1. Introduction: the state at work

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Since the 1990s it has become fashionable to consider the ‘waning of the state’, the ‘transformation of the state’ or ‘the hollowing out of the crown’ (for the latter, see Rhodes 1994; Weller et al. 1997). At the extreme, some scholars have discussed the possibility of ‘governance without government’ (Rhodes 1996). These discussions also reflect waning public confidence in the capacity of governments to govern effectively and fairly (Putnam and Pharr 2000).

Underlying these observations about the decline of the state are phenomena such as the loss of traditional national sovereignty to supra-national polities like the European Union and non-governmental organizations such as the World Trade Organization, the easy permeability of borders in the European Union and the lack of centrality of national governments in functional governance networks where the state allegedly figures only as one among many actors (Sorensen and Torfing 2006). In addition, privatizations have affected the shape of the state and its capacity to steer society. Similarly, retrenchment of the welfare state has resulted in increased private provision of social services in some countries, although at the same time, transfer payments for social subsidies and health care costs have increased dramatically (Castles 2004).

The regulatory activities of the state have also changed. While it may be true that regulatory activities as one part of policy-making have, to a certain extent, moved upwards in multi-level governance systems, rule enforcement and monitoring as corresponding administrative activities have generally remained national. The European Union, for example, does not command implementation agencies but relies on national bureaucracies. Furthermore, despite supra-nationalization at the one hand, core state activities like determining and levying taxes, the judiciary and law enforcement as well as defence remain basically national despite trends towards international cooperation in order to cope with international problems. This holds true for NATO in the defence area as well as for growing security and police communication at the European and international levels. Finally, with increased corporatization, privatization and the use of not-for-profit organizations, the boundaries of the state have become blurred.

While the private law construction of enterprises such as telecommunications, energy and transportation in continental Europe excluded by definition these services from the public sector (as defined by public law), the corporations remain to various degrees financially and ultimately politically controlled by national governments. In other words: during the last 30 years, the picture of national public services has become more difficult to draw. Radical changes have taken place, but their substantive impact remains open to question. This presents some difficulties for international comparative research, but at the same time provides new challenges for focusing on the trees of public activities behind the forest of state images that frame sweeping theoretical analyses.

Since the 1980s there have been several important efforts to come to grips with the changing nature of the public sector, in particular the restoration of the concept of the state, the introduction of the concept of 'governance' and the emergence of the New Public Management (NPM) reform movement. Our endeavour to map public services in ten OECD countries, trace their growth and recent shrinking and inspect their anatomy, albeit motivated by the challenge of comparative research, is related to these concepts. Certainly our findings reflect the reality of the changes identified through these concepts.

THE CONCEPT OF THE STATE

With the renaissance of the continental European concept of the state in international research implying the notion of so-called 'stateless societies' of the Anglo-American type (Dyson 1980), a heated theoretical debate developed, not the least because of the normative underpinning of the state concept. In public law countries, the concept was linked to the 19th century political struggle about what the state (the crown and its bureaucracy) should do and must not do to civil society and the economy. As an analytical concept, though, the 'state' may be also a useful concept to describe the sum total of what national governments are doing: regulating and producing services. There is also consensus on using the term with respect to the state's territorial dimension and thus its usefulness in international law and international relations (Nettl 1968).

The title of this book *The State at Work* claims that we want to detail 'who works for government and what do they do?' (Derlien and Peters 1998). It alludes further to the definition given to public administration by the 19th century German theorist Lorenz von Stein: public administration is the state at work.¹ Stein had set out to distinguish in a functional analysis, sectors of activity in modern societies that are either performed by society itself (in

those days, for instance, education or care for the elderly) and, increasingly, those that have been taken over by the state through its agent, public administration. This notion comes close to Max Weber's verdict that 'political domination in everyday life means public administration'.

