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'Breakthrough' political science: Multi-level governance – Reconceptualising Europe's modernised polity

Charlie Jeffery[1] and John Peterson[2]

Abstract

Multi-level governance has provoked debates over the last quarter century as the thinking of Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks has progressed. That thinking has been both innovative and eclectic, forming a number of intellectual 'story arcs' that part ways, develop and mature, then recombine with renewed force. We take Hooghe and Marks' *Multi-Level Governance and European Integration* as a pivotal moment in the development of that thinking. We then trace the 'story arcs' of multi-level governance by pinpointing three questions. Does multi-level governance 'travel' as a viable analytical framework much beyond cohesion policy? Does multi-level governance give analytical purchase beyond the European Union? And is multi-level governance merely a descriptive framework or does it embed or give rise to theory? We conclude by shortly summarising the contributions to this *Breakthrough Political Science Symposium*.

Keywords

European Union, international organisations, multi-level governance, postfunctionalism, regional governance

Introduction

Sometimes in the study of politics – if rarely – a new framework is unveiled with an apparently modest analytical purpose that catches imaginations because it offers a truly novel way to make sense of political change. Multi-level governance (MLG) no doubt qualifies as one such case. Its debut coincided with a moment of transformational change in the institutions, rules and purpose of what was then the European Community following two rounds of change to its founding Treaties. An important element of the transformation was a large increase in cohesion or 'structural funding', in Euro-speak: public investment in poorer countries and regions vulnerable to competitive market

[1]University Executive Board, University of York, York, UK
[2]Institute of Governance, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK

Corresponding author:
Charlie Jeffery, University of York, York YO10 5DD, UK.
Email: charlie.jeffery@york.ac.uk

pressures unleashed by the 'freeing' of a single European market. The uptick in such funding was impressive, even if it amounted to a modest increase – from 28% to around one-third – of the Community's tiny budget (less than 1% of European public spending). Still, in seeking to explain the enhanced role of cohesion funding in European integration, Gary Marks (1993: 391) offered far more than standard policy analysis and embraced the broader question of '[w]hat kind of political order is emerging in Europe, and what are the consequences of institutional innovation for the existing state system'?

His answer was nothing less than a truly new form of governance: 'a system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers – supranational, national, regional, and local – as the result of a broad process of institutional creation and decisional reallocation' (Marks, 1993: 391). Within a few years, Marks et al. (1996) was joined by Liesbet Hooghe (1995, 1996) – whose own work had focused on cohesion policy and sub-national mobilisation – and Kermit Blank to take things even further. In a landmark article, they contended that not only sub-national authorities (SNAs) but also non-governmental actors were now active, influential players in an MLG system of 'collective decision-making' that had emerged in what was now the European Union (EU). The system empowered supranational institutions as well as sub-national and non-governmental actors to the point where the sovereignty of EU member states had been diluted. Put simply, they had lost control of 'the mediation of domestic interest representation in international relations' (Marks et al., 1996: 341). The EU had become a new and unprecedented experiment in modern governance. MLG offered an original framework for understanding it.

Here, we reflect on debates that MLG has provoked over the last quarter century and more as the thinking of Marks and Hooghe has progressed. That thinking has been both innovative and eclectic, forming a number of intellectual 'story arcs' that part ways, develop and mature, then recombine with renewed force. We take Hooghe and Marks' (2001) *Multi-Level Governance and European Integration* as a pivotal moment in the development of that thinking: a consolidated expression of ideas about governance in the EU that Marks had set in train in 1993. But it also became a platform that launched a research programme of extraordinary ambition that extended well beyond MLG in the EU and then 'returned' to the EU in the form of a 'post-functionalist' lens trained on the crises that have beset the EU in the last decade.

One contributor to the debates on MLG unleashed by Hooghe and Marks shows a gift for understatement in suggesting that MLG had become 'a rather popular term' in research on European integration (Piattoni, 2009: 163). More pertinent was the comment that '[n]o other term in the study of European policy-making, perhaps in modern European political studies, ha[d] gained common currency like multi-level governance' (Stephenson, 2013: 817).

