Burris et al., 2005, pp. 38-39). Different providers of security on multiple levels try to relate to another if they feel they have a common goal to reach.

There is widespread acceptance among scholars that the complexity arising from security networks can legitimately be captured by the concept of “governance” as a means of managing “the course of events in a social system” (Burris et al., 2005, p. 30). Political science and public administration literature lead the way in theorizing the contours of governance – that is, the ways nodal actors and their institutional structures interchange within the context of tight interconnectedness, mutual power relations, and financial, political, and juridical constraints on what can and cannot be achieved (e.g. Burris et al., 2008; Provan & Kenis, 2008; Klein & Koppenjan, 2012). A major challenge is how exactly nodal actors can achieve good cooperation and collaboration in volatile and agile network settings. Depending on the problem at hand, the police, private security firms, government bodies, and numerous others constantly struggle with who should take which position and be responsible for what.

Wood and Shearing make clear that “nodal” actors are not always “networked” actors. Nodal actors do not necessarily have many links: they may have a few or “may not come together to form ‘networks’ at all” (2007, p. 27). As such, the term “nodal” only refers to a radical dispersal of power relations—of Foucauldian “governmentality” (Rose et al., 2006)—among assorted actors. Where nodes constitute network intersects, the actors involved can be said to display a type of “team play” (van Steden et al., 2016), but networks do not automatically flourish. Also, either public or private actors might take the lead when governing networks in an improvised fashion. For this reason, the nodal school provides a conceptual lens that is neutral about the nature of governance: it “is equally comfortable with the idea that governance can be contested and uncoordinated as it is with the idea that it can be cooperative and coordinated” (Wood & Shearing, 2007, p. 28). Empirical
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