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# Can meso-governments use metagovernance tools to tackle complex policy problems?

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Recent years have witnessed a trend towards increasing regionalisation in a range of different countries which has resulted in the growth of meso-level governments and their powers (Hooghe and Marks 2016). At the same time there has been significant scholarly interest in metagovernance as researchers have sought to understand ways in which governments and other actors seek to address complex policy problems (Sørensen and Torfing 2009; Torfing 2016). This paper brings together these two developments through an exploratory study of whether, how and why meso-level governments use the tools and techniques of metagovernance to develop and implement policy agendas.

Our analysis shows that meso-level governments may use metagovernance tools in ways that are have not hitherto featured prominently in the metagovernance literature. It offers three main contributions. First, it identifies a range of factors that aid metagovernance practices at the meso-level government. Second, it shows how a meso-government can act as ‘governor-participant’ in networks, which blurs the distinction in the existing literature between ‘hands-on’ and ‘hands-off’ forms of metagovernance. Third, it suggests that in the case of meso-governments, metagovernance may be practised by much more junior officials than previous studies have suggested.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section examines the concepts of metagovernance and meso-government and specifies our research question. We then outline our research methods. Next we describe the case of homelessness policy in Wales. We then present our findings. The penultimate section discusses our main findings. The final section explores the implications of our study for theories of metagovernance and suggests further research to test the wider applicability of our findings.

28

## 29 2 | MESO-GOVERNMENT AND METAGOVERNANCE

30 Meso-level governments sit between the national and local levels and can encompass a  
31 very wide range of institutional arrangements. Sharpe (1993), one of the first scholars to  
32 adopt the term meso-government, applied it to county councils, the highest tier of local  
33 government in the UK. But more recently it has come to be seen as being qualitatively  
34 different from both the national and the local. Hooghe et al. (2016, p.15) suggest that a  
35 hallmark of meso-governments is that they 'exert self-rule within distinct homelands',  
36 which implies a level of autonomy and a degree of permanence and identity which  
37 extends beyond the local and encompasses more than mere administrative functionality.

38 Metagovernance has been characterised as a reconfiguration of state primacy in  
39 response to a putative loss of powers resulting from social, economic and political change  
40 (Peters 2010). However, in the case of meso-governments, whose formal powers are  
41 often already curtailed by material, constitutional, and institutional factors connected to  
42 their place in a national territorial hierarchy, metagovernance can also be seen as means  
43 of building policy capacity to overcome the limitations imposed by their subordinate  
44 status.

45 The concept of metagovernance is grounded in an extensive literature on governance  
46 networks theory. Although this has developed from a number of distinct traditions, Klijn  
47 and Koppenjan (2012) helpfully identify some common assumptions and concepts. They  
48 suggest that policy and service delivery are seen as emerging from complex processes  
49 of interaction between within networks of interdependent actors, whose strategies are  
50 framed by their (differing) perceptions of problems and solutions. The complexity created  
51 by multiple interactions means that networks require guidance and management, a  
52 process described by Jessop (2016, p. 9) as 'the governance of governance' and by  
53 Torfing (2016, p. 525) as 'metagovernance', which he defines as 'deliberate attempts to  
54 facilitate, manage, and direct interactive governance areas without undermining their  
55 capacity for self-regulation too much'.

56 Blanco et al. (2011) argue that the concept of governance networks has often been  
57 depicted as a response to post-modern and post-industrial social and economic changes  
58 which have reduced the capacity of the state to direct policy change. The closely related  
59 concept of the 'hollowing out' of government developed by Rhodes (1997; 2007) argues  
60 that central government's transfer of responsibility for service delivery to a range of other  
61 actors meant that although it was a participant in networks, it no longer exercised direct  
62 control of them. However, proponents of the concept of metagovernance suggest that  
63 while the range of tools and resources at the state's disposal have changed, and some  
64 have been diminished or lost, the state has not become merely one actor among many  
65 within governance networks. Networks continue to operate 'in the shadow of hierarchy  
66 cast by public and/or private metagovernors...who are capable of regulating and reducing  
67 the autonomy of the network' (Sørensen and Torfing 2009:236). In many cases the state,  
68 even at the local level (Fenwick et al 2012), may use the management of networks as a  
69 means to reconfigure its capacity for action and maintain its primacy in policy and  
70 implementation.

71 Dommert and Flinders (2015) propose a demarcation between the 'governance of  
72 governance' view of metagovernance, associated with scholars such as Sørensen and  
73 Torfing, and a more state-centric relational approach, associated with scholars such as  
74 Marsh (2011). However, this difference may be overstated since although Torfing (2016)  
75 argues that whilst any network actor who can command sufficient policy tools may act as  
76 a metagovernor, in practice state actors usually enjoy advantages over other potential  
77 metagovernors, because they command, and have the time and experience to deploy, a  
78 greater number and range of tools, including funding, staff, and the legal coercive powers  
79 to underpin their authority.