We seek to make our own contribution to work on MLG by pinpointing questions that remain (mostly) unanswered in the research literature. Does MLG really 'travel' as a viable analytical framework much beyond cohesion policy given that the EU is so differentiated by policy sector? Does MLG give analytical purchase exclusively on the EU, or can it help us make sense of other systems? And since MLG has been developed mostly through 'descriptive inference' (Hooghe and Marks, 2001: xiii), is it merely a descriptive framework or does it embed or give rise to theory?

Section 'Paradigm shift: MLG and Europe at the millennium' begins by summarising the intellectual trajectory of MLG's conceptualisation. Section 'Unravelling the central state. But how?' follows that trajectory through to Hooghe and Marks' (2003: 241)

rendering of ideal types of MLG which opened up a research programme beyond the EU. In section 'Crisis, disequilibrium and theorising European integration', we explore the implications of this expanded understanding of MLG for the EU's period of acute crisis in the 2010s. Section 'How far has the leading edge of MLG trekked?' considers MLG's strengths and weaknesses with our aforementioned questions providing an analytical framework. In the final section 'This symposium' we briefly introduce the seven contributions to this 'Breakthrough' political science symposium on multi-level governance.

Paradigm shift: MLG and Europe at the millennium

It is difficult to know whether Marks (1993) knew what he had unleashed when he first hit upon the idea of MLG. It appeared in a contribution to an edited collection of essays by EU specialists that probably was read by few beyond that sub-discipline. Marks' essay closed the book but was included in a section on the 'single market'. To the extent that anyone cared or noticed beyond EU scholars, the main European story of the early 1990s (at least until German unification) was the so-called 1992 project of market liberalisation (see Cockfield, 1994). Few besides Marks seemed to be thinking about whether the emerging EU was mutating into a new, decidedly modern form of governance.

By the turn of the century, however, the EU was seen as a prime case in a more general 'governance turn' (see Stephenson, 2013: 820 and Eising and Kohler-Koch, 1999) concerned with how the landscape of governing was changing. International Relations scholars 'turned' early as they began to try to make sense of what became known as globalisation, which entailed great complexity and unparalleled international cooperation. The result was 'governance without government', in the sense that there was no global government, but still quite a lot of governing to do (Rosenau, 1995; Rosenau and Czempiel, 2010). But public policy and administration scholars also 'turned', partly in response to widespread privatisation, but more generally to shed light on how 'the structure of public work ha[d] become less and less hierarchical' (Kettl, 2002: ix). Modern governance marked a 'shift [in] the balance towards a sharing of tasks and responsibilities; towards doing things together instead of doing them alone (either by the 'state' or by the 'market')' (Kooiman, 1993: 1).

At this point, Hooghe and Marks (2001) were ready to divulge 'the most systematic attempt' to conceptualise MLG (Tortola, 2017: 237). They pointed to how authoritative decision-making had been disbursed across multiple political levels in Europe: from 'above' the nation-state to the EU and 'below' to SNAs. The result, they claimed, was that 'the second half of the twentieth century [would in future] be regarded as a watershed in European political development' (Hooghe and Marks, 2001: xi). The main story was no longer about the centralisation of authority in nation-states as had been the case since the 17th century. European integration had been given powerful impetus by successive Treaty revisions, particularly the Maastricht Treaty (in force from 1993) that created a new European Union and subsequent tweaks (such as the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty), which further expanded its policy competences.

Maybe less noticed was a simultaneous 'major shift towards regionalism' with European states, as Hooghe and Marks (2001: xii) noted, because 'where things have changed, the result has been greater dispersion of authority' (Hooghe and Marks, 2001: xii). Since 1950, most of the EU's (then 15) member states had either embraced greater regionalisation or been constituted as federations. Further devolution followed in inter alia the United Kingdom, Belgium, Spain and Italy (Jeffery and Schakel, 2013: 301).

Why did European states choose to delegate their powers both to the EU and SNAs? Hooghe and Marks (2001: 10–12) offer a principal–agent explanation. Usually leaders of public authorities do not cede their powers if they (and we) conceive power narrowly as their control over the people they govern. But modern governance is impossible if power is treated as a zero-sum game in which 'if one actor gains power, another loses it' (Hooghe and Marks, 2001: 5). By its nature, modern governance seeks to achieve desired policy outcomes by whatever means necessary. European governments became pragmatic because delegation of their powers to the EU and SNAs was what 'enable[d] them to achieve substantive policy goals' (Hooghe and Marks, 2001: 5).

