

Preface

Christopher Pollitt

I can truthfully say that this book is one I have been waiting for for more than a decade, and I am therefore delighted that it has finally arrived. It was in the late 1990s, when I was working with my colleague Geert Bouckaert on the first (2000) edition of *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis*, that I realized that we had very little (at least in English) on Southern Europe. Neither did we have the time, skills or resources necessary to fill that huge gap. For one thing, we had decided not to try to cover countries where neither of us had even a passive knowledge of the language – the dangers of relying on selective translations was just too great. In the second edition of that book, thanks to the generous help of Edoardo Ongaro and Elio Borgonovi, we were able to cover Italy, but that, we knew, was only a beginning. Now, however, the job is done – anglophone readers at last have a detailed, sophisticated, up-to-date treatment not only of France (which has frequently been covered) but also of Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

Yet the value of this work goes far beyond just the provision of information about what was previously largely *terra incognita* on anglophone management maps (useful accomplishment though that is in itself). To my mind it has several major additional virtues. First, it is a theoretically challenging work, engaging not just with the NPM but with other traditions, as well as with the more recently formulated model of a Neo-Weberian State (NWS). Further, it attempts a multi-level approach, integrating observations about developments at the EU level with the analysis of reforms within each particular country, plus some interesting observations about the evidently flexible relationship between national reform *motifs* and the trajectories of subnational governments, and even individual public sector organizations. All this has required some very wide reading – and an ambitious attempt to integrate a variety of approaches, concepts and levels of analysis.

Second, and perhaps less obviously, the detailed analysis implies some significant reorientations for those (many) Anglophone scholars who have hitherto worked comfortably within the thought-world of North America and North-Western Europe. Such scholars can no longer assume that their

world is 'normal' and anything else is a deviation to be assessed against what is happening in the USA, the UK, the Netherlands or Sweden. In this part of the zoo you will find some different kinds of animal, but also some familiar animals behaving in unfamiliar ways. Thus (for example) the *grands corps* in Italy evidently do not behave in the same way as the *grand corps* in France, and the public sector unions in most of the southern countries play a bigger role than we are used to in, say, the UK or the Netherlands. And civil service reforms such as managerialization of the upper grades and a more contract-like form of employment take on a different hue when implemented within an intense patronage/spoils system such as prevails in Italy.

Third, although its author is too modest to say so, I would suggest that this book is another nail in the coffin of 'generic' public management or 'global recipes', because what we see here is some very different types of systems, which exhibit both continuity and change as they pursue distinctive trajectories of their own. As such it is also a sign of growing maturity in the field of academic public management. We no longer need to debate everything in relation to one simple model, or even a succession of simple models ('NPM turns into networks, which then turn into governance', as some of our linear-thinking students occasionally but misleadingly suggest). We can tolerate complexity and diversity, and still make comparisons and build bridges between the different strands of thinking and practice. Even the OECD has now moved away from the linear language of countries being 'behind' or 'ahead' which characterized some its 1990s publications. 'Modernization is context dependent' it says in a recent overview (although it still tries to hang on to a singular 'way forward' (OECD, 2005, p. 22; Pollitt *et al.*, 2006).

Academic books and articles are supposed to go as far as they can and then suggest where other scholars might go next. In this case Edoardo Ongaro brings home a rich harvest of further questions and potential projects. I would hope to see a range of spin-offs and further projects emerge from the debate which I hope this book will provoke. One longer-term strategic vision which I would myself like to add is that public management scholars could get together to formulate an even more ambitious project – one that compares the different 'families' of countries or 'traditions' of administration. Thus we might envisage a broad comparison of the Napoleonic systems with the Scandinavian systems, the post-Communist states of Eastern Europe, Germanic federalism and British centralism. This would require a team effort and substantial funding, but it would give substance and depth to what has hitherto been a prominent but somewhat intangible concept, that of a 'European administrative space'. If such a large-scale project is ever launched then its founders

will be able to look back on this book as one of the milestones along the road.

Christopher Pollitt
Research Professor in Public Management
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
Belgium

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