The term “governance” and the way it has been used by European institutions have elicited much interest in the academic world. However, the notion and its uses have often been studied only in terms of intellectual development or network analysis. Such research leaves us in the dark about some key questions: Which meaning does the concept of governance actually hold for the actors involved? To what degree do they share a single definition of the term? Does “European governance” work as a self-fulfilling prophecy, structuring the space of the EU and the practices of its actors?

The authors focus on the White Paper on EU Governance launched by the European Commission (EC) in 2001. They explain the different positions on governance as well as on the series of new policy tools promoted by the EC (impact assessment, consultation, etc.) and taken up by Member States, EU institutions and stakeholders. Shedding some new light on these currently dominant instruments, the contributors explore the meaning of governance and how EU consultations really work.