Multiple factors endemic to the EU facilitated the shift to MLG. First, as Hooghe and Marks (2001: 11) have repeatedly stressed, the EU's Treaties are ambiguous, allowing states with differing interests to accept and claim them as victories of their statecraft. By the 1990s, critical masses of EU states – multiple of which had recently decentralised (or were in the process of doing so) – were ready to embrace new policy cooperation as long as a wide cohort of stakeholders were part of it. New policy areas subject to EU competence thus were ripe for construction of regimes that directly empowered those with the ability to help make new EU policies succeed (or fail) such as SNAs, economic actors and civil society more generally.

Second, a key player in this construction was the European Commission, the EU's executive civil service. It was powerful both in its Treaty prerogatives – especially its monopoly on legislative initiatives – but its 'power [was also] . . . predominantly soft in that it is exercised by influence rather than sanction. Except for . . . where it has substantial executive autonomy, it can gain little by confrontation' (Hooghe and Marks, 2001: 23). As such, the Commission had strong incentives to consult as wide as possible a collection of stakeholders to legitimate choices it made before tabling legislative proposals.

Third, Treaty revisions in the 1990s drastically expanded the previously 'almost powerless' European Parliament (EP; Hooghe and Marks, 2001: 20). In an expanding array of policy sectors, the EP became a politically and legally equal co-legislator to the Council of Ministers, where EU member states are represented. Here was yet another act of delegation by state principals that changed the equation at the level where legislation became EU law. Just as importantly, the Commission had strong incentives to include members of the EP (MEPs) in deliberations at lower levels where policy options were shaped.

Fourth, crucially, '[m]ulti-level governance [did] not confront the sovereignty of states directly' (Hooghe and Marks, 2001: 27). Instead, MLG envisioned EU member states sharing their powers in ways that made governance more inclusive. EU member states – for a time, at least – embraced MLG as truly modern governance. It became a normative standard by which EU governance was presented as legitimate (see European Commission, 2001; Hooghe and Marks, 2003: 234). Given how the MLG genie let out of the bottle by Hooghe and Marks had become both a sort of gold standard and a pragmatic method for solving policy problems, the next step in the intellectual trajectory was to specify how and for what purposes different types of MLG had emerged.

'Unravelling the central state. But how'?

Both before and after publication of *Multi-Level Governance and European Integration*, one of us reflected on how 'methodological nationalism' had blinded political scientists to the changing landscape of governance (Jeffery and Schakel, 2013; Jeffery and Wincott, 2010). The process of state formation conceptualised perceptively by Stein Rokkan and

others (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967a, 1967b; Rokkan and Flora, 2007) led many scholars to consider the nation-state to be the main, even 'terminal' unit of analysis in the study of politics (Jeffery and Schakel, 2013: 299). As such, MLG drew attention to a new kind of transnational politics. Yet, course corrections can lead to new analytical biases:

> the transnational critique of methodological nationalism . . . had the effect of compounding the neglect of sub-state regions as significant units of analysis by arguing that a Europe, or cosmopolitan, or globalized scale for the analysis of social or political life . . . [was] the most important for social science research. (Jeffery and Schakel, 2013: 299)

At the same time, the analytical breakthrough of MLG was co-opted as the basis for often breathless visions of a 'Europe of the regions' in which regions reached 'beyond the nation-state', amid scarcely veiled hopes they might supplant it. All that breathlessness risked missing 'the real transformation in the relative roles of SNAs and the central state . . . in the inter-state arena (Jeffery, 2000: 2). Regions increasingly challenged their member state's monopoly over EU policy, but more often within established national institutions or processes than by bypassing them.

Hooghe and Marks' next move in refining MLG eliminated blind spots to which both these biases were prone. Melding, interestingly, their prior work on the EU with debates about how American local government was organised, they specified two ideal types of MLG. Resisting labels that might 'add terminological complexity to an already jargon-laden subject' (Hooghe and Marks, 2003: 236), the two types were presented as simply 'Type I' and 'Type II' MLG, with the former 'general-purpose' jurisdictions and the latter performing 'task-specific' duties.