80 Sørensen and Torfing (2009) and Torfing (2016) identify four categories of  
81 metagovernance, which we have applied to frame the empirical analysis presented in this  
82 paper. The first is design. A metagovernor can influence the character, composition,  
83 scope, and time horizons of the network by shaping its rules, norms, and procedures. At  
84 the time of network formation this may help maintain an openness about which actors  
85 need to be involved by focussing on objectives rather than programmes, and later it can

86 maintain or quicken the pace of the work of the network by setting or negotiating  
87 milestones. Second, the metagovernor can steer the goals and framework of a network,  
88 establish its legal parameters and basis, and construct the overall discursive storyline  
89 which defines problems and possible solutions. Setting network goals in ways that align  
90 with those of individual actors can make the network more effective by convincing actors  
91 of the necessity for collaboration. Collection and diffusion of 'best practices' through the  
92 network can shape actors' understanding of the problem and their selection of means to  
93 reach their goals. By funding or supporting selected activities, or by shaping distribution  
94 of roles among network members, the metagovernor can foster interdependence between  
95 them; and network members may be rewarded for participation by being granted access  
96 to other policy arenas, or by being recognised as particularly trustworthy and valued.

97 Sørensen and Torfing describe these first two categories of as 'hands-off' tools of  
98 metagovernance, because they are more concerned with shaping interaction than  
99 participating in it. The other two categories are more actively participative, and so may be  
100 described as 'hands-on' tools. Thus the third category relates to a more active role in  
101 network management, seeking to support network participants in resolving differences  
102 and reducing transaction costs of participation by, for example providing resources,  
103 including resources for meetings and learning opportunities, and by agenda-setting and  
104 arbitration to prevent and defuse conflict. Finally, the metagovernor can participate  
105 directly in the network, influencing outcomes through active leadership, coalition building  
106 and argument. This may also include fostering trust within the network by displaying,  
107 unilaterally if necessary, trust in network members. Sørensen and Torfing argue that in  
108 practice, a combination of hands-on and hands-off approaches, responding to different  
109 imperatives at different stages of the network's operation, is likely to prove most effective.  
110 Hands-on metagovernance will, they suggest, be more common in policy areas that relate  
111 to core functions of the state, or to those deemed to be strategically important: that is, in  
112 areas where failure would have - politically or literally - fatal consequences.

113 Recent studies (Hovik and Hanssen (2015), Stevens and Verhoest (2016), Etherington  
114 and Jones (2016), and Bailey and Wood (2017)) have used Sørensen and Torfing's  
115 typology to analyse how national governments use metagovernance tools in their

116 dealings with regional and/or local actors. Our analysis addresses a different focus,  
117 namely the exercise of metagovernance by a meso-government, and specifically whether  
118 a meso-government can use the tools of metagovernance to tackle complex policy  
119 problems, and how and why it might choose to do so.

120 Our study is exploratory and is underpinned by the observation that whilst meso-  
121 governments lack of some of the policy levers that are available to national governments,  
122 they have access to a range of quasi-national resources (such as legislative powers) and  
123 quasi-local relationships (including proximity to local actors and the ability to cultivate a  
124 greater breadth and depth of interactions with them). Our hypothesis is that this blend of  
125 formal powers and local connectivity means that skilful deployment of the tools of  
126 metagovernance may enable policy actors at meso-level to exploit the advantages, and  
127 offset some of the limitations, of their intermediate position between national and local  
128 government. If it is the case that metagovernance is an important part of a meso-  
129 government's policy repertoire, studying it in this context may add new insights to the  
130 existing literature, which has hitherto focused largely on metagovernance at national and  
131 local levels.

132

### 133 3 | DATA AND METHODS

134 Our empirical analysis focuses on the development and implementation of one of the  
135 most significant pieces of primary legislation enacted to date by the devolved National  
136 Assembly for Wales, the statutory framework for homelessness services contained in Part  
137 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014.

138 We selected this case following a series of exploratory interviews and a roundtable  
139 discussion during which we asked well placed informants to identify exemplars which  
140 demonstrated how the devolved institutions in Wales develop and implement policy.  
141 Focusing on this case for in-depth analysis enabled us to understand in some detail the  
142 process and factors that were in play in a particular policy episode at the meso-level.  
143 Clearly, we have to be cautious about generalising from a single case. However, the many

144 Welsh policy practitioners, as well as academics, with whom we consulted in the course  
145 of the research suggested that this case offers a recent and relatively ambitious which  
146 shows how the Welsh Government can deploy the powers and policy available to it to  
147 best effect. Adapting Goertz's Avoid Overdetermination Rule (Goertz 2016), we believe  
148 that in order to understand a phenomenon - in this case, meta-governance - it can be  
149 most fruitful to study an example which approaches more closely to an 'ideal type' of that  
150 phenomenon. The understanding gained from this study can then be tested in other  
151 settings and combined with insights gained from them.

152 We collected primary data from four sources.

153 First, as noted above, in order to identify potential cases and the key issues to be  
154 investigated, we conducted a series of semi-structured interviews and a three hour focus  
155 roundtable discussion with senior civil servants from the Welsh and UK government,  
156 senior local authority officers and leading academics. The roundtable discussion was  
157 recorded and the key findings written up in a report that was circulated to participants for  
158 checking. In order to allow an honest and open discussion, it was conducted under the  
159 'Chatham House' rule which stipulates that information disclosed in a meeting may be  
160 used freely on condition that the identity of the speaker, and of all other participants in the  
161 meeting, is not revealed (Chatham House n.d.).