This notion may appear problematic for various reasons. First, to those adverse to the use of the term 'state' in academic discourse, it conveys too much of the state-society dichotomy of 19th century monarchist Europe where the 'state apparatus' was, in Marxist perspective, a means of suppression. In this view, bureaucracies staffed with professionally trained, rule-bound and hierarchically appointed civil servants were an instrument of political domination, as reflected in Max Weber's sociology of political domination. However, Weber's 'bureaucratic domination' said nothing about the constitutional framework nor the public tasks performed by the state. Today there is a broad academic consensus that democracy contributed more than anything else to the emergence of the modern welfare state and that civic society is tied to public services delivered by bureaucracies (Marshall 1964). On the other hand, to a Weberian, the concept of the state can hardly be defined by referring to specific public tasks taken on and executed at a specific point in time, for 'there is no single task that was not public in some case and from the protection of personal security to the administration of justice, there is none which all have recognized (Weber 1978, p. 55) – with one exception, however, namely, successfully claiming the monopoly of legitimately applying physical force to citizens. As our concern is less about the state than about public administration and the public service, in the post-war period and in a clearly defined number of OECD countries, we may as well consider the Weberian position a research question: to what extent are public tasks reflected in the public services and shape their composition (Rose 1975)? Third, the state certainly does not work only by providing public services and goods: infrastructure, personal social services, education, safety at home and peace abroad. Rather, it also legitimately extracts money from private pockets, finances the services mentioned and – most important to the argument – distributes and redistributes revenues to citizens and enterprises (as well as within the public sector, say to sub-governments). Even a 'skeleton state' (Ridley 1995) would have to employ revenue officers. In fact, beside the military apparatus (the standing army), fiscal administration (the sitting army) is a nucleus of the modern state apparatus (Rosenberg 1958).

When enquiring about the mix of spending and service provision we are not only back to the historically variable array of public tasks and the modern privatization debate, our subject also links up to investigations about modern welfare regimes as undertaken by Esping-Andersen (1990). According to this author, three such regimes can be distinguished: the

Nordic welfare states producing a very broad assembly of public tasks through public services, with these services financed through high taxes and thus a large GNP share of the public sector; second the minimalist US 'state' with a low taxation level, only providing welfare to narrowly defined social groups at a minimal level while leaving the procurement of services like education also to the market. The third arrangement would be found in continental Europe, a mixture of relatively high public transfer payments (and thus a relatively high taxation level) on the one hand, and mixed public and private service procurement on the other hand. We might assume that the type of welfare regime is reflected in public employment.

GOVERNANCE

Whereas the concept of the state focuses on 'stable' elements like public tasks, albeit acknowledging that these are subject to historical change and constitutionally defined elements of government, the concept of governance that has dominated theorizing since the 1990s, emphasizes the processes associated with the state apparatus and the branches of government (Pierre and Peters 2000, 2004). Furthermore, since the inception of the journal *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions* in 1986 (first volume 1988), the linkage between state and society/economy has become a central concern. This is not only a reflection of earlier NPM-inspired deregulation and privatization. Since the historical landslide of 1989 and the decline of state socialism, but also in view of supra-national state building in Europe and more generally of economic and communication globalization, theorists have tried to come to grips with increasingly problematic national policy-making, in particular with the gap between the steering pessimism and (socialist) steering euphoria of previous decades (Kooiman 1993; Mayntz and Scharpf 1995). In its more radical and present-day formulations governance has become the core concept of a theoretical school claiming that informal processes within networks of political and economic, administrative and civic actors have replaced the public formal organization and hierarchy as channels of problem-solving. This, among other things, is a development ascribed to the influence of deregulation and privatization that under the philosophy of NPM has blurred the formerly clear demarcation of the private-public border; the proponents of governance theory also link it to such diverse phenomena as the growth of NGOs and the development of multilevel policy-making with supra-national institutions such as the EU. Though so suggestive and bold, the empirical foundation for this radical version of governance theory is notoriously quite weak, not the least due to a

preference for case studies in various policy areas. It remains an open question whether the state is merely one among several actors engaged in solving some problem or if the state, bolstered by the classical authoritative policy areas and instruments, as well as the public service, remains a dominant actor even manipulating the networks of interaction.