This moment was one when a new story arc opened up, in two ways. First, the EU was no longer the sole subject matter; the subject matter was the manifestation of MLG anywhere. Second, we saw the germs of what would become an enduring theme in Hooghe and Marks' subsequent work: the tension between rationalist prescription of how public authority should be organised efficiently, and the ideological barriers which frustrate that prescription. The scene was set in an earlier contribution that critiqued neoclassical theory as applied to the distribution of public authority. Scale economies which pressed for efficiency reasons to the centralisation of authority across large territories collided with heterogeneity of territorial communities, often articulated in ideologies of national self-determination. Put more bluntly: 'Nationalism has been an immensely powerful force against multi-level governance' (Marks and Hooghe, 2000: 806).

We return to this arc of the story below. Its preliminary articulation in 2003 in Type I and Type II MLG drew on an unusually eclectic body of research on the EU, IR, federalism, local government and public policy. Collectively, these strands of research shared 'a basic postulate: dispersion of governance across multiple jurisdictions is more flexible than concentration of governance in one jurisdiction' (Hooghe and Marks, 2003: 235). Centralised governments were unlikely to govern effectively across all policy areas given 'varying scale efficiencies from policy to policy', with economies of scale far greater in, say, defence than education policy (Hooghe and Marks, 2003: 235).

Hooghe and Marks (2003: 236) cleverly gave dimension to their venture by collecting together a set of primordial questions about how government should be structured. Should it be organised around communities or policy objectives? Ought competences be bundled or kept functionally specific? Should there be few or lots of jurisdictions? Was it better to build them to last or should they be left fluid and changeable?

Type I MLG draws its inspiration from federalism, with power shared between a federal government and one or more sub-national levels composed of geographically bounded units. Boundaries are durable and memberships do not intersect. Type I MLG limits the number of autonomous actors and bundles their competences together to minimise coordination costs. Most are based on 'encompassing communities' – usually territorial, but also ethnic or religious – and they are built to last. Type I institutions are as a result 'sticky' and it is unusual for jurisdictions to be altered.

By contrast, Type II MLG is task-specific and 'flexible rather than durable' (Hooghe and Marks, 2003: 237). It is widespread at the local level with, for example, more than 35,000 special districts in the United States that work on housing, sewerage, fire protection, water supply, highways, hospitals, airports, cemeteries and on and on. Jurisdictions overlap in a marble cake fashion, with smaller ones often not contained within borders of larger ones. To illustrate, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey oversees transport infrastructure within a 25-mile radius of the Statute of Liberty. Type II governance is pliable, policy-oriented and membership in it is voluntary. While Type I governance can extend across national boundaries – the EU is an obvious example – examples of Type II governance are found more frequently in international organisations (IOs) that range in scale from bilateral to global. They, like other Type II authorities, have overlapping functions and 'respond flexibly to changing citizen preferences and functional requirements' (Hooghe and Marks, 2003: 238). Accordingly, Hooghe and Marks note a marked fluidity in IOs, with news ones constantly created and old ones becoming irrelevant or simply disappearing.

Hooghe and Marks' 2003 article stands out as a landmark contribution whose succinctness and clarity in specifying ideal types of MLG and the purposes they serve belies their statement that in doing so they 'make no claim to originality'. That claim stands uneasily against the one made a few sentences later that 'the types of governance we conceive . . . are radical departures from the centralized state' (Hooghe and Marks, 2003: 241).

There is a rather deep challenge here to the ways in which political scientists have conventionally – and, by implication, insufficiently – thought about the centralised state. There is a challenge, too, in one other concluding thought in the 2003 article: '[o]ur belief is that a logically consistent schema setting out the basic institutional options can help situate one's work in a larger intellectual enterprise' (Hooghe and Marks, 2003: 241). Hooghe and Marks themselves took up this challenge in a vast measurement exercise over the next 15 years that first produced a Regional Authority Index (RAI) applied to 42 OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries over the period 1950–2006 (Hooghe et al., 2008). It was then extended to Southeast Asia (Rosenfield et al., 2014) and Latin America (Niedzwiecki et al., 2018), with an equivalent index developed for IOs (Hooghe and Marks, 2015; Lenz et al., 2014). This exercise is now being consolidated into a mammoth five-volume series setting out a 'postfunctionalist theory of governance' above and below the central state, of which four are now published (Hooghe et al., 2016, 2017, 2019; Hooghe and Marks, 2016).

