

Towards a Neo-Weberian European Union? Lisbon Agenda and Public Administration

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ABSTRACT

This essay analyzes the role of Public Administration (PA) within the Lisbon Agenda (LA), both on the EU and the Member States' level and as concerns both the administration of the LA and general PA. It argues that overall, PA has been neglected or reduced to policy, finance, and a simple strife for 'modernization' and 'innovation' in the LA and the surrounding discourse until very recently, which is all the worse because without high-quality PA, the success of the LA is impossible. The essay suggests that, when PA reforms are discussed, they generally follow the old-fashioned approach of the New Public Management, which by now has proven to be a failure. It is argued that, rather, a successful PA strategy for the LA has to heed the principles of the Neo-Weberian State, which in addition to everything else is particularly appropriate for any innovation-based development agenda.

Key Words: Lisbon Agenda, Public Administration, Public Management Reform, Neo-Weberian State, New Public Management.

1. Public Administration and the Lisbon Agenda, 2000-2007

The life-world of the Lisbon Agenda, today's Europe, can be described as a primarily administered environment. In spite of all criticism of the public sector and its organization, it retains its significant, often dominating role in economy and society. It is therefore baffling that the original Lisbon Strategy does not address this subject at all, nor was this remedied in the Kok Report or any other documents until 2005. In that sense, public administration was the missing dimension of the Lisbon Agenda.

Only from 2006 do we see a trickle of mentions of public administration in Lisbon Agenda-related documents, especially as concerns its role in innovation (which is very different from 'innovative practices in public administration'). The Implementation Report 2006 states that there is a role of the public sphere in the innovation process (17), and the Lahti conclusions (2006, 6-7) likewise acknowledge this role. In all the documents that mention the Lisbon Agenda, including later ones,

even if they are not factually linked, the same tendency is visible: A focus on e-government, public procurement, and innovation (usually very loosely understood).

2. The European Public Administration Network

At the same time, in Lisbon Agenda scholarship, too, neglect of public administration was the case; there was virtually no attention given to the subject matter. The main exception is the work by Seppo Määttä (2004, 2006), which is very strongly policy-oriented. This work was done in the context of the one institution that has addressed the topic fairly early on, EPAN (or EUPAN, the acronym seems to vary), “an informal network of Directors General responsible for Public Administrations in EU member States and European Commission” (<http://www.eupan.org>), which is in fact the main institution on the European level, if with no legal basis or staff and completely voluntary, to deal with the issues.

During the Luxembourg presidency, and chaired by it, EPAN formed an ad-hoc group on the Lisbon Strategy that worked for half a year in 2005; the results (EPAN 2005) do not seem adequately reflected in the further discussion of public administration within the Lisbon Agenda in the EU context.

The “Wassenaar Memorandum of Understanding” (November 2004) had established the Lisbon Agenda as a main point of reference, arguing for “the importance of an excellent functioning public administration as a contributor to realising the Lisbon Strategy.” (EPAN 2005, 22) The final report of the ad-hoc group states that “Implementing some of the key Lisbon priorities depends on a highly competent, professional and competitive public administration, being characterised by effective governance structures, innovative and effective policy-making practices and a performance oriented service delivery. In this sense the national public administrations are to be considered as important enablers for reaching the Lisbon targets.” (5)

What we can learn from the EPAN and Määttä is the significance of public administration for the Lisbon Agenda in its different aspects (to which we will later add public administration’s key role in innovation):

Table 1: The significance of public administration for the Lisbon Agenda
Public administration...

General	In the EU	For the Lisbon Agenda
as a central part of public governance	as the largest employer in the EU	as the main service provider especially in the key areas of the Lisbon Agenda (education, health care, social protection)
as context creator for citizens and businesses to act	as a large spender/purchaser (more than 15% EU GDP overall)	... and governments as the designers of the Lisbon Agenda
as service provider (hindering role as well as positive one)	as the largest single industry in the EU (45% EU GDP overall)	

(EPAN 2004, 2-3; Määttä 2004, 4-6; 2006, 29, 58-59)

3. Public Administration in the Lisbon Agenda today

By 2008, public administration still plays a very minor role in the Lisbon Agenda context, but it now does play a role, much of it a result of the Portuguese presidency's initiative in this field. There have been specific meetings and policy papers (Initiatives 2007), especially as regards the Member States and the National Lisbon Programmes; and public administration is an issue, if not a top priority, in the results report of the presidency as well. (Preparing 2007)

We can categorize public administration as it relates to the Lisbon Agenda into four basic categories:

Table 2: **Categories of public administration in the Lisbon Agenda context**

Public administration	of the Lisbon Agenda	in general
on the Member States' level	1	2
on the EU level	3	4

If we do so, we see that the current focus is almost exclusively on 2, with some attention to 1 and none to 3 or 4. We can further say that none of the Lisbon-related public administration documents address the structure and organization of public administration, except in very general terms; partially, this may have to do with the highly national quality of the civil service structure. Rather, tools and methods have been the main focus. A link to the current debate about the shifting character of the public administration paradigm, especially in Europe, seems to be almost completely missing; this short paper will attempt to supply it.

