

Authors: Giovanni Esposito¹ and Giuseppe Lucio Gaeta²

¹ University of Liège, HEC-School of Management, g.esposito@ulg.ac.be

² University of Naples “L’Orientale”, Department of Human and Social Sciences, glgaeta@unior.it

Abstract

The appearance of professional management as the dominant means of organizational control in society has been referred to as the “managerial revolution” (Preston and Post, 1974). This expression was coined by Burnham (1941) who asserted that, since early XX century, American industrial establishments and state agencies came progressively to be dominated by a new ruling class of managerial professionals. In the context of the public sector, this revolutionary change occurred in the wave of the opposition against the extension of government ownership and the setting up of new bureaus and governmental bodies that made the object of a constant stream of propaganda picturing them as ridden with inefficiency compared with private business (Burnham, 1941).

The European organizations of the public sector have experienced during the last century the same process of organizational change where private sector managerial tools and principles have spread across both central and local governments with the aim of improving effectiveness, efficiency and economy (Aucoin, 1990; Stewart and Walsh, 1992; Hood, 1995; Walsh, 1997; London, 2002). Many scholars have associated this process of change with the raise and diffusion of managerialism (Clarke and Newman, 1997; Saint-Martin, 1998; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2000). The latter refers to a set of beliefs in the values of professional managers and the concepts and methods they use and came to be established thanks to the New Public Management (NPM) reform movement (i.e. Saint-Martin, 2000; Kernaghan, 2000; O’Flynn, 2007). As referred by Christensen and Læg Reid (2011), this reform movement has been more than a mere technical and apolitical framework to modernize old-style bureaucracies (i.e. Scott Bushnell and Sallee, 1990; Hood, 1991) and has manifested itself in history as a political process driven by a powerful reform ideology (i.e. Hood, 1995; Fournier and Grey 2000).

The academic literature in the field of management and governance studies has already investigated managerialism as a form of political ideology. In fact, while some scholars have studied the managerialist

conception of society (Enteman 1993) and its core beliefs with regard to the organization of human interactions in society (Parker, 2002), other scholars have deepened the consequences that the entrenchment of this ideology in the organizational structures of the public sector may have not only on the provision of some basic public services (i.e. Trowler, 1998) but also on the independence of public decision-making processes from external private actors (i.e. Saint-Martin, 1998). As far as the European context is concerned, some recent studies have focused on the spread of managerialism across specific policy areas of the national public sectors (i.e. Carvalho and Santiago, 2015). Nevertheless, as of today, no systematic empirical study is available about the national parties' political propaganda that over the last century has advocated the dissemination of managerialist values across the organizations of the European public sectors. Therefore, we address the following two research questions: i) are there any patterns of diffusion of public-sector managerialist values across the political agendas of European parties over the XX century?; and – given that the relationship between the reform ideology and the actual reform practice may be variously interpreted (Christensen and Lægreid, 2011) - ii) which type of country-level specific relationships may exist between this type of ideological propaganda and the actual reform practices?

As far as the first research question is concerned, this paper adopts a longitudinal framework of research (Pettigrew, 1990) and detects developmental trends in the characteristics of the last-century European public-sector managerialist propaganda. More in details, by mining a large database covering elections occurred in Western and Eastern Europe since 1950, it provides a threefold contribution. Primarily, it quantifies the influence that the managerialist values have had in the political agendas of European parties over the last half-century. Secondly, it estimates the pace of diffusion of these values across the above-mentioned agendas and, thirdly, it uncovers the political agency advancing these values.

As far as the second research question is concerned, this paper identifies three different scenarios of country-level specific relationship between the diffusion of the public-sector managerialist ideology and the actual adoption of public-sector managerialist reform measures. On the basis of these three scenarios, it provides three ideal-typical categories to be used in any future research initiative addressing the controversial relationship between the reform ideology and the actual reform practice.

In a nutshell, this paper wants to provide evidence-based insights in the history of the political propaganda that since 1950s has supported the diffusion of public-sector managerialist reforms across the national administrative systems of Europe. Such a research orientation is in line with the ongoing research initiatives supported by the European Commission that is in search of novel and systematic quantitative data on public-sector managerialist reforms and their impacts in Europe (COCOPS, 2013).

Working Paper LOC_WP_01

Please do not quote.

This is a preliminary version

The paper is structured as follows. In section two, we go through the relevant literature on public-sector managerialism and define the variable to be observed in this empirical study. In section three we present our analysis. The fourth section presents the empirical findings whereas the fifth discusses them. The sixth section concludes by summarizing the main achievements of this study and prospecting the forthcoming research developments.