We do not have the space to give full credit to this work, save to say that it documents beyond reasonable doubt that central states now do much less than they did, and that both SNAs and IOs do much more, and do much of it beyond the control of central state actors. But there are two analytical insights we want to highlight. The first reinforces the point Hooghe and Marks (2009) made about the tensions between efficiency and community in the distribution of public authority. The initial RAI revealed an identity effect associated with regional decentralisation that 'arises because individuals prefer rulers who share

their ethno-cultural norms' (Marks et al., 2009: 175). Exploring IOs reveals a similar point: notwithstanding strong efficiency rationales for IOs, 'people care deeply about who exercises authority over them, and we argue that this exerts a powerful constraint on governance beyond the state' (Lenz et al., 2014: 132).

The second is a more speculative comment about the RAI which we might call the '1968 hypothesis'. The RAI showed that the major shift in authority from the central state to SNAs happened from around 1970. So: '[d]id the cultural shift of the late 1960s kick-start the process?' At that moment 'norms that were taken for granted – materialism, cultural progress and short hair – were explicitly challenged, as were political norms, including deference to political leaders and centralised decision-making' (Marks et al., 2008: 170).

That question still awaits a full answer. But the 1968 hypothesis has a notable echo in one of Hooghe and Marks' parallel story arcs focused on political parties and European integration. Analysis of their expert survey of party positions on European integration led Hooghe et al. (2002) to overlay a 'new politics dimension' over conventional left-right interpretations of party competition on EU issues. Here, they picked up on seminal work by Inglehart (1977) and others to propose a new dimension of party competition on EU issues, whose poles were parties with Green/alternative/libertarian (GAL) objectives and parties with a traditional/authoritarian/nationalist (TAN) prospectus.

Hooghe and Marks (2018: 15) later described GAL-TAN as a transnational cleavage in the Rokkanian sense, a 'cultural conflict pitting libertarian, universalistic values against the defense of nationalism and particularism'. Crucially GAL parties are 'not so deeply motivated' in their pro-EU position as are TAN parties against the EU, fixed as they are on an existential question of 'defense of the nation'. So it is 'the TAN side of the new politics dimension [that] drives the overall relationship' (Hooghe et al., 2002: 977). To put it another way, the cultural shift to environmentalism, equality of opportunity and participatory democracy is not the most powerful legacy of 1968. Rather, it is defensive mobilisation against that cultural shift.

Crisis, disequilibrium and theorising European integration

We have traced a number of different story arcs that track the course of an intellectual project that started out in the narrow frame of EU structural policy. It then broadened out to think about how the central state had been transformed worldwide as a locus of public authority, revealing in the process a pervasive tension between efficiency and community. We now move to discuss the 'return' of the MLG story arc, with all the additional insight collected on the way, to the EU. It did so in the guise of what Hooghe and Marks (2009) called a 'postfunctionalist theory of European integration' (a subset, one presumes, of their five-volume 'postfunctionalist theory of governance'). This move raises the question of the relationship of MLG to theory. MLG is not in itself a theory. It thus has been criticised for providing 'little explanation of causality' (Stephenson, 2013: 818). But that is not really the point.

At one level, MLG has been, as Hooghe and Marks (2001: xiii) themselves cheerfully state, an essentially 'descriptive' exercise. Yet the inferences drawn from description, developed through the digression and recombination of different intellectual story arcs, have created the 'building blocks' for their postfunctionalist theory of European integration. This theory at heart is one that finds causality in the tension, set out above, between the functional efficiency of organising public authority at larger territorial scales and the

identities that underlie preferences for organising public authority at smaller territorial scales. It is 'postfunctionalist' because the functional imperatives for organising public authority efficiently may not win out as they become subject to political conflict around identity. So, for Hooghe and Marks (2009: 2), 'identity is decisive for multi-level governance in general and regional integration in particular'.

