"The future of the liberal arts lies...in addressing the fundamental questions of human existence head on, without embarrassment or fear, taking them from the top down in easily understood language, and progressively rearranging them into domains of inquiry that unite the best of science and the humanities at each level of organization in turn.....I find it hard to conceive of an adequate core curriculum in colleges and universities that avoids the cause-and-effect connections among the great branches of learning – not metaphor, not the usual second-order lucubrations on why scholars of different disciplines think this or that, but material cause and effect.” (Wilson 1998 p301).
Consilience and Performance in the ‘Art of the State’

Introduction

This paper addresses the fragmentation of the field (or fields) of public policy, governance, administration and management and in turn how this affects the problematic issues of establishing ‘what works’ and ‘what performs’ in state activities. It suggests that there is a contra-flow in operation: tendencies towards increased disaggregation and fragmentation and tendencies towards consilience and integration. The first part of the paper addresses the degree of fragmentation by spelling out the multiplying sub-divisions of the study of various aspects of state activity (which includes its interaction with society, market, etc). The second part points to some of the counter trends in themes and programmes which appear to be trying to reconcile and integrate these different approaches and why this is desirable. The paper then concludes on issues of performance in state activities – in its broadest sense – and how the failure or success at efforts of consilience might affect this.

1. Towards Fragmentation

The study of human societies over the past 150 years can be characterised as one of increasing fragmentation and specialisation, sometimes driven by subject segmentation, sometimes by disciplinary ontological and epistemological differences, and sometimes by both. From the small number of identifiable disciplines of the mid-19th century we today have probably hundreds of disciplines and sub-disciplines studying, in one way or another, how humans behave, make choices and see themselves, how they organise themselves in familial, social, economic and state ways, etc. Moreover these ‘social’ sciences have, as Edward O Wilson has pointed out, become increasingly estranged not only from the ‘natural’ sciences but also from one another (Wilson 1998).

The sources of this fragmentation are multiple. Some relate simply to the size and complexity of rapidly changing and multiplying human experiences of social organisation and the possibilities for ‘niche’ studies of particular aspects of this. Other sources of fragmentation relate to institutional factors in the organisation of academe and the dynamics of different disciplinary traditions. Finally, there are also some very deep epistemological and ontological controversies which have divided social sciences in general – especially those associated with so-called ‘post-modernism’. The latter movement indeed celebrates division, diversity, relativism and other traits which push towards greater fragmentation within social sciences. At its most extreme this movement even suggests that we live in a “dappled world” where laws governing the one aspect are unconnected with laws in other areas (Cartwright 1999) or that there are equally valid but incommensurable paradigms shaping the study of the same phenomena by different scholarly groups (Guba 1990; Aldrich 1992).
Consilience and Performance in the ‘Art of the State’

(There is an additional but not often recognised factor at work here: size matters. Wilson suggests that social sciences have not made as much progress in producing coherent, integrated, progress as have the physical sciences despite having equivalent resources (Wilson 1998). This not strictly true – investment in physical sciences far outweighs that in social sciences. But it is not absolute size which matters – most social science is labour rather than capital intensive. What matters is what is done with most social science money – it is largely dissipated into relatively small research groups or even individuals, unlike physical sciences where large research groups are the norm. The cultural norm in social sciences is the “loneliness of the long distance researcher” – from PhD to mature professional you are much more likely to find a social scientist working alone or at best in very small groups than in large teams. This produces a culture of individualism and individual competition for resources which is inimical to the sort of cooperation Wilson sees in the physical sciences (Wilson 1998).

The Art of the State

The study of the state and its activities in modern societies has also diverged into a series of separate and often disconnected sub-areas, defined by a mixture of different disciplinary approaches and objects of study. These studies have always drawn upon, in different degrees, other ‘base’ disciplines such as social psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics and politics, which have themselves become more estranged and internally fragmented. Some of this fragmentation can of course be justified as ‘division of labour’ where different scholars focus on different aspects of state activities. This would be acceptable if, and only if, there is a conscious and explicit attempt to reconcile these different efforts and provide causal explanations between different subjects, disciplines and levels of analysis as appropriate. Some scholars, as we shall see, do this but most do not. The predominant characteristic of scholarly work has become fragmentation in the negative sense of disconnection. Moreover, the disciplinary ‘base’ of studies of the state and its activities has always been somewhat uncertain - the veteran US public administration scholar Dwight Waldo, in 1968, jokingly described the study of public administration as “a subject-matter in search of a discipline” (cited in Hood 1998:4). This disciplinary uncertainty has added to fragmentation, but is not the main focus of this paper. I hope to address this in a subsequent paper.

State activities have traditionally fallen into two distinct domains of study: public administration and public policy. The former’s ‘base’ discipline varied - in the United States it was mainly political science but in Europe mainly law. Public policy on the other hand drew mainly upon economics and sociology. Both public administration and public policy have become much further fragmented in the past two or three decades.

‘Public’ administration arose, at least in part, from a more generic field of study – simply ‘administration’ (Fayol 1969; Urwick 1974; Shafritz and Hyde 1992). This divided into the separate study of public and business administration. Schools of public administration were founded in the USA and Europe in the first half of the 20th century. Their focus was primarily on training public functionaries and whether in the USA or Europe they tended to eschew looking at what became separately known as “public policy” following the Wilsonian divide between ‘policy’ and ‘administration’. Instead they focussed on state structures as they related to state activities of
regulation, service delivery and re-distribution, including their legal status, organisational and institutional forms, personnel management, financing, etc.

Public policy is a malleable concept. Whilst many people have a general notion of what they think it means, pinning it down with exact definitions is notoriously difficult. Usefully, Colebatch’s (1998) introductory text on policy points out that it can overlap quite messily with ‘politics’, ‘strategy’ and ‘management’. Indeed all these terms are used in similar ways in similar contexts and sometimes in various combinations (e.g. political strategy, policy management, strategic policy, etc). Public policy remains a very healthy field of study covering a wide range of issues from policy decision making processes through to evaluation, but these various sub-domains have fragmented. For example, the study of public policy processes and content (themselves usually treated separately) have also become increasingly divorced from the study of the outcomes of policy – evaluation.