Regardless of whether the state is perceived as helplessly responding to the new challenges from NPM, in particular deregulation, privatization and decentralization or de-concentration, or whether NPM is a sophisticated intended way of response, of applying a new less authoritarian policy style than previously (Pierre and Peters 2000), our research can have a bearing on the discussion about governance. First, the identification of large numbers of public (state) servants might underline that there is no governance solely by the market, however incomplete state-led governance attempts may be. Second, by inspecting public service size and composition in various countries our awareness of differentiated arguments may be sharpened, thus bringing theories down to earth again. Empirical research might be especially helpful in sorting out the impact of NPM that, as a philosophy of public affairs, gave rise to huge reforms and subsequent theorizing of 'governance without government'. Although we neither go into public finance and the welfare regime of transfers without services nor into rule production and the deregulation-reregulation paradox, it is our hope that *The State at Work* might provide at least important background information.

NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

The international reform movement stimulated by neo-conservative governments in the UK (since 1979) and the USA (since 1980) was about redrawing the boundaries of the state – towards 'hollowing out the state' – basically for fiscal reasons. The accompanying toolkit of reform measures became summarized under the heading 'New Public Management' (Pollitt 1991; Hood 1991). Whatever the impact of the ensuing reforms in the individual country – there is quite a bit of national variation (Olsen and Peters 1996; Peters and Savoie 1998; Pollit and Bouckaert 2000) – they moved public sectors in three directions:

- *Privatization* of previously public tasks and publicly provided services, in particular in countries with a large array of public enterprises, according to Osborne and Gaebler (1993) led governments to reconsider whether they wanted to concentrate on steering or also to engage in rowing. First, many countries privatized nationalized

industries that did not produce public goods but, for instance, motor cars or coal. Second, the reorganization of communication systems in a broader sense, including the public monopolies of railways, postal services and telecommunications, has taken different forms in different countries and in different sectors. Privatization's linkage to the internal market of the European Union is constituted by the EU's claim that national markets for public service utilities should be opened for competition from the outside. Privatization did not, however, always lead to complete selling of government assets to non-governmental investors. In organizational terms its main implications have been an insistence on the separation of regulatory tasks from operative tasks. Furthermore, in political perspective the drive behind these reforms in the EU has also been fiscally motivated. The notorious 1992 Maastricht criteria fixing thresholds for national debts for entry to the European Monetary Union forced member states to cut back public debts by selling the 'family silver' allegedly hidden in public enterprises or more realistically, by discharging debts accumulated by the often unruly offspring of the state in the economic sector. For public services privatization, be it mere corporatization or genuine selling of assets, meant at least a formal decrease of the size of the public labour force (in budgets and national statistics).

- *Decentralization* became the second imperative, in both unitary and federal systems. In line with NPM reasoning the centre sought to hive off political and fiscal responsibility for many public services. In unitary states this fiscally motivated reform impetus was however complemented by a longstanding politically motivated drive to grant more autonomy to sub-governments or even to federalize the system. In the European Union, this trend was fostered by developments under the Single European Act 1987. The establishment of a committee of the regions induced unitary states to define politico-administrative units to match the states in federal systems such as Germany and (later) Austria. It saw the federalization of Belgium and Spain (also prompted in both countries by powerful political forces to grant ethnic and cultural autonomy to subsystems), decentralization in France and devolution in the UK. Even within federal systems such as the USA or Germany, national policy attempted to redefine centre-periphery relations and to turn around a trend that had emerged since 1945 towards ever greater centralization of rule-making and spending power. Thus we would expect also a decentralization of public employment and a relative shrinking of central government as an employer. De-concentration, the transfer of

ministerial personnel to agencies concerned with the implementation of policies (agencification in the UK) though would not affect the importance of central government as an employer.

- Although NPM was about the *confines* of the state, its more dramatic influence was on the state's internal operations in the public services. Not only would the size of these be affected by privatization but their structures were also to be at the disposition of policy-makers and reformers. The historical particularity of the public services and their alleged privileges compared to employment in the private sector were to be reduced, both on normative grounds and because of presumed efficiency gains from using private sector personnel management principles. In particular, public bureaucracies with their closed career systems, with tenured positions and status-related pay schemes were the target of reformers. To what extent management practices, performance pay and contractualism affected the public service remained to be seen; previous research indicated differences in the rate of reform and compatibility with national administrative cultures, with the Anglo-American countries as spearheads.