Once again we see an arc linking across different elements and stages of the MLG story. The 'constraining dissensus' of identity politics they identified in 2009 was evident when the first seeds of MLG were sown. Marks (1993: 395) warned that fractious debates about the Maastricht Treaty in Denmark, France and the United Kingdom meant that the EU had entered 'the highly charged atmosphere of domestic party politics, [and] it seems unlikely that national leaders will ever be able to coax it back' to the safe space of the permissive consensus. *Multi-Level Governance and European Integration* went further in claiming that:

> EU decision making is no longer insulated from the kind of political competition that has characterized democratic politics in the member states . . . The action has shifted from national governments and technocrats in semi-isolation to domestic politics in the broad and usual sense: party programs, electoral competition, parliamentary debates and votes, public opinion polls, and public referenda. (Hooghe and Marks, 2001: 9–10)

The latter point seemed especially prescient after the United Kingdom's vote in 2016 to leave the EU. It was underlined in Hooghe and Marks' (2009: 21) 'expectation of a downward pressure on the level and scope of integration' [that is into and back to the member state] as identity politics, mobilised by TAN parties, strengthens. This first account of postfunctionalism appeared as the EU entered a decade of profound and continuing disequilibrium. In due course, it faced at least five crises at once: over migration, the euro, Greece, Ukraine and 'Brexit' (Peterson, 2017). So how has it – and its MLG building blocks – fared amid political crisis?

At one level, quite well. Controversy around the EU's role in migration policy, and the ongoing psychodrama of Brexit align well to an understanding of MLG constrained by the 'downward pressure' of identity. Hooghe and Marks are, for example, praised for being 'ahead of the theoretical curve in thinking about the post-Maastricht period as one in which political contestation over integration moved to the centre of EU politics' (Hodson and Puetter, 2019: 2). And yet when Hooghe and Marks (2009: 8) 'claim that politicization of European integration has changed the content, as well as the process of decision making' they offer no distinction between different types of decision: concerning the purpose and institutional architecture of European integration? Or day-to-day EU policy cooperation? The 'claim that identity as well as economic interest underlies preferences over jurisdictional architecture' and thus '[a] brake on European integration has been imposed . . . because legitimate decision-making has shifted from an insulated elite to mass politics' can seem hollow, or at least beside the point. The EU's jurisdictional architecture has remained unchanged for nearly a decade – a record period of stability since the Single European Act of the 1980s – under the Lisbon Treaty (in force from 2009). Cooperation on a buoyant policy agenda under it has continued apace, despite multiple crises. To be clear, our point is not that postfunctionalism is an inadequate theory of European integration. It is that MLG EU-style as an everyday process of governance may be sturdier than many appreciate.

Yet perhaps naturally, EU scholars – Hooghe and Marks included – are drawn to focus on how the EU is coping in a political atmosphere roiled by multiple emergencies (see Dinan et al., 2017; Grimmel, 2019). This focus extends even to how to theorise European disintegration (Webber, 2019), 'collapse' (Hodson and Puetter, 2019: 6) or, less apocalyptically, how the EU 'fails forward' (Jones et al., 2016) in a succession of sub-optimal responses to crisis, each seeding the next stage of crisis. What seems less predictable is the turn in the research literature back to 'grand theories of European integration' (Moravcsik, 2018: 1648) concerned with fundamental questions of why states pool sovereignty or 'indeed . . . become or remain EU members at all'.

It is not our purpose to review the 'grand theory' debate. But we will comment on the contribution to it of Hooghe and Marks (2019: 1) themselves. The grand theories they dissect – neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism and postfunctionalism – are all, they suggest, 'flexible bodies of thought that resist decisive falsification' and are 'better described as schools of thought rather than grand theories'. After examining four different crises – the Eurocrisis, migration, Brexit and the illiberal challenge posed by Hungary and Poland – they conclude that 'none of these theories is fundamentally wrongheaded or subject to sweeping disconfirmation' (Hooghe and Marks, 2019: 16). Readers disappointed by this apparently bland assessment should nevertheless take heed of the authors' honest judgement that all three schools offer 'insights [that] are not mutually exclusive, and neither, perhaps are the approaches that suggest them' (Hooghe and Marks, 2019: 16). That, to us, is a testament to an intellectual curiosity which is open to insight from other traditions of thinking (a curiosity which has enriched their and our understanding of MLG) and a generosity of spirit that is not always reciprocated.

How far has the leading edge of MLG trekked?

To the credit of its conceivers, MLG has given rise to a large literature that interrogates its assumptions and conclusions from a rich variety of angles. Numerous works exist of a 'survey' variety that seek to summarise and extend MLG debates (Bache and Flinders, 2004; Piattoni, 2009, 2010; Stephenson, 2013). Others have offered particularly salient critiques and sets of questions that future research might tackle.