162 Second, having identified our case, we analysed in detail consultation papers, reports,  
163 and research on homelessness produced and commissioned by the Welsh Government  
164 and other stakeholders in Wales since 1999, and official reports of debates in the National  
165 Assembly during the passage of the legislation in 2013-14, to identify the main episodes  
166 and actors in the development of the policy.

167 Third, we conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with sixteen Welsh Government  
168 officials, academics, politicians, and local government and third sector actors who had  
169 played significant roles in development and implementation of the homelessness  
170 legislation. Interviews were conducted in summer 2016 on a non-attributable basis in  
171 settings of interviewees' own choosing. Most interviews were conducted face-to-face but,  
172 at the interviewees' request, two were undertaken by telephone. They typically lasted

173 about an hour and were recorded, professionally transcribed, and made available to  
174 interviewees for factual correction or clarification (although only a very few minor  
175 corrections were requested). Transcripts were then coded using a manual thematic  
176 analysis to identify principal themes.

177 Our initial selection of interviewees focused on individuals who were identified as key  
178 actors from our analysis of documents and knowledge of this sector and we managed to  
179 interview all of the key actors with the exception of the minister who had overseen the  
180 passage of the legislation. However, several of the interviewees had worked closely with  
181 him, including in some cases as trusted specialist advisers, and they were able to offer  
182 us insights into his thinking and actions. Our initial sample were shown to have included  
183 almost all of the other important actors, but we adopted a 'snowball' sampling method,  
184 asking interviewees to identify others who had been involved (Devine 1995) and this  
185 yielded one additional informant who provided particularly valuable information about  
186 implementation of the policy. Although, as we shall show, there was a substantial and  
187 broad consensus among interviewees, there points of significant disagreements and we  
188 are confident that our selection captured this diversity of positions.

189 The roles of the interviewees quoted verbatim in this paper are shown in Table 1.

190

191 Insert Table 1 here

192

193 Our fourth data source was a three hour policy reunion which brought together seven of  
194 our key informants and an academic discussant to discuss the key emerging findings from  
195 our documentary analysis and interviews. Policy reunions or witness seminars - the terms  
196 are effectively synonymous, although in using the term policy reunion we follow the  
197 practice of the Institute for Government (Rutter et al 2012) - bring together key actors  
198 associated with a particular historical or policy episode to reflect on their experiences and  
199 deliberate, in a structured way, on key issues, critical incidents, and areas of agreement  
200 and differences of perspective. The method has limitations (Centre for History in Public

201 Health n.d.): it depends upon the ability to select and gather suitable participants, and in  
202 addition to the questions of candour and reliability of recall which are shared by other  
203 approaches which rely on oral testimony, the structured group setting may sometimes  
204 inhibit frank discussion. But it can produce data which, when examined alongside other  
205 evidence help to provide additional insight into issues such as the motivation,  
206 underpinning assumptions, and dynamics of groups and individual actors. In our case it  
207 also provided an opportunity to test and affirm or revise key findings.

208 Participants in the policy reunion are shown in Table 2

209

210 Insert Table 2 here

211

212 All of the participants in the policy reunion were still active in the sector: consequently,  
213 they requested that, as in the earlier roundtable, the discussion be conducted under the  
214 'Chatham House Rule'. This is a departure from the usual (but not invariable) practice of  
215 policy reunions/witness seminars (History of Modern Biomedicine Research Group n.d.)  
216 but was necessary to ensure open and honest discussion. The reunion was audio  
217 recorded and the recorded data were coded using a manual thematic analysis to identify  
218 principal themes within them. A draft report was then compiled and made available to  
219 interviewees for factual correction or clarification (again, only a few minor corrections  
220 were requested) before a final version of the report was published.

221

## 222 4 | DEVOLUTION AND HOMELESSNESS POLICY IN WALES

223 Until 1999, most areas of domestic policy in Wales were the responsibility of the Welsh  
224 Office, a department of the UK Government, and operated within legislative frameworks  
225 set by the Westminster Parliament. Since 1999, successive Acts of the UK Parliament  
226 have first created devolved institutions (Government of Wales Act 1998) and then  
227 extended their powers (Government of Wales Act 2006, Wales Acts 2014 and 2017). An

228 executive, responsible to the Assembly and now known as the Welsh Government, was  
229 established in 2001 and recognised in law in 2006 (s45, Government of Wales Act 2006).  
230 In 2011 the Assembly was granted full primary legislative powers in devolved matters  
231 under part 4 of the Government of Wales Act 2006. The Wales Act 2017 gave the  
232 National Assembly full legislative powers in all matters not explicitly reserved to  
233 Westminster, including health, education, housing, local government, agriculture, the  
234 environment, and significant areas of transport and economic development. It also  
235 devolved limited taxation and borrowing powers to Wales. Approximately 80% of the  
236 Welsh Government's overall expenditure budget continues to come from a block grant  
237 from the UK Treasury the overall size of which is determined by UK government's  
238 decisions about levels of spending on public services in England (Welsh Government  
239 2018). However, the Welsh Government determines how it distributes this funding  
240 between devolved services.

