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Focus non-western forms of governance: a statement for equivalence functionalism in governance research in areas of limited statehood

Anke Draude, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

Who provides governance outputs, and in which manner? These are pivotal questions for an innovative governance research in areas of limited statehood. They aim at discovering alternatives to typical western governance forms. If the state malfunctions as in so many places, societies depend on such alternatives. That is why conventional debates like that about failing states are unsatisfying, analysing merely imitations or collapses of western modes of governance in areas of limited statehood. The proposed paper will understand the concept of governance in a radical functionalist way: it thus attempts to disengage the discourse from a eurocentric focus on the state to open the concept for the study of alternative forms of governance.

My reflections start from a discourse-analytical observation: The definition of governance seeks to capture the totality of mechanisms a certain collective employs in order to regulate societal processes; i.e. the state is an optional but not necessary governance actor. Contrary to this the governance discourse premises a necessary involvement of the state as coordinator or manager of the governance process (so that governance in many developing and transforming countries would be impossible). Moreover, the state is omnipresent in the discourse that uses (and has to use) the genuine euroamerican dichotomy of state and society in order to make governance visible. Both state foci - state as referent object and statecentric scientific tools - will be explained with the constructivist paradigm which claims that every observation is biased through the context of its observer. And the context of the socio-scientific observer is the euroamerican history in which terms and theorems developed.

I argue that by using the method of equivalence functionalism the criticised state focus can be eluded so that relevant non-state actors get adequate advertence. The method focuses on governance outputs and asks for its different providers or modi of provision. The outputs have to be defined first, from an inevitably eurocentric starting perspective (f.e. ideal OECD-state functions like security or health care). The blind spot here is the possible oversight of governance outputs that might be demanded in non-western regions. However, by focusing on some contingent outputs, equivalence functionalism opens a non-eurocentrically pre-typicised field for possible combinations of actors or regulation structures. This open field is a necessary condition for recognizing alternative, non-western forms of governance.