It can be reasonably assumed that, whatever the strength of these reforms in the individual national polity, these NPM trends would have an impact on 'the state'. However, reformers at the time of launching the reforms, did not have sufficient empirical evidence other than crude fiscal data, nor do we today have an international empirical account of the outcomes of the attempts to reshape the state. Furthermore, there are aspects of national public service systems not taken into consideration by reformers such as the ethnic composition of the service and long-term trends such as increasing part-time employment that nevertheless deserve closer inspection.

It is the aim of this book to take stock of the historical development of public services, starting long before NPM, to shed light on the most important public task areas or policy programmes, to illuminate the distribution of public employment between national government and sub-governments, and to trace the impact of NPM on the public service as a social system that, in most countries, comprises at least 15 per cent of the labour force.

THE RESEARCH CHALLENGE

Unlike many other areas of political science, the analysis of public administration has not yet progressed very far in the objective measurement of the basic phenomena about which we do research. Most work in the field of administrative studies involves impressionistic analyses of the structures

of government, rather than more objective measurement of the relevant phenomena. In large part because of the measurement problem, there has been little or no development of basic data necessary for the analysis of administrative executives. These deficiencies of measurement and data collection are even more evident when comparative analysis is considered (Derlien 1992). Although, in particular, the UK Economic and Social Research Council's 'Whitehall Programme' gave rise to a number of important structural-functional comparative studies, the comparative study of public services has remained less attractive. Certainly, administrative elites have attracted periodic attention since the 1970s. Since Armstrong's (1973) important historical book, some interesting and important comparative studies of the attitudes of civil servants (Aberbach et al. 1981; Aberbach 2003) and the structure of the 'mandarins' of western Europe (Page and Wright 1999) were carried out. Hood and Peters published findings of one important aspect of executive systems, rewards in high public office (1994; see also Brans and Peters, forthcoming). Also Gow and Simard (1999) dealt systematically with unorthodox, non-career public service employment in five countries. But there remains limited comprehensive data on the basic elements of public service systems.

There has however been one major study of public employment in western countries (Rose et al. 1985) in which the scale and the growth of public employment in six countries (Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, USA) were investigated for the period 1951–81. That study is now largely out of date. Further, data were confined to large aggregates (generally defined in functional terms) so that little comparison could be made of the structural evolution of governments. Recently Bekke and van der Meer (2000), as part of the ambitious Leiden project (Raadschelders and Perry 1994), published *Civil Service Systems in Western Europe*, with a strong emphasis on the history of the core group of state personnel but neglecting the public service at large and its modern welfare functions. Analogous volumes were published for other parts of the world. Also, Auer et al. (1996) and Bossaert et al. (2001) of the European Institute of Public Administration provide a formal, legal analysis of the public service systems in the 15 European Union core states, dealing basically with aspects of personnel management including recruitment, performance measurement, pay system, pension system, work hours and disciplinary law and the ethical codex. An introductory section (Bossaert et al. 2001, pp. 45–58), cites statistics for the size of the public services and their distribution among levels of government, but the developmental perspective as well as the distribution of public service personnel among policy areas, is not dealt with. Nevertheless, the work shows the growing interest in comparative public service analysis in general and for specific European Union

harmonization purposes. Finally, there have also been some post-NPM surveys (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000; OECD 1997; 1999), whose scope is though, limited to the implementation of reform measures.

Thus, while there have been some useful quantitative studies of administrative systems, there is still a relative dearth of information when evidence about the executive branch is compared with that available for other areas of political science inquiry. This has led to other efforts, last but not least by the OECD, at improving the conditions for systematic comparative analysis, but up to now they are at the incipient stage. This most recent endeavour stated: 'Very early data are suggesting that the new measures of public employment totals are leading to significantly revised understanding of employment in the public domain' (OECD 2007, p. 9). We anticipate that the research reported here will advance the comparative endeavour.