241 The Welsh Government therefore possesses the characteristics of a meso-government  
242 as set out by Hooghe et al. (2016). It can be understood as a Type I jurisdiction in terms  
243 of Hooghe and Marks' (2003) classification of sub-national governments because it is  
244 responsible for a range of functions and policy areas, its boundaries do not intersect with  
245 any other at its level, it is intended to be stable over time, and it possesses representative  
246 institutions. In terms of Hooghe and Marks's later Regional Authority Index (Hooghe et al.  
247 2016: Hooghe and Marks 2016), it exercises a significant degree of self-rule<sup>1</sup> and has 'the  
248 capacity to make legitimate and binding decisions for a collectivity' (Hooghe and Marks  
249 2016, p.29) which enables it to develop distinctive policies.

250 As explained above, this paper focuses on the development and implementation of  
251 legislation to tackle homelessness from 2009, when the Welsh Government publicly  
252 identified the need to reform the existing statutory framework (Welsh Assembly  
253 Government 2009), until 2015, when Part 2 of the 2014 Act came into force. This reform  
254 of homelessness policy entailed substantial, innovative, distinctive and apparently  
255 successful changes to an existing statutory framework which Wales had shared with  
256 England. Since 1978, local authorities in Wales (and England) have had a statutory duty  
257 to secure long-term housing for homeless persons who met certain eligibility criteria. After

258 1999, homelessness was 'always ...on the radar' (Academic informant 1) of Welsh policy  
259 makers who produced their own national homelessness strategies and used their  
260 secondary legislative powers to make marginal changes to the inherited statutory  
261 framework. But importantly, during this period, that framework came to be seen as  
262 inadequate by many homelessness policy actors, within and beyond government and  
263 beyond.

264 There were three reasons for this (Clapham et al. 2009, Mackie 2015): the existing  
265 framework offered little help to homeless people who did not meet all its eligibility criteria,  
266 rising numbers of households in Wales were being placed by councils in (often costly and  
267 unsatisfactory) temporary accommodation while their applications were being processed,  
268 and there was an increasing focus on the importance of preventing homelessness.  
269 Prevention acquired growing prominence in successive Welsh National Homelessness  
270 Strategies and several local authorities developed their own non-statutory preventative  
271 approaches, sometimes with support from the Welsh Government (Authors 2017).  
272 Ultimately, Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 would give councils additional and  
273 substantial duties to help people who are threatened with homelessness to retain their  
274 accommodation, and to help people who are actually homeless to secure interim  
275 accommodation. These obligations are owed to almost all people in need of help, and not  
276 just those who meet the restrictive eligibility criteria for the long-term housing duty. These  
277 reforms are widely seen as a success. They achieved many of their key aims and have  
278 heavily influenced subsequent legislation in England (Fitzpatrick et al. 2017; Mackie et al  
279 2017).

280 Homelessness had a particular political significance in Wales. Wanna (2014: 566) notes  
281 that subnational political leaders 'frequently juxtapose their political objectives or  
282 leadership styles in contrast to central or national leaders/governments', and Welsh  
283 Ministers were keen to establish a socially progressive policy agenda, that was clearly  
284 differentiated from that of the UK Government (Morgan 2002, Drakeford 2007). In the  
285 absence of devolved powers over social security or (until very recently) taxation,  
286 homelessness became an 'emblematic' issue (academic informant 2) in which Wales  
287 could develop a distinctive approach. Thus when it became likely that primary legislative

288 powers would be devolved, Welsh policymakers were keen to identify policy areas in  
289 which they could demonstrate that the new legislative powers would make a difference.  
290 Homelessness, which was heavily embedded in legislation and was already the subject  
291 of considerable networked governance by the Welsh Government, quickly emerged as a  
292 leading contender (Third Sector Witness, Policy Reunion).

293

## 294 5 | FINDINGS

295 The data gathered from our initial roundtable, the documentary analysis, interviews, and  
296 policy reunion all pointed to the existence of a pattern of consistent and deliberate network  
297 management by the Welsh Government, which reflected all four of the categories of tools  
298 of metagovernance identified by Sørensen and Torfing and we therefore use their  
299 typology to structure the presentation of our key findings.

300

### 301 5.1 | Network design

302 Welsh policy makers operate in a small country which has a small number of governing  
303 institutions and often close-knit policy communities. This makes it possible to bring  
304 together the main actors from the private, public and third sectors, at least in a physical  
305 and literal sense (Rabey 2015). As a result members of Welsh sectoral policy networks  
306 know each other well and interact frequently. Furthermore, the limited policy capacity of  
307 the small civil service in Wales prompts policymakers to rely more on non-governmental  
308 actors for information and support. (Both these factors have also been identified as  
309 characteristic of the so-called 'Scottish policy style' (Cairney et al, 2016, p. 340).

310 Consistent with this approach, our data showed that the Welsh Government played an  
311 important role in establishing and designing institutional networks relating to  
312 homelessness. Although the pre-1999 Welsh Office had of necessity cultivated  
313 relationships with selected partners (Deacon 2002), devolution produced a development  
314 of this practice whereby close engagement with a range of actors became the norm:

315 I think it was more difficult with the Welsh Office quite frankly. It was  
316 a much more up and down kind of relationship and became much  
317 more of a critical friend partnership with the Assembly (Third Sector  
318 informant 1).