The term ‘public management’ has recently partially eclipsed the term ‘public administration’ for many scholars and public management has, of course, drawn heavily on business administration in its modern guise of ‘management’ (Pollitt 1993), completing a somewhat ironic trajectory.

Indeed the term public management has become so ubiquitous that some writers have stretched it to cover a variety of approaches and issues which, whilst they are clearly ‘public’, go much wider than the term ‘management’ would imply. Thus, for example, Hood’s (1998:3) statement that “public management – ‘the art of the state’ – can loosely be defined as the problem of how to design and operate public services and the detailed work of executive government”, probably extends the concept far wider than a literal use would suggest and effectively puts it squarely on the former domain of public administration. Nevertheless, Hood’s definition is accurate in that the actual public management literature covers a very wide range of state, government and public activities and organisational and institutional arrangements including everything from personnel management through organisational design to governance and quasi-markets.

Hood suggests that ‘public management’ has possibly proved so popular in part because of its very ambiguity (and adaptability). The term, he suggests, can be split in two: ‘public’ appeals to all those who want to address anything in the public domain and recognise its distinctive character; whilst ‘management’ suggests a more generic approach with a very different appeal to a different audience – giving the combined term wide (if indistinct) acceptance. This identifies a certain plasticity which seems to infect much scholarly activity in this area – recognition, perhaps not always consciously and explicitly, that too narrow a focus offers insufficient scope for explanation. This plasticity should not however be mistaken for systematic attempts at consilience.

As public management has displaced (but not entirely replaced) public administration a gap has opened up. Public management places more emphasis towards the service delivery end of government activities and tends to ignore the work of government itself and how this is organised (although not entirely). Whilst this is somewhat encompassed by public policy (especially its process sub-component), and by residual public administration, there remains something of a void left by the diminution of
public administration – with its much greater emphasis on government – and this has partly been filled by a whole new literature on ‘governance’, what Kooiman (1993) defines as ‘government-society interactions’.

Dwight Waldo’s amusing jibe about public administration assumed it at least knew what its subject matter was. Today even that is less certain. Academic practitioners of what was once called public administration appear under a wide variety of labels: public policy; social policy; government and politics; governance; public management; etc as well as a plethora of sub-groups.

I think that this is reducible to three broad themes in terms of the subject matter addressed by scholars in the general field, if not necessarily representing their academic homes, theoretical and methodological fashions, or institutional affiliations. These themes and subject matters are: public policy, governance (societal rather than organisational) and public management and administration.

I outline the literature covering these broad areas, starting with public policy, followed by governance and then public management and administration. I try to put a little order into the burgeoning output in these fields. This is meant to be an indicative rather than a comprehensive analysis so the references used are only to books and are mainly to illustrate trends. Inevitably there is a great deal of overlap in reality, with many texts falling into more than one category. Nevertheless the subject map drawn by this analysis is, I think, useful.

Most crucially this categorisation is based not on theoretical approaches or disciplinary areas adopted but primarily on the subject matter covered in relation to empirical or normative analyses of policy, governance, administration and management in the public domain. I recognise that there are many additional sub-categorisations which could have used but I have tried to draw these inductively but reasonably rigorously from the literature as I see it. For the purposes of an initial reconsideration of the field I think this is sufficient – others may (I hope) want to elaborate or reconstruct some of these groupings.

Public Policy

Public policy literature is extremely extensive and there are some very clear separations – between aspects of policy processes and actual policy content, for example. The latter is rarely informed explicitly by the former and the processes literature often has an abstract character devoid of empirical examples.

The public policy process literature tends to be structured by linear ‘stages’ based conceptions of the policy process (Deleon 1999) which is based on a particular set of assumptions about the process itself which is at best contestable. Nevertheless, this is how the literature is structured so I have used the ‘stages’ concept to organise this analysis, with some additions (e.g. policy learning and policy content). The categories are not, however, necessarily arranged here in their traditional order.

Before launching into the categorisation, it is worth noting that there are of course numerous volumes dealing with the whole topic of public policy covering many of the
categories below (and indeed some of the titles cited in each category cover more than one area). Notable texts here are the excellent reader produced by the Open University (Pollitt, Lewis et al. 1984) and the more recent encyclopaedic volume by Parsons (1995). Shorter introductory texts might include Howlett and Ramesh (1995), Sabatier’s (1999) reader on theoretical frameworks or Radin’s useful primer on modern policy analysis as a profession and a discipline (Radin 2000).

Decisions and Leadership

Perhaps the classical approach to policy making is the ‘great man’ (and it was usually men) school of decision making and leadership. Perhaps the best known texts in this field are Vickers ‘The Art of Judgement’ (Vickers 1983) and Allison’s (1971) study of the Cuban Missile Crisis. There are also numerous studies of the role of leadership in innovating policy - both political leaders (e.g. Dror 1994) but also, importantly here, bureaucrats (e.g. Doig and Hargrove 1990; Behn 1991; Levin 1994; Troxel 1995; Borins 1998).

The issue of bureaucratic leadership goes straight to the heart of the ongoing paradox at the centre of public administration thinking, first identified by Waldo: that rational, goal orientated leadership by bureaucrats undermines and is undermined by democratic political leadership (cited in Stivers 2001). Several texts deal with this issue, notably Peters (1995) and (Gray and Jenkins 1985). A fascinating historical study of ‘the forging of bureaucratic autonomy’ in US federal agencies from the mid 19th to the early 20th centuries is contained in Carpenter (2001).

Policy Processes

The classic debates about public policy processes revolved around whether or not these could be explained in terms of institutional characteristics (Lindblom 1959; Lindblom 1980) or behavioural ones – especially varieties of self-interested rationality (Simon 1957). Lindblom’s work is usually reported in terms simply of ‘incrementalism’ but it is more an argument that complex institutional settings lead to incrementalism, although the latter has since become an approach in its own right (Elcock, Jordan et al. 1989; Elcock 1991).

At central government level the classic descriptive studies on policy making are those concerning the budget processes in the USA and UK (Heclo and Wildavsky 1981; Wildavsky 1992): studies which have been updated by more recent work (e.g. Thain and Wright 1996; Chapman 1997; Rubin 2000).