Delineating the Public Service

In this present study, when discussing the state at work we refer to millions of people who are members of the public service in each of the ten countries under investigation. Members of the public service are employed by national, regional and local governments. Their relationship to the state is defined by contracts or legal status. This relationship implies or presupposes that they are paid out of taxes and that (in principle) salaries and number of positions are contained in state budgets. Thus, we do not regard those who work in a purely functional relationship for governments as members of the public service, that is, people working in areas that are contracted out to private enterprises or who are in privatized public enterprises, even if financial responsibility is partly or totally retained by governments. Further, subsidized industries and their employees are not in the public domain. Unless these merely functionally related areas are excluded from our definition, we would end up with inflated employment figures for the public service, a weakness that partly invalidated the earlier analysis by Richard Rose and his contributors (Rose et al. 1985).

This definition carries its own complexities. For instance, railways, airlines and post and telecommunications, in some states, remain government enterprises, while in other states they have been privatized. Lufthansa has always been a private law company (with national and state governments holding sizeable proportions of the shares), whereas Air France was privatized only in 1999 with the state keeping 19 per cent of the shares. Railways in the United States never went through a period of nationalization as they did in Europe; European railway systems were privatized in the 1990s. The US Postal Service however is still in the public domain, while the postal service in Germany, for instance, has been privatized. In countries with a

public law tradition, the delineation between public and private law companies is much easier than in the Anglo-American world. In continental Europe it is necessary to distinguish between full-scale privatization where governments sell former state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to private investors and corporatization where a SOE is transferred to private law status although the enterprise remains heavily controlled by governments. In any case, employees in these companies no longer have contracts with governments but with the relevant company. These legal differences have implications for public service statistics quite like the difference between the British National Health Service (public employment) and other health systems, where providers, medical doctors and general practitioners are private entrepreneurs although their services are paid from compulsory contributions by patients. Further, there are countries with overwhelmingly publicly run schools and universities while in other countries there is a mixture of public and private schools and universities. The delineation between public and private, however, remains valid, even if private schools and universities are heavily subsidized from public coffers. This delineation has a bearing on the estimate of the public service size and its share of total public employment.

Public and Civil Service

Another definitional clarification of some importance in many countries is the distinction between the public service and the civil service. In this study, public service is the broader concept including employees of all kinds: labourers, employees and a group with a special legal status commonly called civil servants. The civil service, in other words, is just a subgroup of the public service – a distinction which is not made in all of the countries. When so identified, civil servants have an exceptional position, owing to the terms of recruitment, employment, function and retirement. In most countries where the distinction is made, civil servants are found in authoritative areas of public activity where they make binding decisions interfering with the basic rights of citizens and, in most countries, they are working in government departments giving political advice and/or controlling policy implementation. If the public/civil service distinction is not observed, we arrive either at underestimating the size of the public service, a problem from which the study by Bekke and van der Meer (2000) partly suffered, or shading the qualitative difference between the larger public service including employees and labourers and the civil service proper with its particular status and function. Therefore, one methodological aim of this project is to compare the quantitative importance of the various subgroups of the public service (see Derlien and Rouban in Volume II).

The above discussion elucidates the complexity of the public sector 'employment contract' when a comparative perspective is applied. This complexity becomes even more pronounced if the varying scope and pace of civil service reform is considered. NPM reform in general has questioned the continued reliance on the entire civil service concept, preferring contractual relations as in the rest of the labour force, and radical reformers such as New Zealand have taken action accordingly. But in other countries not normally counted among zealous reformers, the civil service has also gradually lost its importance as the basic form of government employment. In Denmark, for example, this development had already started in the 1960s and today most public employees outside the judiciary and the police are hired on the basis of contracts backed up by collective agreements (Gregory and Christensen 2004).

