
Preface

The study of regulation is the study of the politics, policies, institutions and effectiveness of formal and informal controls. Such controls may take many forms: some are hierarchical with clear sanctions attached, while others are softer; some are in the domain of one actor, while others are highly divided among actors, arenas and institutions; some are exerted by governmental organizations and some by private organizations; some emphasize participation, while others emphasize compliance; some reflect well-designed systems of delegation, monitoring and enforcement, and others are at best patchworks. They are all however the products of politics, and they all have redistributive effects, even if these effects are often blurred and not transparent. Politics is intertwined with regulation, and the efforts to depoliticize the topic makes it all the more interesting.

The study of regulation is also the study of the limits of control and the overt and covert resistance of rulers and their rules. In the age of governance, regulation is also the study of regulatory regimes in shifting levels, arenas and spaces of control. As a mode of control, regulation represents an alternative to taxing and spending on the one hand and nationalization and public ownership on the other. As a hybrid mode of control, regulation is not only control by government but also the control over government, control without government and shared forms of control. It is also a multidisciplinary field that in the last decade has rapidly developed a common language and shared understanding of the problems and challenges. The increased invasion of regulation into everyday life and the growing attention paid to it by both citizens and scholars is well attested to by the creation of the European Consortium for Political Research's scholarly network on regulatory governance (with currently 1600 subscribers), by the establishment of the journal *Regulation & Governance* (2005) and by the growing body of scholarly work published in the area. There is definitely a distinct "hype" around the study of regulation at the moment. The extent to which this will have a long-term impact on the social sciences and law is still unclear, but there is no doubt that the relevant literature is coming of age.

The present handbook seeks to contribute to the study of regulation and to its consolidation as a multidisciplinary field. The diversity of material and comprehensive manner in which its various aspects are covered in the handbook is evidence of this. The scholars currently active in the field come from diverse academic backgrounds, and I deeply hope that readers will recognize not only the substantial contribution but also the freshness of their outlook, and the creativity and originality they bring to this volume. To the best of my knowledge, this is the largest collection of essays ever published on the subject/topic of regulation, as well as being the most interdisciplinary. Our field is rapidly expanding, and it is my hope that this handbook presages a promising future.