A perennial topic has been the policy roles of bureaucrats in shaping and sometimes making policy. In the UK, this issue was famously exposed in the ‘Yes Minister’ and ‘Yes Prime Minister’ television series (Jay and Lynn 1986). However, it has also long been the subject of scholarly study (Appleby 1949; Gray and Jenkins 1985; Hennessy 1990)

An important perspective here is that of policy-making processes that act ‘bottom-up’ rather than top down. The classic study here on the role of ‘street level bureaucrats’ in
effectively making policy judgements is Lipsky (1980) and a more recent study shows how middle level bureaucrats can shape policy (Page 2001).

Mostly studies of the whole policy process consist of normative analyses (Braybrooke and Lindblom 1963; Bauer and Gergen 1968; Hogwood 1987; Hill 1993; Hill 1997). More rarely has work on policy processes been based on empirical studies of actual processes, with some exceptions: for example a useful study of several internationally comparative cases (Zahariadis 2003) or a study of a policy failure (the Poll Tax in the UK) brought about by a flawed policy process (Butler, Adonis et al. 1994).

Some studies focus on the broader context of policy processes, including pressure groups (Richardson 1985). Recent work on policy processes has focussed on a series of theoretical innovations, such as behavioural analysis (Rose 1989), policy networks and policy coalitions (Fischer and Forester 1993; Rhodes 1997), public choice theory (Lane 1987; McLean 1987; Dunleavy 1991; Self 1993; Green and Shapiro 1994; Stretton and Orchard 1994) and action-centred institutionalism (Scharpf 1997) just to name some.

Finally, there is what might be called ‘detached’ policy making processes – where policy making is delegated to external bodies such as commissions. A classic study of this tradition in the UK, prior to its virtual elimination in the 1980s, was Chapman (1973).

Policy Analysts and Think Tanks

There is a small stream of literature which looks at the role(s) of policy analysts inside government and the bureaucracy. This examines these roles both empirically (Meltsner 1976; Plowden 1987; Blackstone and Plowden 1990; Plowden 1994; Heineman, Bluhm et al. 1997) and normatively (Dror 1994). Another rivulet examines the role of ‘Think Tanks’ and policy organisations outside of government (Weiss 1992; Cockett 1995; Stone 1996) and the contribution they make to the policy process.

Policy Content

The study of actual policy content is vast, but mostly focussed on specific policy areas (e.g. social security, housing, education, transport, etc). It is far too large to cover every area here, but a couple of particular areas are worth mentioning: welfare and social policy and economic policy.

The study of ‘social policy’ – usually taken to include all those aspects of policy concerned directly with human needs and welfare – has become an area of study on its own (Alcock, Erskine et al. 2003). Some of this literature has dealt with the long-term trends in welfare and social policy (Hill and Bramley 1986; Jones 1991; Deakin and Parry 2000; Timmins 2001). More specific studies relate to the social policy issues arising during the long Conservative period of government (Wistow, Knapp et al. 1994; Butcher 2002).

There is a similarly substantive literature on economic policy and especially the debate about UK relative economic decline which tend to cover a wide spectrum of
economic and social policies (Gamble 1994; Hutton 1995; English and Kenny 2000) and specifically on economic competitiveness (Hughes 1993).

Both of the above are closely linked to discussions about the size and shape of the ‘welfare state’ and the state versus the market more widely.

The ‘policy stance’ of governments, covering all or most areas of policy, has usually been discussed in relation to specific political administrations – thus there have been studies of successive UK government’s broad policy stances, for example, on the Tories (Gamble 1988; Savage and Robins 1990; Michie 1992; Wilson 1992; Kavanagh and Seldon 1994) and New Labour (Savage and Atkinson 2001). Longer term trends and wider thematic policy changes, covering whole periods rather than just particular governments, are exemplified in a number of works about the UK (e.g. Glennerster 1992; Hogwood 1992; Rao 1996; Davis 1998).

International and comparative developments have been extensively covered including work on the public sector (Kaufmann 1991; Lane 1993; Lane 1996) on comparative public policy (e.g. Castles 1989; Heidenheimer, Heclo et al. 1990; Castles 1998), comparative welfare (e.g. Room 1991; Gould 1993), comparative social policy in Eastern Europe (Eatwell, Ellman et al. 1988) and the comparative political economy of welfare (Gough 1979; Gough 2000).

A final category here could be ‘public institution policy’ or ‘public management policy’. This links both ‘tools of government’ (see under ‘Governance’) and public management. By this I mean the types of policy tools which have been widely applied in recent public policy reforms for shaping public institutions: decentralisation, disaggregation, devolution, quasi-markets, public-private partnerships, privatisation, performance measurement and contracting, etc. These are covered in the ‘governance’ and ‘public management’ sections, which is where their analysis has mostly taken place in the literature. There are of course exceptions to this – for example analyses of quasi-markets in social welfare, health and other areas (Le Grand and Bartlett 1993; Taylor-Gooby 1993; Wistow, Knapp et al. 1994; Walsh 1995).

Public Policy Dynamics

Closely allied to these descriptive analyses of public policy content are more explanatory materials which seek to explain why and how policy changes over time. One strand in this literature is the analysis of broad political, economic and social trends. This is also partially covered in the ‘Governance’ section below.

Another strand is the explanation of policy change primarily from analyses and theories of the dynamics of the policy processes themselves. I have already mentioned the classic ‘incrementalism’ versus ‘rationality’ debate. This has been supplemented by studies of what has been called the ‘pathology of public policy’ (Hogwood and Peters 1985) with books covering policy change (Hogwood and Peters 1983; Hood 1994) and ‘inheritance’ and ‘inertia’ in public policy’ (Rose and Karran 1987; Rose and Davies 1994). The impact of general ideologically driven policy lobbies on government (such as the ‘New Right’) has also been widely analysed in general terms (Jordan and Ashford 1993) alongside and overlapping with the ‘think tank’ literature.
Policy Analysis Approaches, Tools and Techniques

The normative literature on policy analysis approaches, tools and techniques offering advice to policy-makers about the correct way to proceed in policy making is quite large and covers the last 30 years or more (Dror 1968; 1971; Carley 1980; Leach 1982; Hogwood and Gunn 1984; Bobrow and Dryzek 1987; Percy-Smith 1996; John 1998).