319 The Welsh Government fostered a set of compact, well-integrated, and more or less  
320 formal networks which enabled a flow and exchange of information between it and key  
321 actors from local government and the third sector. Two networks were particularly  
322 important in the case of homelessness policy. The Local Authority Homelessness  
323 Network, which was 'very much a part of the development of [the legislation]' (Local  
324 Government informant 1), is discussed below (section 5.2). The Homelessness Strategy  
325 Working Group (HSWG) was originally convened in the early 2000s to monitor and inform  
326 the development of the first devolved National Homelessness Strategy (Third Sector  
327 informant 1; former Assembly Member; Welsh Government informant 1) and included  
328 local authority and third sector stakeholders. It continued to exist beyond its original  
329 purpose because its members saw that it had value as a forum for

330 'two-way information and debate around the development of national  
331 policy' and a 'sounding board and a way of keeping channels very  
332 much open with the various sectors' (Welsh Government  
333 informant 1).

334 '[it] was a group which may have been a talking shop ... but which  
335 formed the basis for something productive that's now come to fruition'  
336 (Consultant).

337 Two features of the HSWG are particularly noteworthy. First, while all interviewees  
338 depicted it very positively, it continued to be 'owned' by the Welsh Government in the  
339 sense that it was convened and chaired by civil servants who emphasised that its role  
340 was advisory with responsibility for policy decisions remaining with Ministers (Welsh  
341 Government informant 1). Secondly, it existed to debate and inform strategies and policy  
342 frameworks (and, thus, objectives), rather specific programmes. This enabled it, as

343 Sørensen and Torfing's analysis would suggest, to take fairly open and pragmatic  
344 decisions about its membership:

345 ... Mostly [peak organisations] but we do have some individual  
346 representatives from the third sector and from Local Government as  
347 well... I think we started off with the representatives and then we  
348 invited on people as the group felt would be helpful ... (Welsh  
349 Government informant 1).

350

## 351 5.2 | Steering network goals and framework

352 In addition to establishing and designing homelessness policy networks, the Welsh  
353 Government took an active role in steering their operation and supporting the work of  
354 networks which were not of its own creation. Ansell et al. (2017) have identified the  
355 value of collaborative policymaking in creating shared problem definitions, and  
356 developing and implementing solutions, and our case presents two examples of this.  
357 The Local Authority Homelessness Network brought together homelessness service  
358 managers from the 22 local authorities (Local Authority informant 1). It was managed by  
359 the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), but funded by the Welsh  
360 Government to conduct

361 'pieces of work ...on behalf of Welsh Government or on behalf of the  
362 Local Authorities or a sort of mixture of the two, looking at ... good  
363 practice and developing ... practice and looking at implementation'  
364 (Local Authority informant 1).

365 This network brought into policy development and implementation practitioners whose  
366 views were seen as being often:

367 '... much more pragmatic and largely constructive about things' [than  
368 the official positions of the WLGA, which represented the local  
369 government sector as a whole] (Consultant).

370 [The Homelessness Network is] working with officials, Local Authority  
371 employees, and sometimes WLGA is a members' [= local politicians']  
372 response and sometimes there is a slight difference (Local Authority  
373 informant 1).

374 The second example concerns the creation of a shared policy narrative. In 2011, with the  
375 granting of full primary legislative powers, the Welsh Government commissioned a team  
376 of academics and consultants, well known and respected in Welsh housing circles, to  
377 examine, and explore stakeholder perspectives on, the existing statutory framework and  
378 to identify options for improvement. Known as the 'Mackie Review'<sup>2</sup> (Fitzpatrick et al  
379 2017), this was credited by our informants with creating a remarkable consensus about  
380 the nature and causes of homelessness in Wales.

381 The review team adopted a highly participative approach, engaging widely with local  
382 authorities, housing providers and other stakeholders across Wales:

383 'everyone who had an interest had an opportunity to get involved.  
384 Lots of work around Wales, road-shows' (Welsh Government  
385 informant 1).

386 'There was definitely more of the being out and about and actually  
387 speaking to the grassroots' (Academic informant 2).

388 Although it drew significantly on comparative data about approaches outside England and  
389 Wales, and administrative data from local authorities about their responses to applications  
390 for homelessness assistance, a very important part of the review was the series of  
391 workshops with local authority practitioners and other stakeholders, from which the review  
392 team developed a substantial evidence base (Authors 2017). Invitations were distributed  
393 widely: the team identified some invitees, particularly through networks like the Local  
394 Authority Homelessness Network, and then asked them to pass invitations on to anyone  
395 they thought might want to attend. Discussions were designed to elicit participants' views  
396 as openly as possible:

397 'This is an open discussion. It's your view. You don't have to  
398 conform to the views of your management. We just want to know  
399 about your perspectives collectively that can help us identify'  
400 (Academic informant 1)

401 and succeeded in doing so. Consequently, because the Review's recommendations were  
402 substantially informed by evidence about the best of existing local practice, practitioners  
403 had some sense of ownership of them and a common storyline was developed:

404 ...there was a point at which people got behind it and that came halfway through  
405 the review, because at the start there were a lot of conflicting ideas...about which  
406 direction [the review] might go....The process [the review] went through carried  
407 people with [it]. It was a process, not just an output. (Academic Witness, Policy  
408 Reunion).