Coming to Grips with Policy Areas

At a first glance, the definition of what a policy area includes in terms of activities and personnel employed is apparently an easy one. At least from a national perspective the operational definition of a policy area might be clear-cut in national statistics. However, even at the national level, slight redefinitions often take place, for instance how to deal with personnel employed in public sector university hospitals: because of their multifunctionality, these personnel can be subsumed under the heading of either health care or research and teaching. In internationally comparative perspective, the classifications adopted by national statistical offices vary considerably and pose ultimately insurmountable problems. To mention just one of these, there are countries (for instance, Germany) where personnel working in national ministries are not counted among the staff of the policy area the ministry represents, but in a category of 'general administration', a category that at the same time encompasses similar personnel at sub-government levels. However, as the extent of employment in the government departments themselves is normally relatively small, entailing not more than 20 or 30 000 people, the bias in the policy analysis data is negligible. On the other hand, in unitary states such as France, employment figures of national government departments may be deceptive, as for instance teachers in France are included in departmental statistics, whereas in federal countries, education is regularly a matter of sub-governments (state and local) with relevant regulatory activities and personnel policy often being reserved by higher levels of government. In their recent survey, the OECD foreshadows working with 'definitions of the public domain which encompass activities that represent a significant contingent fiscal liability to government' and which are based on the system of national

accounts (OECD 2007, p. 9). Nor could we solve the problem. Knowing that there are national definitional differences, our analysis focuses on the relative size of the major policy areas to end up with a reliable picture for the importance of at least the three to four major policy areas in terms of personnel employed. We do not, however, maintain that employment in minor policy areas, for instance agriculture (regulatory activities and state domains), lend themselves to comparative analysis, in particular in time series data. We therefore had to abandon the plan to devote a specific chapter to public sector employment by policy area in Volume II.

In order to analyse employment by policy area in detail, one could have gone into theoretical classifications like those stipulated by Theodore Lowi (1972), distinguishing distributive, regulatory, redistributive and polity decisions, or take the sticks and carrots approach (see for instance Bemelmans-Videc 1998; Vedung 1997). In terms of decreasing intervention capacity into citizens' autonomy, such a classification would include:

- Regulatory activities of the law and order type including regulation of competition, financial services and environmental and consumer protection;
- Taxes, monetary incentives and disincentives;
- Transfer payments such as pensions and social subsidies;
- Infrastructure projects offering usage (motorways or public toilets);
- Personal social services such as kindergartens or hospitals;
- Contracts with private service providers;
- Pedagogical programmes with highly normative information like health- or traffic-education, for example, teaching children how to cross a street;
- Provision of 'neutral' information like weather broadcasts or traffic information.

Such a typology of instruments (see also Salamon 2002) would be useful for explaining employment differences between particular policy areas. For example, where personal social services provided by governments through the public service are characteristic, the manpower employed is large, whereas transfer payments (for instance pensions), although amounting to huge expenditures, can be operated by few people with the help of computers.

PROJECT HISTORY AND DESIGN

The research work on which this book is based started in 1994, initially funded by the Transcoop Program of the Humboldt Foundation and a

matching fund of the University of Pittsburgh. It resulted in the pilot study by Derlien and Peters (1998) concerning public service development in the USA and Germany. Subsequently, conferences in Bamberg (1998), Sandbjerg (1999) and Glasgow (2000) were organized to bring together the international research team.

The dimensions of analysis derive from the core aspects of the state concept, specifically public tasks and state structure or to put it differently, policy areas and the structure of the polity:

- Historical development (and growth) of public services since the 1960s when data became available in most countries;
- Development of part-time employment;
- Development of female employment;
- Distribution of employment among levels of government;
- Changes in the composition by legally defined groups of public servants, among these the core civil service;
- Composition of the services and change of this composition by policy area;
- Composition by ethnicity as far as this is of concern;
- Influence of NPM-inspired reforms since the 1980s.

The brief national accounts contained in Volume I try to deal with all of these aspects and provide brief historical and qualitative background information. The analytical chapters contained in Volume II summarize and discuss the national findings along the theoretical dimensions set out for the national reports.