Implementation

The classic study of this problem is Pressman and Wildavsky’s ‘implementation’ which had the amusing subtitle: “How Great Expectations in Washington are Dashed in Oakland; Or, Why It's Amazing that Federal Programs Work at All, This Being a Saga of the Economic Development Administration as Told by Two Sympathetic Observers Who Seek to Build Morals on a Foundation of Ruined Hopes” (Pressman and Wildavsky 1984, 1973). This volume sparked a spate of case studies, mostly in article form but some in books, including the study of the failure of the UK poll tax (Butler, Adonis et al. 1994) or of ‘implementing Thatcherite policies’ (Marsh and Rhodes 1992) as well as more general studies (Mazmanian and Sabatier 1989; Hill and Hupe 2002).

More recently much of this literature has tended to overlap with that on public management (e.g. Clarke, Cochrane et al. 1994; Clarke and Newman 1997; Clarke, Gewirtz et al. 2000).

Evaluation

Evaluation of policies has long been a well-established and distinct field with its own journals and substantial publications, its own institutions (e.g. the European Evaluation Society). This is not the place to fully review this literature but examples of the genre over the years might include a typical early collection of papers (Caro 1977) some textbooks (Rossi, Freeman et al. 1979; Fitz-Gibbon 1987; Breakwell 1995), a guide to ‘realistic evaluation’ (Pawson and Tilley 1997), an up-to-date handbook (Nagel 2002) and an interesting discussion of where evaluation should fit into the overall policy process (Boyle and Lemaire 1999). Evaluation has also been notable for intense doctrinal disputes over philosophy and methodology (Guba and Lincoln 1989; Guba 1990).

Policy Learning

A minority literature is that on ‘policy learning’ (Rose 1993; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993; Leeuw, Rist et al. 1994). This is odd because it could be expected that the vast activity of policy evaluation would lead to policy learning but the study of ‘learning’ as such seems thin. One interesting approach draws on organisational theory on learning (Argyris and Schon 1978) and applies this perspective to policy controversies (Schon and Rein 1994). There are also clearly potential, although largely unexplored, links with public management, evaluation, implementation literature and the governance literatures.
Governance

The study of government was traditionally the terrain of public administration and politics and concentrated very much on the institutions and structures of government in and of itself. Traditional public administration focussed almost exclusively on government itself: the institutions of government, prime ministers, presidents, executive functions, cabinets, parliaments, legislatures and the civil service, etc. For an excellent collection of public administration ‘classics’ that makes this point admirably through its contents see (Shafritz and Hyde 1992).

Public administration has largely abandoned this more formalised study, but the focus on the central state and its core functions has remained largely the same. Recent edited volumes from the ESRC’s ‘Whitehall Programme’, for example, clearly focuses mainly on the internal workings of government if at a more informal level (Peters, Rhodes et al. 2000; Rhodes 2000) whilst international comparative studies of ‘administrative reform’ from this tradition also retain this focus (e.g. Caiden 1991). The governance literature, on the other hand, has a much broader focus on the place of state activity in the wider political, economic, social and cultural setting of the state and its interactions with these contextual variables.

Governance: Government-Society Interactions

‘Governance’ can be loosely defined as “patterns of government-society interactions” (Kooiman 1993). This literature has started up most recently – during the 1990s - of our three central categories (policy, governance and management) but has expanded rapidly, partly perhaps because of its official sanction by bodies such as the OECD (2001) and a World Bank report emphasising the role of good governance in the developing world (World Bank 1997). [Although use of the term ‘governance’ is hardly entirely new in itself – see, for example, Rose’s volume on the ‘Challenge to Governance’ (1980)].

A central theme in this literature is that the nature of ‘governance’ in the developed democracies is changing. This is most usually attributed to globalisation emptying the nation state of much of its previous power as outlined in popular texts (Ohmae 1995) and heavy-weight academic studies (Strange 1996; Holton 1998; van Creveld 1999). It should be said that this view is not without its critics who generally argue that the effects of globalisation are overstated or misread (Hay 1996; Hirst and Thompson 1996; Weiss 1998).

For those who accept the ‘globalisation thesis’ it is leading to either declining social reform (Teeple 1995) or standardisation on a neo-liberal model (Deacon, Hulse et al. 1997) but in either case policy is allegedly driven not by national governments but by external forces. These include international organisations (e.g. the World Bank, IMF and OECD) and supra-national bodies (e.g. the EU). One interesting argument is that globalisation of policy is not a facet of economics but is an artifice of policy espoused by a range of domestic political actors who use ‘globalisation’ as an excuse for policy change (Gray 1998).
Another variant on the disempowerment of the state thesis, called ‘hollowing out’, is that power is not just leaching away ‘upwards’ but also ‘downwards’ towards devolved authorities and decentralised and disaggregated public services (Weller, Bakvis et al. 1997). Furthermore this is generating ever more ‘networked’ and pluralistic polities in which central authority cannot guarantee the same level of authority as was exercised in old-style bureaucratic, hierarchical, ‘big government’ (Rhodes 1997).

One very specific contributory factor in the debate about governance is the perceived unchecked expansion of the public sector in the period roughly between 1945 and the late 1970s in the developed world. This was widely supposed to have led to the ‘fiscal crisis of the state’ (O’Connor 1973). The extent to which this notion had become a received wisdom, at least in some quarters, can be seen in the OECD volume on ‘the role of the public sector’ (Saunders and Kalu 1985). This debate helped to fuel many radical reform initiatives aimed at reducing public spending and continues unabated (Tanzi and Schuknecht 2000). Many of these analyses accept that the state is caught in a sort of ‘scissors effect’ with the need (and demand) for fiscal restraint being matched by rising demand for more and better quality services (Foster and Plowden 1996). The implication of this need to ‘do more with less’ contributes to the governance debate by making the consideration of more ‘steering’ and less ‘rowing’ (Osborne and Gaebler 1992) an essential ingredient of the reform of state institutions from this perspective as well as the others already mentioned.

