

# Preface

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This book originates from two impulses: the first analytical, the other normative. On the one hand is the difficulty of defining ‘governance’ (despite its widespread use) and of determining which phenomena are necessarily encompassed within it and which lie at or outside its boundaries. Our shared view was that some of the phenomena that can be frequently observed in connection with governance are not entirely accounted for by the current literature; hence the wish to fill this gap. On the other hand is the feeling that some of the phenomena frequently observed in connection with governance are somehow ‘disturbing’ – that they represent more than just an extension of the activities and relations that we would legitimately associate with the act of governing. This double impulse prompted prolonged conversations among the contributors of these chapters which resulted in the reflections contained in this book.

European Union (EU)-level policy decisions crucially depend on interaction among the institutions, individuals and groups which take part – at whatever stage – in the decision-making process. Yet which groups or individuals should be in or out is not determined by general criteria of competence, right, need or concern as would be those established by formalized systems of negotiation; nor is it entirely left to the interplay of interest groups in the ‘political market’ for lobby and pressure. Participation is rather determined by a haphazard mix of the above criteria, some reflecting the process through which representative forums are normally established, some corresponding to the mechanisms through which groups and individuals try to shape policy decisions, some again resembling the ways in which expert advice is sought in technically or politically sensitive matters, and some simply manifesting cooptation among closed circles of friends. While each of these mechanisms is at work (within established limits) also in national democracies, at the EU level they coexist in unknown proportions and perhaps within inappropriate arenas.

When there is a public debate on the criteria according to which participants in the decision-making process at the EU level should be selected, it often concludes that the key issue is that a compromise is achieved and the decisions thus reached are effective. The effectiveness of policy decisions thus produced is then inferred from the lack of overt challenge, and the legitimacy of the participants who produce such decisions is attributed to their contributing expert knowledge to the decision-making process. Even though one ought

to ask 'effective for whom?' and 'knowledge of what?', this is in fact the justification provided by much of the literature for the current system of European governance. Governance is thus often opaque, non-codified and, consequently, not publicly sanctioned – it is 'informal'.

The goal of this book, then, is to expose as systematically as possible the significance of informality in EU policy-making process. It aims at placing emphasis and drawing attention to the non-codified and non-publicly sanctioned aspects of contemporary European governance with the hope of stimulating a normative and positive debate on the ways in which we are governed.

The sustained conversations which led to this volume began in 2000, in Copenhagen, at the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) Joint Sessions. Simona Piattoni and Carolyn Warner had co-directed a workshop on 'Clientelism, Informal Networks and Political Entrepreneurship in the European Union' which attracted a number of highly provocative papers and prompted a stimulating debate. Participants expressed a desire to keep the conversation going – and so it was. During the year 2000/2001 the presence of several workshop participants at the European University Institute (EUI) in San Domenico di Fiesole helped to move the project forward. Over lunch in the canteen of the Badia, the decision was made to try to translate these conversations into an edited book. A successful application for further funding was made to the European Union's Fifth Framework Programme (Key Action 'Improving the Human Potential'), and the resultant grant no. HPSP-CT-200160018 from the European Commission facilitated a number of editorial meetings and the organization of a conference, once again at the EUI in June 2002, where draft chapters of the book were presented and discussed.

We would like to thank Yves Mény and Helen Wallace at the EUI for facilitating our stay at the Institute, Kathinka Espana, Monique Cavallari and Serena Scarselli at the EUI for their role in the organization of the conference, Susanne Kempe at the Jean Monnet Centre in Aberystwyth for editorial assistance and Aris Apollonatos at the European Commission for his support and assistance throughout the course of the project. Finally we thank all the contributors for their cooperation, submitting drafts and final chapters on schedule, responding quickly and thoroughly to any questions and requests for revisions, and for accepting on occasion intrusions into their texts from the editors. We hope that the final product will stimulate further normative debate and empirical research into those informal aspects of European governance that are ever-present but frequently lost from academic analyses.

*The Editors,  
Aberystwyth and Trento, March 2003*