A first is how far MLG has 'travelled' as a generalised portrait of how the EU operates. Marks (1993: 401) singled out structural policy 'as the leading edge of a system of multilevel governance in which supranational, national, regional, and local governments are enmeshed in territorially overarching policy networks'. But is there anything behind the leading edge? SNAs seem far more engaged in EU decision-making in cohesion than (say) competition policy, where the Commission wields especially formidable powers and despite moves to decentralise decision-making to involve national regulators (see McGowan, 2005). But is MLG just about SNAs? Does it need to extend more systematically also to the ways in which non-governmental actors also break the conventional boundaries of decision-making controlled by the central state (see Tortola, 2017: 237)? EU research policy, for example, certainly involves non-governmental actors – especially scientists and policy analysts – in decision-making more than, say, external trade policy. It could be that MLG's leading edge in cohesion policy has been replicated – albeit in a different form – across more EU policy sectors over time.

Elsewhere Stephenson (2013: 822) notes that MLG has been criticised for failing 'to distinguish between governance and participation (or dialogue)'. Many actors are consulted as the EU generates policy, but that does not mean they have power or even

influence over policy. In a particularly thoughtful contribution, Papadopoulos (2010) worries that EU policy networks that bind stakeholders representing multiple layers of government and NGOs offer 'more accountability, but less democracy' since traditional means of democratic accountability (which exist, mostly, at the domestic level) are bypassed. Is this accountability deficit, paradoxically, a driver of the identity-driven discontent which has come to constrain MLG?

Second, is MLG exclusive to Europe? One of the most perceptive of all EU scholars – Alberta Sbragia (2010: 268) has concluded that MLG is 'especially tricky' when applied beyond Europe. We have argued something different: that MLG – burgeoning out from the initial emphasis on structural policy in the EU – became an expansive research programme for Hooghe and Marks which documented the proliferation of different types of MLG across the globe, from the tiniest task-specific authority at local scale to global scale IOs. We suspect that Sbragia's frame of reference is bounded too much by Marks' foundational contribution from 1993 and has not followed the story arcs that it and subsequent contributions set loose.

That connects to a third question: whether MLG gives theoretical purchase. Again, an understanding of MLG qua EU structural policy does not. Marks in 1993 and the various other contributions by him, Hooghe or the two together during the 1990s were generally focused on documenting, rather than theorising, a new phenomenon. But if the story arcs are followed through to the global scale MLG measurement exercise and beyond the state, the encounter with neoclassical assumptions about the distribution of public authority, the collision with the realities of community-based preferences for self-government and the new dynamics of party competition that have resulted from those preferences, then the answer to the question about theoretical purchase looks different. MLG did not start out as, but did become, a powerful theoretical account of the distribution of public authority across different territorial scales, both within the EU and elsewhere. The ultimate success of that theoretical account awaits the final volume on the emerging postfunctional theory of governance. But, to us, it has the potential to be one of the most important contributions so far this century to an understanding of how we govern ourselves within and beyond the state.

This symposium

The contributions in this symposium reflect on the intellectual imprints that MLG has made. We would like to highlight three major impacts of MLG that surface from the contributions and which resonate with several of the story arcs we outlined above. The first is the way in which we conceive governance, within the EU but also within states and beyond the EU. The 2001 book *Multi-Level Governance and European Integration* offered a genuinely novel analysis on the EU that captured the consequences of the enlargement of the EU in the 1980s, the 1992 single-market programme, and the treaty changes of the 1990s that established a truly modern form of governance. It stretched across both conventional organisational structures and conventional understandings. The contributions converge on the notion that postfunctionalism undoubtedly provide useful insights into governance arrangements from the local to regional and national to the (above state) regional and global scales.

Zooming in on the role of regions in the EU polity, Arjan Schakel (this issue) notes that MLG exposes that the EU institutions and the member states share authority with regions also in cases where the formal right to make a decision lies with national governments or

the EU legislator. While acknowledging the merits of postfunctionalism, Tanja Börzel (this issue) and Michael Zürn (this issue) point out that the theoretical leverage of postfunctionalism can be enlarged as to include more instances of delegating and pooling of authority by and among states at the regional and global scales. Zürn suggests loosening the assumption that community and scale are negatively related to each other, that is, the presumption that when territorial scale increases/decreases, community decreases/increases which subsequently decreases/increases the authority that will be shifted towards IOs. By conceiving the relationship between scale and community as orthogonal, Zürn argues, one can account for general-purpose organisation at the global level. Börzel maintains that postfunctionalism does not fully explain (above state) regional governance arrangements in places where states are weak. However, this caveat can be easily remedied when MLG scholars refrain from a 'public authority bias' and include non-state actors such as social partners or public interest groups.