Country Selection

From the beginning, we have tried to avoid the ‘coins, flags and anthems’ approach of comparative research or comparative anthologies. In selecting the countries represented here, we started with two basic considerations. First, we found it necessary from the beginning to compare federal and unitary states; our reasoning was, among other more obvious typological interests, that the degree of centralization might induce different management challenges and thus reform inclination in national governments. Federal states represented here are the USA, Germany, Spain, Canada and Australia. Second, we found it reasonable to compare public services in countries with different political cultures, in particular countries that went along the path of stateless, minimalist welfare traditions, the USA and Commonwealth countries, to Nordic and Continental European countries based on public law traditions and the notion of rather strong states,

Table 1.1 Design: countries/contributors

		Polity		
		Federal		Unitary
Anglo countries	USA	Peters	UK	Hogwood
	AUS	Nelson	NZ	Gregory
	CAN	Gow/Sutherland		
Family	G	Derlien	FRA	Rouban
Non-Anglo countries	ESP	Alba/Navarro	DK	Christensen/ Pallesen
			SW	Pierre

reflecting welfare regimes other than the Anglo-American family. Thus the design depicted in Table 1.1 emerged (with contributors indicated).

Further ‘variables’ we wanted to catch with this selection were:

- Countries involved in the process of devolution: UK, Spain (and France, to a certain extent);
- Countries with a presidential form of government (USA and France, to some extent) compared to parliamentary governments;
- Countries with recent government changes between liberal and conservative parties where supposed policy changes might produce re-directions of public service employment policy.

Time Horizon

It was agreed to begin the time series of data as early as possible after the Second World War. As is pointed out in the chapter on long-term trends (Christensen and Pallesen in Volume II), detailed data have been available in most countries only since the beginning of the 1960s, while the 1950s can be covered only with rough aggregates. Due to the time it takes to bring so many researchers together in a single project, the latest data we were aiming at were for 1998, and then as the project drew along, for 2000. It seemed reasonable to stop the update at this year, for the major reform factors supposed to impinge on public sector development had by then had time enough to work out following the start of reforms in the early 1980s. In fact, major privatizations of public tasks had been carried through, and – as far as the German case is concerned – temporary post-unification effects on the public service were levelled by 2000. Ultimately, in a secular study, it hardly

matters if data depict the state of affairs in the year of publication. The important thing has not been to put together an up-to-date collection of comparative statistics but rather to make a first and serious step towards paving the field for systematic comparative analysis applying a public employment perspective.

Furthermore, given the amount of privatization and the number of years spent on structural public sector reform in the countries under investigation, more recent changes in government, whether from conservative to social-democrat or in the opposite direction, did not imply major changes in public sector policy. International competition for capital investment by providing attractive private sector tax levels, prevent even leftist governments from expanding the public sectors in the way that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s.

Database

Any project attempting to provide comprehensive comparative information on a subject such as ours encounters substantial difficulties. To a great extent we were all at the (not so tender) mercy of the official statistics of our respective countries. We all attempted to be as diligent as possible both in identifying the sources of our data and the definitions of particular entries, especially when they differed from the agreed-upon definitions of the project.

The problems we encountered were in part a function of the nature of the statistics that the official sources chose to collect and report. This problem was particularly apparent when attempting to establish a historical baseline for the systems prior to 1960. Furthermore, not only did the statistics formally change, with some entries disappearing and others appearing, but in some cases the countries themselves changed. For example, the significant changes in the Spanish polity from the 1970s onwards and the unification of Germany required careful attention to the details of what was being measured and in relationship to what. We can only say that we have made every effort to make the data as comparable as possible and to expose the cases in which the data are insufficient or inconsistent.

CONCLUSION

This project has produced the most extensive and directly comparable research on public employment now available. This does not mean that the research is without its problems and potential deficiencies. Still, the coverage of countries and the quality of the individual country studies provides

an important expansion of our knowledge of 'the state at work'. Further, the time series data used demonstrate the extent of change that has occurred in the public sector in most industrialized democracies and to some extent foreshadows future change.

Like all studies in the social sciences this one may raise as many questions as it solves.

NOTE

1. To be precise, von Stein speaks of administration as 'the organic activity of the state' (p. 10). Stein's concept has already been referred to by Derlien (1985).

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