The study of governance is now well established and the field is generating many theories and models of the ‘new governance’. These include a model which suggests the key facets of the new regimes are dynamism (speed of change), complexity and diversity and these lead in turn to more coordination, steering, and regulation rather than instrumental intervention (Kooiman 1993). Others suggest that there are multiple governance models emerging (Peters 1996; Newman 2001) or that the debate is still emerging and furthermore, even the concept’s usefulness remains contested in some quarters (Pierre 2000). Although Hood’s work on cultural analysis and public management is not explicitly located in the ‘governance’ literature it is clearly highly relevant (Hood 1998).

Most influential in the new school are debates about networks: policy networks, organisational networks, economic networks and social networks which are usually contrasted to other forms of social co-ordination such as markets and hierarchies (Thompson, Frances et al. 1991; Maidment and Thompson 1993; Thompson 2003). This links into a specific literature focussed solely on networks and network management (Kickert, Klijn et al. 1997).

Finally, there is also a growing literature about direct participation in government as an antidote to the disengagement of citizens (Berger and Neuhaus 1996; Simrell King and Stivers 1998).

Institutionalism

The 1990s also has seen a resurgence of interest in institutions as a category of analysis. The so-called ‘new-institutionalism’ has come from two very specific sources. The first is academic and constitutes a reaction to the (then) dominant
behaviourist trend in political science and other disciplines. The reassertion of the role of institutions is widely attributed to the seminal work of March and Olsen (1989) but has been expanded and deepened in a number of ways since in political science (Peters 1999), in organisational analysis, particularly linked to issues of similarities and difference in forms (Powell and DiMaggio 1991), and in policy analysis (Scharpf 1997).

The second source of new institutional studies has been from practice – specifically the recognition by the World Bank of the importance of institutions (as opposed to just markets, state size and incentive structures) in the developing and transitional states context (Burki and Perry 1998). One result of this was ambitious attempts to develop ways of assessing the effectiveness of institutions in developing and transitional states and most recently this approach has ‘come home’ in a Brookings Institute study of the effectiveness and health of US institutions (Davidson 2003).

Tools of Government

Alongside the debates about what government can (and cannot) do in a changing world, encompassed in this broader governance literature, there is a very specific ‘tools of government’ subject which has emerged. What are the main instruments at government’s disposal for doing things? Perhaps surprisingly this question has only recently come to the fore as a specific subject for analysis – perhaps because the answers seemed to be ‘obvious’ in the past, although they are in fact far from clear. Two early examples of this ‘tools of government’ approach are seen in Rose’s ‘Understanding Big Government’ (1984) and Hood’s ‘The Tools of Government’ (1983). More recently two large edited collections have vastly expanded the field of study (Bemelmans-Videc, Rist et al. 1998; Salamon 2002) but this area remains under-explored.

Public Management and Public Administration

As was discussed at the start of this article, the title ‘public management’ has largely (but not entirely) displaced ‘public administration’ as the topic of most book publishing in this field and forms part of the title of a number of new journals (Kettl and Milward 1996; Hood 1998). It has seen a veritable explosion of publishing during the 1990s with several introductory texts to the subject going through multiple editions: e.g. Flynn (1990; 1993; 1997; 2002) and Hughes (1994; 1998; 2003) and a fully-fledged Oxford Handbook of Public Management due out in 2004 (Ferlie, Lynn et al. 2004). Indeed by 1996 the field was already deemed sufficiently well developed to publish a reflective collection on its state (Kettl and Milward 1996).

Public administration may have diminished compared to this vigorous upstart but it has hardly disappeared with a new ‘handbook of public administration’ about to appear (Peters and Pierre 2003) and some old favourites soldiering on after 35 years and six editions (Heady 2001).

Whilst public management and public administration have clearly had different subject foci and to some extent differing disciplinary influences there is also sufficient overlap for us to consider them together in this analysis. The one issue where there is
a substantial difference, which has already been mentioned under the ‘governance’ section, is in public administration’s focus on central government institutions – ‘the machinery of government’ – which is largely absent from the public management literature.

Much of the new public management literature, by volume, has been focused on individual country developments and has been of a descriptive analysis and often normative type – for example in the

- UK (Metcalf and Richards 1987; Taylor and Popham 1989; Young and Hadley 1990; Pollitt 1992; Wilcock and Harrow 1992; Farnham and Horton 1993; Hinton and Wilson 1993; Isaac-Henry and Painter 1993; McKevitt and Lawton 1994; Nutley and Osborne 1994; Flynn 2002);

- USA (Perry 1989; Rainey 1991; Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Bozeman 1993; Kettl and Dilulio 1995; Kettl and Milward 1996; Osborne and Plastrik 1997); and


Some single country studies and comparative studies between a small sample of countries have been much more critical in their analyses and less normative, for example: New Zealand (Boston, Martin et al. 1996); Canada (Aucoin 1995); Australia and the UK (Zifcak 1994) and the USA, Australia and the UK (Savoie 1994).

Larger scale comparative studies have begun to emerge. There are several such studies covering Europe or more often Western Europe (Eliassen and Kooiman 1993; Flynn and Strehl 1996; Kickert 1997; Verheijen and Coombes 1998). Other more comprehensive comparative works covering either just developed countries or more global comparisons from either the public administration tradition (Caiden 1991; Chandler 2000; Heady 2001; Jreisat 2002) or public management (Naschold 1996; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000). Additionally, there has been the OECD PUMA series of surveys of public management reform (e.g. OECD-PUMA 1997). Finally some work on public management in developing countries is also now starting to emerge (Grindle 1997; McCourt and Minogue 2001).

Within the general public management literature there are also a number of well developed sub-themes relating to specific public management reforms usually associated with the so-called ‘New Public Management’. I will touch just briefly on some of these.