A second key contribution of MLG is to draw scholarly attention to the politicisation of governance. As Hanna Kleider (this issue) clearly articulates, MLG exposes the effects of (the politicisation of) territorial identities on the development of governance structures. In addition, MLG reveals the politics of decision-making and policy implementation in multi-tiered polities where actors can shift blame, 'pass on hot potatoes', compete, and limit or enable each other's policy choices. The latter point is also addressed by Schakel who notes that MLG directs scholarly attention to the incentives for regions to be involved in EU affairs and for national governments and EU institutions to share decision-making authority with regions.

MLG's third notable contribution is the impact it has made on practitioners and politicians whose daily work takes place in MLG systems. Dorothée Allain-Dupré (this issue) and Claire Charbit (this issue) report on how the OECD has adopted and embraced MLG. The proliferation of MLG within states has produced various kinds of inter-municipal, metropolitan and asymmetric governance arrangements and thereby has increased the occurrence of differentiated government. Allain-Dupré emphasises that the role for state governments has changed from a direct service provider to an enabler, advisor and facilitator which requires new capacities at the central level. Considering that the changing role of central governments and noting that competences are almost never clearly separated, Charbit argues that coordination is key for successful MLG. The OECD proposes to use 'contracts' across levels of government to overcome gaps regarding information, capacities, funding and accountability by enhancing trust among the participants.

The symposium is closed by a response from Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks (this issue) who outline three building blocks of a postfunctionalist theory of multilevel governance. These building blocks directly address the three main impacts we highlight above. Hooghe and Marks argue that the essence of MLG is cooperation to provide collective goods at diverse scales (1). Conflict over community impedes or enables MLG (2), whereas the form that MLG takes depends on the sociality of participants (3).

In 1993, MLG was an initial stage in what has become more than a quarter century of creative thinking, whose current state bears little resemblance to its original conceptualization. The intellectual nimbleness and drive for developing new knowledge out of old that Hooghe and Marks show is a virtue to be commended. It is also a necessity. As Marks et al. (2008: 178) put it, 'if history is any guide, stasis . . . would be the last thing one would expect'. With the three building blocks provided by Hooghe and Marks we are set to go to explore the merits of a postfunctionalist theory of MLG.

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Author contributions

This collection set out to mark the outstanding contribution Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks have made to political science. It also became a tribute to John Peterson, my co-editor. John died unexpectedly shortly before the contributors met with Liesbet and Gary to discuss their work. That seminar was at one level a sombre occasion. At another it prompted reflection on John's own contribution to scholarship and on the kind of man he was. In both senses, he was outstanding. John had long been one of the leading figures in research and publication both on the European Union and on transatlantic relations. He never did this from an ivory tower. He was equally at home on the highest-powered academic conference panel, or explaining the oddities of British, EU and US politics on drivetime radio, or advising EU Commissioners how to run the Commission better. And he defied – with a degree of glee – all the publishing conventions which decree that rarefied journals only read by the academic peer group are the be all and end all of academic life, and that textbooks are a career dead-end. John published, of course, in the rarefied journals. But he also wrote textbooks because he truly cared about his students and felt they too should benefit from the best scholarship. John did all this with a true generosity of spirit. It was striking when we discussed his career how many people John had supported or encouraged as they began to make their way – his doctoral students, new arrivals in his academic department, people he barely knew at the time, but still offered a supportive word to after a tough conference panel. And John was always ready to praise others. When he convened the team to edit the *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, one of his ideas was to mark 'breakthroughs' in political science, landmark contributions – like those of Liesbet and Gary – which have changed the ways in which we think about politics. That was so characteristic of John – not all leading academics are inclined to single out the achievements of other leading academics! So John leaves behind both a powerful academic legacy and many friends. Amid the sadness at his passing, we also have many good memories to cherish.

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