Workshop proposal

**Administrative Reform, Democratic Governance, and the Quality of Government**

**Co-directors:**

Professor Jean-Michel Eymeri-Douzans  
**Institut d'études politiques de Toulouse**  
2ter, rue des Puits Creusés  
BP 88526  
F- 31685 Toulouse Cedex 6  
France  
Phone/fax: +33(0)5 6224 9460  
jean-michel.eymeri-douzans@sciencespo-toulouse.fr

Professor Jon Pierre  
**Department of Political Science**  
University of Gothenburg  
Box 711  
SE-405 30 Gothenburg  
Sweden  
Phone: +46 31 773 1246  
Fax: +46 31 773 4599  
jon.pierre@pol.gu.se

**Workshop abstract**

Market-based administrative reform, often referred to as New Public Management (NPM), has been implemented across Western Europe (and the rest of the world) with significant variation among different national contexts and with different degrees of impact on democratic governance. This workshop will address the sets of issues related to these national experiences. The first theme relates to this cross-national variation: what explains this pattern? Why is it that Anglo-American democracies have been much more inclined to implement NPM reform than countries like Germany, France and the Scandinavian countries? The second theme is focused on the impact of NPM on the role of the public administration in democratic governance. To what extent are traditional values of public administration like legal security, transparency, accountability and equality challenged by NPM reform, and what have been the consequences of this reform on the role of the public administration as a keystone in democratic governance? The third theme will assess NPM reform in terms of its impact on the quality of government, broadly defined. To what extent has this reform enhanced the quality of public services and “customer satisfaction, and, conversely, to what extent has it had negative effects on the democratic nature of the public administration?

**The workshop theme**

The past 15-20 years have witnessed fundamental extensive reform in the public sector. With significant national variation, the emphasis has been on bringing market-like processes into the public sector; to separate policy making from the operative elements of the public sector; to professionalize management; to provide customer choice; to produce public services in
collaboration with NGOs and civil society; to “contract out” or privatize wherever possible; and to curb the expansion of the public sector. This model of administrative reform, so-called New Public Management (NPM), has often been an integrated part of a neo-liberal ideological campaign against traditional models of public service provision, aiming at downplaying the specificity of the public (political and administrative) nature of the public sector. NPM has influenced public sector reform across Western Europe (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004), including the Scandinavian countries (Ejersbo and Greve, 2005; Premfors, 1999) and countries initially reluctant as France (Bézès, 2002) as well as in Southeast Asia (Turner, 2002), Canada (Savoie, 1994), the United States (see e.g. Kettl, 2000) and the Antipodes (Gregory, 2000).

There is thus a host of literature on NPM-inspired reforms in different national contexts. We also have some knowledge about how these reforms have impacted traditional political and administrative roles (Peters and Pierre, 2001; Page and Wright, 2007). But very little has been done in terms of assessing the impact of NPM on the public sector in a larger perspective. The key problem is that NPM is a strategy of reform which does not recognize that the public administration of a country is a political creature and an essential element of democratic governance (Suleiman, 2003). The public administration is one of the key interfaces between citizens and their elected officials and, as such, has to take broader considerations in institutional design and modus operandi than NPM reform objectives do. Also, we know surprisingly little about what explains the variation among different countries with regard to the extent with which they have conducted neo-managerialist reforms. Why is it that the Anglo-American democracies have been most inclined to adopt NPM reform whereas countries such as Germany, Japan and some of the Scandinavian countries have been more tentative about NPM as a proper research strategy (Peters, 2001)? Most importantly, perhaps, we have seen very few studies raising the essential question of whether NPM has actually improved the quality of public services and the quality of government more broadly, or not – and the methodological and practical question of how to measure such quality changes. Could it be that NPM brings economy and efficiency but not necessarily effectiveness? Could it be that NPM brings more customer satisfaction at the expense of citizen engagement, transparency and legal security?

This workshop will try and assess NPM-inspired reforms—in their various forms—in a comparative perspective. Given the breadth and scope in which European states have embraced such reforms, an ECPR workshop would be the ideal context for a comparative assessment of these reform processes. We are particularly interested in three different aspects. First, we are intrigued by the significant variation in the objectives and “trajectories” of reform among the West European countries (see Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). One group of countries, with Britain as the leading example, has launched a wide range of New Public Management-style administrative reform. Several other countries, such as for instance Germany and the Scandinavian countries, have been quite tentative about this model of administrative reform and have been slower in implementing it, or have followed other strategies of administrative modernization. Research done on administrative reform in Europe has demonstrated this significant variation among the European states in how they choose reform strategy, but we do not know very much about what explains those choices (for some hypotheses, see Dreyfus and Eymeri-Douzans, 2006). Thus, we invite papers that address issues of how administrative reforms were inscribed on the agenda. What options were considered by the politico-administrative elites when planning the reform? What was the role of “policy forums” like the EU and the OECD in the domestic reform processes? What was the significance of “administrative traditions” and globalizing forces? To what extent can we
observe some convergence among public administration and civil service systems across the world, and how do the national trajectories of administrative culture still prevail more or less?

A second theme of the workshop relates to administrative reform and democratic governance. NPM reform programs have now been implemented for two decades in a large number of countries. It is now time to assess the extent to which these programs have affected the institutions of government—the politico-administrative web of activities—and the governing processes of these states. If, as it is well documented, we assume that the public administration is a cornerstone of governance, either democratic or not, how have the NPM programs with their focus on managerialist objectives challenged the political and democratic nature of the public administration?

The third theme of the workshop is focused on administrative reform and the quality of government. There is a rapidly increasing interest in research on the political, economic and institutional sources of the so-called “good governance” and a high quality of government (see http://www.qog.pol.gu.se). NPM raises a series of intriguing questions about the relationship between administrative reform and the quality of government. On the one hand, NPM reform programs claim that they want and will offer public services which are more attuned to individual's needs and allow “customers” to choose among different service providers. On the other hand, NPM separates the public administration from the political echelons of government and may potentially jeopardize accountability, equal treatment and transparency. How can we assess the impact of NPM in terms of the real outcomes of governing processes and public services for the ordinary citizen, and what cross-national patterns can we see in this respect?

The workshop will thus address issues related to administrative reform and how it has impacted on traditional politico-administrative institutions. We are less interested in the technical aspects of public management reform and more interested in the political and democratic ramifications of that reform processes. Have NPM reforms complicated political responsiveness, accountability and transparency — or have they instead created new channels for citizen engagement and input? To what extent have political institutions redefined their role given administrative reform? To what extent has administrative reform driven a redefinition of democracy, for instance in the form of users' direct influence on public service delivery? If we conceive of these developments as "dependent variables", there is substantive variation in the range and scope of administrative reform in different countries as "independent variables”.

The workshop invites case studies as well as comparative papers although the latter would be preferred. We are interested in both theoretical/conceptual and empirically oriented papers, although given the stock-taking ambition of the workshop we are particularly interested in empirical accounts of administrative reform and its ramifications.

References