409 Later, the Local Authority Homelessness Network organised a programme of  
410 implementation training to help local authority and third sector homelessness practitioners  
411 move to the new ways of working which the reformed framework required. Crucially, the  
412 programme, which because of the small size of Wales was able to 'train everybody, every  
413 case worker across the country' (Local Authority informant 1), was designed and  
414 delivered by a joint team from the Network, the Welsh Government homelessness policy  
415 team, and a significant third sector housing advice organisation. This, and the fact that  
416 local authority and third sector staff were trained together, meant that it contributed  
417 significantly to developing and disseminating a shared view of the nature and purpose of  
418 the reforms (Local Authority informant 1).

419 These are clear examples of the use of 'hands off' tools of metagovernance, although  
420 they were exercised in a way that entailed a fairly closely engaged role for Welsh  
421 Government officials because of the small size of Wales and of its homelessness policy  
422 community.

423

### 424 5.3 | Active network management

425 Turning to 'hands-on' tools, interviewees cited numerous examples of active network  
426 management by the Welsh Government, including the implementation training described  
427 above. By the late 2000s there was broad agreement within the Welsh homelessness  
428 policy community about the shortcomings of the existing statutory homelessness  
429 framework and the principles which should underpin reforms. But there were significant  
430 disagreements between the local authorities, speaking through their representative body,  
431 the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), and some other network members,  
432 on matters such as the likely resource costs of reforms (Consultant; Third Sector  
433 informant 2). Welsh Government officials and ministers played an active and vital role as  
434 arbitrators in intra-network conflicts and were able to make decisions which were  
435 accepted as binding by all parties.

436 These decisions were conditioned by an awareness that while the Welsh Government  
437 had ultimate legislative and financial responsibility for the homelessness framework, it  
438 was local authorities that would implement it. Nonetheless, the open lines of  
439 communication which existed through formal networks facilitated the making, and  
440 subsequent acceptance, of these decisions (Third Sector informant 2; Consultant). Welsh  
441 Government Ministers also played a role in network management by signalling their  
442 strong support for collaboration between actors.

443

### 444 5.4 | Active network participation

445 Active participation by Welsh Government officials was a distinctive feature of formal and  
446 informal networks:

447 I've had the opportunity to go to England a few times and present  
448 and I would say that's one of the big things that struck me [about  
449 Wales], the involvement and the real consideration of what other  
450 agencies think about the legislation and their opinions... It has been

451 a very, very collaborative piece of work and I think that's one of its  
452 strengths really (Local Authority informant 1)

453 In particular, interviewees presented the leader of the Welsh Government's  
454 Homelessness Policy team as having been consistently engaged with and accessible to  
455 other actors:

456 I would give [that official] and his 'team'- two or however many it is,  
457 it's a very small and delicate team, I would give them lots of credence  
458 really in terms of being open to ...co-production (Consultant)

459 On some occasions this engagement took the form of building coalitions within networks  
460 to circumvent opposition. For example when there were disagreements with the WLGA  
461 over resource costs a decision was taken to seek alternative perspectives from  
462 homelessness service lead officers in local authorities to test the claims being made by  
463 the WLGA. This was a 'highly tactical' manoeuvre 'to get a more sensible and balanced  
464 position from the people who were actually... it was actually respecting their expertise and  
465 professionalism' (Consultant).

466 Another example of active participation in networks by the Welsh Government was the  
467 revision of the statutory Code of Guidance for local authorities on provision of  
468 homelessness services. Although a code had existed under the previous homelessness  
469 legislation, the new statutory framework made it imperative to revise it, and a cross-  
470 sectoral working group with strong local government and third sector participation was  
471 established by the Welsh Government. Importantly, the Group's first Chair was a  
472 specialist adviser to the Minister for Housing and Regeneration who was widely respected  
473 within the Welsh homelessness sector. Her leadership at an early stage was an important  
474 factor in imbuing the group with a sense of 'shared endeavour' (Consultant), which made  
475 it a very effective forum for identifying and reviewing problems and possible solutions.

476

## 477 6 | DISCUSSION

478 The case of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 demonstrates that the Welsh Government  
479 used metagovernance to develop an innovative policy framework that differed from  
480 previous approaches to homelessness in Wales and those adopted across the border in  
481 England. The answer to the first part of our research question is then that a meso-  
482 government can use the tools of metagovernance to address a complex policy problem.

483 Turning to the questions of how and why they might choose to do so, our case shows  
484 that, as we anticipated, metagovernance offered the Welsh Government a way of  
485 mitigating some of the limitations of its *constitutionally* intermediate position and  
486 maximising the benefits of its *geographically and hierarchically* intermediate position. In  
487 a small country with a tight knit policy community, it was possible for government officials  
488 to establish networked relationships that were comprehensive and extended to the front  
489 line of policy delivery. The gap between policymakers and implementers, already small in  
490 a country with only a single layer (and a comparatively small number) of principal local  
491 authorities below the subnational government, thus became narrower still, and while  
492 policymaking and implementation were not fused, they did come much closer to being  
493 part of a wider collaborative process. The proximity of the Welsh Government to other  
494 actors in the field meant that its practice of metagovernance extended upwards and  
495 downwards, involving both ministers and, routinely, relatively junior officials.