**Market-type Mechanisms**

The first of these specific reforms is the introduction of ‘market-type mechanisms’ or ‘quasi-markets into public services. There have been extensive studies of these reforms, examples from the UK include Le Grand and Bartlett (1993) Walsh (1995) Wistow et al (1994) and Taylor-Gooby and Lawson (1993). Closely allied to the notion of quasi-markets has been the idea of contracting within and between public services (Common, Flynn et al. 1992; Walsh, Deakin et al. 1997; Fortin and Van
Hassel 2000). Closely linked to the study of quasi-markets and contracts is the notion of citizens as consumers and customers (Ayeni 2001).

**Public-Private-Voluntary Partnerships**

The partnership literature may be divided into three main areas around partnership structure, in the first, the public-private partnership, the focus is upon arrangements between central or local government departments or its agencies on such topics as the London Underground (Ruane 2002) or more general Public Finance Initiative and Public-Private Partnership issues(Taylor 2001). A much larger and better established literature concerns public-private partnerships in the area of urban development in both the US, sometimes conceived of as regimes (Stone 1989).

In the second type, public-public or public-voluntary, the literature focuses on partnership working in areas which broadly speaking are social policy. Literature concerns interagency working between agencies such as health and social care providers (Ballock and Taylor 2001) and research on professional partnerships focusing on the relationships between these key workers (Clarke and Rummery 2002). The literature now reconceptualises joint working between the voluntary sector and local authorities from at least the 1920’s as ‘partnership’ (Glendinning, Powell et al. 2002).

The third area, possibly the biggest single area in the UK is that of multisectoral regeneration partnerships where much effort has been expended in testing the degree to which they are indeed partnerships among members rather than relationships defined by unequal participation in decisions over the content and process of regeneration, the so called ‘paper partnership’ (Davies 2001; Sullivan and Skelcher 2001; Glendinning, Powell et al. 2002). These partnerships are defined by their multiple membership which increasingly seeks to be inclusive of the community itself. Partnerships of some sort, originally conceived as bilateral partnerships, have been common in this area since the 1970s. (Skelcher, McCabe et al. 1996). The multisectoral partnership literature also includes that carried out in the European Union context, where partnerships are also vertically integrated within a multi-level governance (Hooghe 1996; Geddes and Benington 2001). In other policy areas such multisectoral partnerships are much newer such as Education Action Zones and other Zone initiatives (Dickson, Gewirtz et al. 2002).

**Decentralisation and Disaggregation**

Another key theme of NPM style reforms has been the idea of decentralisation of public organisations and services. This has included disaggregation within government itself such as the UK’s ‘Next Steps’ programme and many other such initiatives internationally (Pollitt and Talbot 2003a). However decentralisation has affected a wide range of services including health, education, and welfare services (Hoggett 1987; Common, Flynn et al. 1992; Burns, Hambleton et al. 1994; Pollitt, Birchall et al. 1998).
Performance and Quality

The study of performance and quality issues in the public sector has expanded almost as rapidly and voluminously as public management study itself. The number of new books published in the past decade or so is far too large to list so merely a sample of interesting collections (Halachmi and Bouckaert 1996; Mayne and Zapico-Goni 1997; Kearney and Berman 1999) will be noted. There are, additionally, one or two especially influential texts such as Behn (2001) which links performance with the idea of ‘earned autonomy’ currently under discussion for Foundation Hospitals in the UK; and Moore’s ‘Creating Public Value’ (Moore 1995) which is influencing discussions in the UK Cabinet Office (see Strategy Unit website for details). A recent study based on extensive empirical work in the USA has produced a model of ‘government performance’ (Ingraham, Joyce et al. 2003) whilst the Brookings Institute has launched a fascinating study of the performance of core state institutions (Davidson 2003). For a fuller analysis of the performance literature see Talbot (2004).

What Works

A very new sub-theme is the study of ‘evidence based policy and practice’ or as it has become known the ‘what works’ agenda (Davies, Nutley et al. 2000). This so new that little has yet been published although there is clearly a large flurry of activity, including substantial research funding directed into this area by the ESRC in the UK and the establishment of several research centres, an academic network, etc. Interestingly the ‘what works’ theme actually emerged from professional circles rather than academe – principally in regard to reducing re-offending behaviour amongst convicted criminals (McGuire 1995). The ‘What Works’ literature also links closely to evaluation and implementation studies, although in relation to the former case, it is without the doctrinal disputes as baggage.

Coordination and Joined-Up Government

Our final category of study – also relatively new but boasting a larger publication count is the new co-ordination or ‘joined-up government’ agenda as it is known in the UK. This appears to be mainly a US (Linden 1994; Bardach 1998; Sarason and Lorentz 1998) and UK (Balloch and Taylor 2001; 6, Leat et al. 2002; Sullivan and Skelcher 2002) phenomenon. However, a recent OECD publication has clearly given the issue some international impetus (OECD-PUMA 1997).

2. Towards Consilience and Performance

What, if anything, can we conclude from the brief survey conducted above of the fragmentation and disaggregation of the field(s) and what contrary trends exist? The first and most obvious conclusion is that if it could be taken as a single field of study it is clear that public policy, governance, administration and management constitutes a large and vibrant field. However, this not reflected in any internal cohesion, theoretical clarity or academic status. Rather at the moment it resembles something close to the old Maoist slogan about “letting a thousand flowers bloom”.
There is an underlying sense that reality is too complex and can only be partially understood through metaphor (Morgan 1996) and in any case we do indeed live in a “dappled world” (Cartwright 1999) in which consilience is not possible. Whilst this view is rarely expressed explicitly (but see Hollinger 1994) there is nonetheless a constant theme in the literature of resort to metaphor rather than theory, of self-limitation in theory building, of largely sticking to one’s own patch, etc. Most academics in this field may explicitly reject post-modernism but they act as if it were true, in so far as they make only relatively small attempts at ‘joined-up’ theorising and research. This poses severe problems for the field as whole: the lack of consilience between the highly fragmented sub-areas of study fatally undermines our ability to say useful things about ‘what works’ in the very broadest sense in relation to the art of state.

The second conclusion I would draw is that this is, nevertheless, a single field of study. Waldo’s comment about public administration being a ‘subject matter in search of a discipline’ suggested it was a clear and fixed field of study, well aware of its position. I doubt if, even then, things were quite so simple – public administration and public policy, for example, were not always comfortable bed-fellows. However, seen from a higher level and more historical perspective it is fairly clear that every one of the areas of study described above forms an integral component of a single field or domain of knowledge - Hood’s (1998) ‘the art of the state’ perhaps?

