

Abstract

Non-Governmental Actors in New Governance Spaces: Navigating the Tensions

Principal Investigator

Professor Marilyn Taylor, University of the West of England

Co-investigators

Dr. Chris Miller, University of the West of England
Joanna Howard, University of the West of England

Aims and objectives of the research

The move from government to governance across the globe has created new governance spaces in which NGOs have been invited to participate. While these new spaces present new opportunities, they also pose a number of dilemmas, especially in relation to autonomy and legitimacy. This research *Bulgaria, Nicaragua and the UK* will explore the tensions that NGOs experience in these new spaces and the strategies they adopt to address these tensions.

Its objectives are to:

- explore how global trends for NGO involvement in governance are translated into different national contexts;
- develop a theoretical understanding of the opportunities and tensions in these new spaces;
- generate new empirical evidence on the ways in which non-governmental actors in these different contexts perceive the tensions within the new governance spaces and the strategies they use to address them;
- identify the factors that enable some actors and not others to negotiate these tensions effectively and make recommendations on how this learning can be applied.

Key research questions/hypotheses and methods

The research will be conducted in Bulgaria, Nicaragua and the UK in collaboration with partners at the New Bulgarian University in Sofia, Bulgaria and the University of Central America in Managua. Drawing on governmentality and social movement theory, it will explore the factors that enable NGOs to become 'active subjects' within new governance spaces. Following a preliminary conceptual and context mapping exercise across the three countries, the research will use four locality case studies to explore:

- the political opportunities afforded in the new governance spaces;
- the tensions that NGOs experience there in relation to autonomy, agency, voice and legitimacy;
- the factors which shape the way these opportunities and tensions are perceived and negotiated – in terms of history, structure, funding and the informal relationships and networks in which the new governance spaces are embedded.

The case studies will use mainly qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, inquiry groups and a web-based knowledge exchange.

Relation to the programme

This project contributes to the “non-governmental organisations and public action” strand of the programme, building theory to explain NGO responses to partnership policies and generating empirical data both on the impact of these policies and on the strategies NGOs use to negotiate the new governance spaces created by these policies.

Relevance of this research to user groups

The research process will promote learning between NGOs within and across national boundaries and develop both conceptual and practical tools for use in assessing and navigating these spaces. It will also promote understanding of the challenges facing NGOs in these spaces amongst external ‘partners’ in the state and elsewhere. It will be informed by an international Advisory Group of academics and NGOs which will build links with relevant policy, practitioner and academic audiences and facilitate dissemination.

Contact details

Professor Marilyn Taylor
Cities Research Centre
Faculty of the Built Environment
University of the West of England, Bristol
Coldharbour Lane
Bristol BS16 1QY

email: marilyn.taylor@uwe.ac.uk
tel: 0117-328-3998

Dr. Chris Miller
email: Christopher.miller@uwe.ac.uk

Joanna Howard
email: Joanna.howard@uwe.ac.uk

September 2005

ESRC's Non-Governmental Public Action Programme
c/o Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE.
tel: +44(0)20 7955 7205; fax: +44(0)20 7955 6039; email: ccs@lse.ac.uk; <http://www.lse.ac.uk/ccs>