496 This is a significant finding because one of the principal arguments deployed by  
497 advocates of decentralising powers previously held by national governments is that meso-  
498 governments are more likely to pursue policies that address the particular needs and  
499 priorities of their territories (Kay 2003; Bradbury 2005), whilst one of the enduring  
500 concerns about devolution has been whether meso-government can marshal the capacity  
501 and capabilities needed to do this (Andrews and Martin 2010).

502 Our analysis also highlights the importance of combining formal and informal powers and  
503 resources. Significant reform of Welsh homelessness policy would not have been  
504 achieved without the Welsh Government's law-making powers, personnel and financial  
505 resources. The Welsh Government's funding for the 'Mackie Review' and implementation  
506 training was vital. Its homelessness and housing policy teams, though small, constituted

507 a core capacity for policymaking, co-ordination and communication. Most importantly,  
508 because homelessness provision in the UK is deeply embedded in a framework of  
509 statutory services and duties, significant reform required the ability to make new  
510 legislation. The devolution of primary legislative powers to Wales in 2011 was recognised  
511 as a step-change in Welsh homelessness reform by the Welsh Government and others.

512 However, while these formal powers and resources were necessary, they were not  
513 sufficient to achieve it effectively. This was partly because statutory homelessness  
514 services are delivered by local authorities (and to some extent the third sector), but also  
515 because the whole process of policy development, including conceptualisation and  
516 definition of problems, identification of policy options, and introduction and  
517 implementation of the new framework, required the collaboration of other key actors in  
518 the homelessness policy community. By bringing to the table, through managed networks,  
519 a wide range of stakeholders, the Welsh Government could achieve decisions that were  
520 informed by their experience and understanding of the policy issues and could secure  
521 from them a degree of commitment to the reforms, as well as procedural legitimacy.

522 Metagovernance tools were important not just in the period in which this new policy for  
523 tackling homelessness was being actively developed and implemented but also in the  
524 previous decade when the Welsh Government lacked law making powers and fostered,  
525 managed, and participated in homelessness policy networks because there was little else  
526 that it could do. However, as its formal powers increased, so did its capability to act as a  
527 metagovernor. The prospect of devolution of primary legislative powers, and thus of a  
528 'homegrown' statutory framework, prompted non-government actors to review their  
529 approach to collaboration with local and Welsh Government, and to conclude that  
530 collaboration offered them the best chance not only of achieving goals which they  
531 supported, but of influencing difficult choices that could affect their role. Furthermore,  
532 shifting the focus of policymaking from strategies and co-ordination to taking decisions  
533 about legal obligations in what was, as we have seen, a highly politically salient area  
534 moved the practice of metagovernance, at times, to a higher level of authority, as Welsh  
535 Government ministers became more involved in arbitration and decision-making. Thus,

536 the more formal authority the Welsh Government acquired, the deeper and longer the  
537 shadow of hierarchy over metagovernance became.

538

## 539 7 | CONCLUSIONS

540 Our analysis demonstrates the usefulness of the theoretical framework developed by  
541 Sørensen and Torfing (2009; 2016) but also offers insights that can develop and build on  
542 it thus extending our understanding of metagovernance.

543 We found evidence that the meso-government in our case employed all four of the  
544 categories of metagovernance that described by Sørensen and Torfing. Interestingly  
545 though, in practice the boundaries between them were often blurred and practices were  
546 deployed concurrently. For example, the implementation training described above is an  
547 example of steering the goals and framework of the network by creating a common  
548 storyline about the reforms. But it can also be seen as an example of active network  
549 management by providing opportunities and resources for the network to function, and,  
550 perhaps, as active network participation, strengthening the coalition by demonstrating and  
551 fostering trust between Welsh Government, local government, and third sector actors.

552 This blurring of the categories of metagovernance was particularly evident when it came  
553 to 'hands-on' and 'hands off' tools. Welsh Government officials played multiple roles,  
554 consistently shaping and steering networks through active network management whilst  
555 also participating in them. These actors can be described as 'governor-participants' who  
556 combined the 'hands-off' tools of network design and steering with 'hands on' tools such  
557 as active participation and network management. They were an important means by  
558 which the Welsh Government governed networks, and the formal governing resources  
559 such as political and legislative authority which the government alone possessed, gave  
560 these officials a decisive advantage as participants. If, as we have suggested, a  
561 characteristic of a meso-level government is a combination of quasi-national formal  
562 powers with proximity to wider policy communities and a relatively narrow distance  
563 between policymaking and implementation, the governor-participant role can be seen as

564 one which may be particularly important in the case of meso-governments, and its  
565 identification offers a new contribution to our understanding of metagovernance.