I would suggest strongly that any serious analysis of the output of the field of public policy, governance and management and administration must conclude that these are dealing largely with the same subject matter: what can and should modern states be doing as collective action and how should this be done. Texts on governance encompass policy and management, whilst analyses of public policy processes and content inevitably stray into governance at one level (policy processes) and management at others (implementation). Public management literature and theorising has become as broad as to encompass just about anything in the public domain, as already noted above but rarely with consilient joining-up in mind. More importantly, from the perspective of practice the somewhat scholastic divisions within the ‘art of the state’ domains appear as unhelpful and even downright destructive.

Thirdly, I would conclude that it is fairly obvious that those engaged in this field of study are not yet fully self-aware of, or accepting, its identity as a coherent subject and the potential for consilience – greater internal coherence and linkages. There is clearly a ‘path-dependency’ issue here: those engaged in the study of public policy, governance and management have come from very different academic traditions and disciplines. They remain often walled off from one another in different institutional ‘homes’. Some are more disengaged than others - evaluation studies, for example, seems out on a particular limb even from the ‘policy’ community it is clearly substantively linked to.

The fourth conclusion is that this is a field of study in a state of rapid and continuing change. This is because its object of study – policy, governance and management in the public sphere - is changing, certainly rhetorically and in many respects in practice. At the same time the academic study of these phenomena is also changing, with new schools of thought and research emerging and others in retreat or retrenchment. This
creates processes of fusion, diffusion and flux which have yet, apparently, to settle into a definitive pattern.

The fifth and most important conclusion of all is that consilience within this overall field is desirable, possible and to some limited extent starting to happen but it requires conscious effort to propel it forward.

Why is consilience desirable? One of the defining characteristics of the field over the past 20 years has been its largely atheoretical nature. What passes for theory is actually more often akin to natural history’s production of classifications of flora and fauna in the 19th century. Wilson makes this point about much of social sciences in general (Wilson 1998) and Henry Mintzberg (1979b) has made the same point about much of management research. In other words there has been a lot of ‘naming of names’, classification, and limited comparison but very little joining-up of different areas of study through explanatory and causal theories. Consilience as an approach attempts to integrate patterns and casual explanations across areas of study and between different levels. As I will show below this approach is strikingly absent in much of our chosen field of study.

There are some exceptions to this pattern – the public choice school, for example, has attempted to link models of individual preferences and decision making (rational utility maximisation) to choice in political, policy and administrative decision-making. Indeed the incursions that these economics-based approaches have made into areas of public action can be attributed to the fact that they at least try to assemble causal explanations, even if not always very subtly or successfully. More sophisticated approaches have started to emerge – for example the attempted consilience in Julian Le Grand’s study of motivation and choice in public services which seeks to explicitly draw upon social psychological, institutional and others findings to construct a model of individual choice between self-interest and altruism in the public domain (Le Grand 2003).

I would suggest that there are several emerging fields of study, some identified above and some others I will mention here, which are driving towards, or at least permitting the emergence of, consilience rather than fragmentation. Again, this is not an exhaustive list but more an indication of what might be possible.

Consilience 1: What Works and Evidence-Based Policy

The ‘what works’ and ‘evidence-based policy’ (EBP) material implicitly addresses the gap that has developed between policy analysis on the one hand and evaluation on the other – indeed the very need for a ‘what works’ agenda suggests a radical disconnect between policy and evaluation studies. If, for example, evidence were routinely included systematically into policy-making – either prospectively or even retrospectively – there would be no need for a special ‘what works’ or ‘evidence-based policy’ agenda. (It is noticeable this trend has emerged mainly in the UK whilst the literature on discursive public policy is largely US-based, possibly reflecting differing policy traditions).

The emergence of such an approach highlights a number of lacunae in existing scholarly evaluation work. For example, the lack of receptivity of policy-making
processes to evidence is clearly a function of the nature of those processes, yet few
evaluation scholars would seem to have much knowledge of the current literature on
such processes. The same would seem to be true of policy content, an even more
surprising gap in the evaluation literature.

Similarly, evaluation studies have traditionally focussed mainly on the outcomes of
policy rather than on the processes of implementation. Although there has been some
‘process evaluation’ and the ‘realistic evaluation’ school includes a focus on context
and process, by and large most evaluation has been free from much consideration of
implementation or public management issues and the results of research in these
fields.

Lest this seems unfairly critical of evaluation studies, the same is true in reverse –
policy analysis, governance and public management have largely failed to draw on the
knowledge developed in evaluation studies. For example, it is striking how few
studies of public management reform have been informed by current thinking and
scholarship in evaluation studies (Pollitt 1995) or how little policy content analysis is
informed by the evidence of evaluations.

The ‘what works’ and EBP agenda therefore opens up (but does not assure) the
possibility of much greater integration between aspects of public policy content,
process and implementation and public management studies and evaluation studies. It
opens up the possibility of better understanding of the causal links (and feed-back
loops) between policy processes and content through implementation and institutional
and managerial design issues and hence to evaluation or outcomes.

It may allow for the better understanding of the factors at each level which facilitate
and hinder success in policy. Crucially, this will only happen if consilient theoretical
approaches are adopted which can join-up these levels. One fruitful area here may be
non-linear systems analysis (chaos and complexity theories) which may offer
additional insights into how relationships between these levels may operate.

Consilence 2: Governance and Public Management

The ‘governance’ literature is potentially highly consilient in its approach. It tries to
develop a more theoretical and interactive view of the relationship between the state
and civil society, incorporating knowledge from policy studies (policy networks),
institutional studies (hierarchies, markets and networks), public management, etc. It
can potentially also embrace issues of participation and consultation and link to
studies of ‘social capital’. It can link, potentially at least, to comparative political-
economy by placing an understanding of national and international patterns of
governance in a much broader context.

The ‘top-down’ approach of the governance literature is complimented by the
growing literature on comparative public management reform which has also
extended its range upwards from a narrow focus just on the internal workings of
public organisations to much a much wider analysis of institutional and cultural
factors. Thus some employ cultural theory to explain variation in public management
(Hood 1998), whilst others employ a combination of institutional and cultural theories
(Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000) and variation in even specific public management
reforms require some cultural/institutional explanation (Talbot and Caulfield 2002; Pollitt, Talbot et al. 2004).

There is plenty of scope here for bringing together these comparative governance and public management analyses into more coherent explanations of international variation, provided advances can be made in constructing more adequate theoretical accounts of the causal roles of institutional, cultural and other variables.

The growing field comparative political economy (e.g. Hall and Soskice 2001; Blyth 2002; Swank 2002) and cultural differentiation approaches (e.g. Hampden-Turner 1994), which have flourished since the fall of Communism in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (Johnson 1995), provide potential high-level integration mechanisms for explaining some of the continuing variety and difference in ‘actually existing states’ as well as vertical integration of various elements of public governance, policy, administration and management. At the moment, whilst the governance and public management literatures have begun to expand upwards and outwards into political-economy, institutional difference and cultural comparisons this does not appear to be the same in reverse and progress is limited and patchy.

Consilience 3: Performance

The literature on ‘performance’ has in one form been very restrictive to the internal processes and efficiencies (or otherwise) of public systems in producing public goods and would seem an unlikely candidate for generating consilience. However, performance has broadened its approach towards a ‘creating public value’ agenda which embraces attempts to understand the whole process of value creation in the public sector from resources consumption through to outcomes in society. In doing so it potentially joins up a whole series of different areas of study.

‘Outcomes-based governance’ (Molen, Rooyen et al. 2001), for example, seeks to integrate public services and knowledge about them in several ways – by emphasising results for users, by producing useable knowledge about results for decision makers (users, managers and politicians), etc. It also potentially offers ways of linking issues of individual, organisational and social choice and of viewing the nature of success – ‘creating public value’ (Moore 1995; Kelly and Muers 2002). More widely it is also being used to link to issues about governance in both an organisational and societal sense (Heinrich and Lynn 2000). Finally, in addressing ‘outcomes’ it is expanding into areas traditionally reserved to evaluation (Blalock 1999) and hence potentially into wider policy fields.

Performance - in its widest sense of asking what are the policy and institutional options which best provide for achieving the ‘good society’ in publicly acceptable and efficient ways - offers a large potential for consilience by recognising the need for ‘joined-up thinking’ about such issues. At the moment much of the performance literature is somewhat ‘theory-lite’ although there are interesting exceptions emerging which point towards better theoretical integration (Talbot 2004).
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Consilience 4: New Science

Our final example of potential for consilience comes not from within the ‘art of the state’ literature but mainly from outside. The so-called ‘new sciences’ which deal with such issues as chaos and complexity theories, network theories, evolutionary psychology, etc provide strong potential links across not just ‘art of the state’ knowledge domains but much more widely. This has not featured in our analysis so far largely because it represents more a potential than an actuality as yet. However there is a small literature which is starting to take advantage of the ‘new science’ advances to apply its insights to ‘art of the state’ knowledge:

- using complexity theory in social science generally (Byrne 1998), in public management (Kiel 1994; Haynes 2003); in ‘performance’ (Axelrod and Cohen 1999; O’Toole and Meier 2000), in international relations (Jervis 1997); and in development policy (Rihani 2002).

- using evolutionary theory to analyse public policy issues (Pinker 2002; Somit and Peterson 2003) and paradox in public policy and management (Talbot 2004); etc.

Both of the above are examples of consilience – attempting to link causal explanations across different levels and areas of analysis. A striking example of where this is not done (or at least not very much) is in the fashionable area of ‘networks’ (policy and service networks) where the scientific work on networks (e.g. Watts 1999; Barabasi 2002; Buchanan 2002) is largely ignored (e.g. Kickert, Klijn et al. 1997).

A cautionary note here: a great deal of the so-called new science scholarship has sought to use these theories (especially chaos and complexity theories and undigested aspects of quantum theory) to justify the type of subjectivist and relativist positions described at the start of this paper. This has been especially true in the management field (see for example Stacey, Douglas et al. 2000).

Whilst this in no way exhausts the possibilities suggested by Wilson (1998) it is at least a start.

Conclusion: Consilience and Performance

All of the above new areas of study tend towards more integrative approaches towards the ‘art of the state’. They offer possibilities – but only possibilities – for consilience. It is highly unlikely however that this will happen through some sort of spontaneous Hegelian synthesis of ideas. Unless action is taken at the level of intellectual discourse, institutional incentives and structures for researchers and encouragement from the domain of the state itself these consilient tendencies are unlikely to be fully realised.

There are two separate types of consilience here: what might be called ‘lateral’ consilience – joining up the theories from various sub-areas of the art of the state – and vertical consilience – grounding such theories more in the ‘base’ social science disciplines and in emerging useful theories from other scientific areas (such as
evolutionary psychology, network theory, chaos and complexity theories, etc). This is not, I should stress, to suggest that some such consilience is not already happening. What is however obvious is that a consistent consilience approach is lacking in the study of the state.

The consequences of lack of consilience in this one specific arena of social sciences are a performance failure in two respects. Firstly, social scientific explanations of what happens in those human social organisations associated with ‘public’ activities will continue to under-perform in the sense of failing to yield satisfactory causal theories. Even within social sciences those studying the art of the state have failed to establish the same level of recognition and influence as other base disciplines or similar multi-disciplinary areas such as the Business Schools.

Secondly, and consequentially, efforts to improve the performance of public institutions are likely to continue to prove inadequate. For social scientists engaged in studying the state and its activities this might not prove too much of a personal or professional problem – social sciences, including our own, have managed so far without making the sort of verifiable advances of the physical sciences. It might be professionally dissatisfying but not necessarily fatal to the profession but the effect on the activities of the state and its recipients is perhaps more serious. It is not that some progress is not being made in improving performance – some involving social scientists and some not. But it is piece-meal and certainly nowhere near the standards established by the physical sciences.

To paraphrase Marx, if the philosophers can’t even understand the world in a joined-up way they are unlikely to be able to change it.

END
References


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