566 The final contribution of our study is to highlight the agency exercised by relatively junior  
567 officials. Sørensen and Torfing (2009) suggest that the strategic and collaborative  
568 competences required for the practice of metagovernance may not be found among  
569 lower-level officials. However, our research shows that much of the Welsh Government's  
570 day to day governance of, and participation in, homelessness policy networks fell to a  
571 junior, though experienced and well respected, officials in its small homelessness policy  
572 team. This may be a particular feature of the exercise of metagovernance by meso-  
573 governments which lack the policy capacity possessed by national governments but  
574 whose officials are 'closer' to delivery. In our case it was linked to two main factors. First,  
575 the relatively small size of the Welsh homelessness sector and the Welsh Government's  
576 homelessness team allowed, and probably required, junior officials to take an active  
577 metagovernance role as network governor-participants. Second, the salience of  
578 homelessness as a policy issue empowered them to take action in the knowledge that  
579 they had the backing of their minister. Sørensen and Torfing suggest that hands-on  
580 metagovernance is associated with policy areas that are core activities of the state, or  
581 which are seen as strategically important. As explained above, in Wales, homelessness  
582 was, if not a core function of the state, a highly state-centric policy area and emblematic  
583 of the desire to develop a distinctive social policy agenda.

584 We acknowledge the limitations of our study based as it is on a single case. Informants  
585 highlighted it as an example of successful policy development and implementation for a  
586 number of reasons. Homelessness policy sat squarely within the remit of the Welsh  
587 Government and had few, if any, direct consequences outside Wales. The statutory  
588 framework placed the state in a strong position to bring about change, and there was  
589 broad agreement within the small and well-defined Welsh homelessness policy  
590 community about the shortcomings of the existing statutory framework. The  
591 metagovernance of homelessness policy was, therefore, arguably one of the less  
592 complex policy issues facing the Welsh Government. There are other instances where

593 devolved administrations (in Wales and elsewhere) have struggled to secure distinctive  
594 policy responses and future research might usefully focus on the exercise of meso-level  
595 metagovernance in some of these more complex and contested policy arenas.

596 Nonetheless, our research demonstrates that, in at least some contexts, the combination  
597 of quasi-national powers and quasi-local positioning make metagovernance an important  
598 and effective tool for meso-governments. Where its formal resources are limited and/or  
599 contested, success in policy development and implementation becomes less a matter of  
600 *what* a government can (constitutionally) do, than of *how* it does it. At the same time, the  
601 ability to make authoritative decisions about law or funding within their territories, in a way  
602 that is quantitatively and probably qualitatively different from that of local governments,  
603 gives meso-level governments a set of ‘hard’ powers which incentivises other actors to  
604 co-operate. ‘Soft steering’ metagovernance resources such as provision of funding,  
605 information, and expertise (Martin and Guarneros-Meza 2013) - which, in Sørensen and  
606 Torfing’s typology may combine network steering and active network management – can  
607 be very valuable. In our case study, the Welsh Government’s funding and steering the  
608 Local Authority Homelessness Network, is a notable example of this. However,  
609 fundamental policy change may require legislative or funding resources which, within the  
610 territory, only the meso-level government possesses.

611 Further research could usefully investigate whether the findings from research apply in  
612 other contexts. It might be valuable to compare the exercise of metagovernance by meso-  
613 governments of different types. For example, in Hooghe and Marks’s (2003, 2016) terms,  
614 not only by Type I administrations, such as the Welsh and Scottish Governments, but  
615 also Type II (task- specific, non-exclusive, flexible) jurisdictions, and by meso-  
616 governments with differing degrees of authority. It would also be useful to explore  
617 whether government officials in other contexts take on the role of ‘governor-participants’  
618 and to investigate whether, as in our case, junior officials exercise metagovernance.  
619 Although Peters (2013:578) has suggested that low-ranking officials ‘in the field’ may be  
620 more successful at co-ordinating *implementation* networks than senior officials ‘in the  
621 national capital’, in our case it was less senior *policy* officials who acted as ‘governor-

622 participants' in policy networks. This suggests the possibility that the closer, in terms of  
623 both geography and hierarchy, a government is to network actors (as it may be at the  
624 meso-level), and the more active its metagovernance style, the less of a distinction there  
625 is between policy and implementation, and the more opportunities and requirements there  
626 are for officials at different levels to act as metagovernors.

627

628 NOTES

629 <sup>1</sup> The period covered by the data on regional autonomy in Hooghe et al. (2016), which  
630 suggest a lower degree of self-rule for Wales, ends at 2010 - that is, before the National  
631 Assembly gained full primary legislative powers and before fiscal powers started to be  
632 devolved to Wales.

633 <sup>2</sup> Named after its principal investigator, Dr Peter Mackie of Cardiff University.

634

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636

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747 Table 1 Interviewees cited

Academic informant 1	Interviewed 6 July 2016
Academic informant 2	Interviewed 19 July 2016
Consultant	Interviewed 10 June 2016
Former Assembly Member	Interviewed 23 August 2016
Local Government informant 1	Interviewed 5 August 2016
Third Sector informant 1	Interviewed 25 July 2016
Third Sector informant 2	Interviewed 25 July 2016
Welsh Government informant 1	Interviewed 1 August 2016
Welsh Government informant 2	Interviewed 14 September 2016

748

749 Table 2 Policy reunion participants

Welsh Government Witness  
Third Sector Witness  
Local Government Witness 1  
Local Government Witness 2  
Academic Witness  
Ministerial Adviser Witness  
Local Government Witness 3  
Academic Discussant- Professor Alex Marsh  
Chair- (Author)

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