If we look from a public administration perspective at all the papers and documents mentioned, we also notice three significant aspects: public administration is generally viewed synonymously with public policy, and it is understood within a (public) finance framework, mainly aiming at its reduction and (streamlining, customer-oriented) reform, often said to (indirectly) aid the innovation process. We also see that what is striven for is throughout a 'modernization', so as to arrive at 'modern' and 'innovative' public administration. And in general, it seems that institutions are seen more as barriers to growth and innovation than enablers.

3.1 Policy

Even, perhaps especially, the very best documents connecting public administration and Lisbon Agenda do so from a policy perspective. For instance, Maria João Rodrigues' proposal (2008) for improving public administration for the Lisbon Agenda focused exclusively on planning and strategic management. (9-17). Even when taking into consideration the many problems with strategic planning, this is undoubtedly important, but it does not address the main issues of public administration. The same, if on a much more tool-based level, is the case with all other documents as well, best perhaps in Määttä (2004, also 2006). Obviously, then, there is a tacit conflagration of public administration with public policy. Yet, while the two overlap and always have overlapped, the clear recognition of public administration,

its basically implementational character, the difference between administration and policy (Hegel 1821, § 287 is the classic statement), is important to retain in order to keep one's focus on questions of staff and organization – the 'who' rather than the 'what', because there is no 'what' without the 'who' –, indeed of civil service structure, because administration is not policy but its exercise. A concentration on policy obscures the nature of and demands on administration itself, to the detriment of whatever the project at hand is. So, in the Lisbon Agenda context, while policy is important, it is necessary to look at public administration proper in order to see who implements it, and how.

3.2. Finance

As regards the finance context, a particularly strong example is an ECFIN (Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs) paper preparing a meeting on these issues (Initiatives 2007), where public administration reforms are seen, fundamentally, as a money-saving device, together with lifting a bureaucratic burden. The final report of the Portuguese presidency on the Lisbon Agenda (Preparing 2007), in turn, lists a "need for stronger action" in public administration, specifically "public administration modernization", (Preparing 2007, Main Outcomes, 1) but the statement remains largely fiscal: "The modernisation of *public administration* is key to improve efficiency and effectiveness of public finances." (3) Reported as a main result of the 2822nd Council meeting is "the reform and modernisation of public administration. The conclusions highlight the importance of such initiatives in enhancing competitiveness, delivering better services, achieving better value-for-money and ensuring the control of government expenditure, and thus meeting the objectives of both the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs and the stability and growth pact." (2) The following statement is typical: "The Council discussed Member States' experiences of modernising public administration in the context of the quality of public finances." (12) It does address "a re-organisation of public administrations" (12), but what this should look like, and why it should take place, is not specified. It even recommends having the Ministers of Finance play a key role in public administration reform (12), a move that historically has almost universally led to disaster, because ministries of finance are by their self-logic interested in cost-cutting, neither in value-creation nor in the support of innovation. Finally, public administration is mentioned in the March 2008 Presidency Conclusions only in the context of improving the quality of public finances. (3) However, public administration can only be judged, in financial terms, by the wealth it creates, and so the question is not how much can be saved here, but how much return one receives from investing. (This is of course difficult to ascertain, let alone measure, but this does not affect the principle.) To save by cutting public administration may be foolish if this leads to lower productivity, entrepreneurship, innovation, or economic development – and there are good reasons to think that such a connection exists.

3.3 'Modern' and 'innovative' public administration

Most importantly, however, what is emphasized in general and overarching as a claim is the need for a 'modernization' of public administration. Every single document that addresses public administration talks about 'modernization'. However, what does 'modern' really mean? Almost no document gives as much as a working definition of the concept, and the one that does, "Initiatives" (2007, 4), states that "In a broad sense, the modernisation of public administration can be defined as reform measures aimed at improving the quality of governance and at raising the efficiency and effectiveness of public service provision." This is both highly reductionist and completely vague, because neither is merely the quality of public administration the issue, nor is public administration exhaustively described by service provision.

In any meaningful sense in this context, 'modern' can not mean anything specific, but 'in line with the times', 'in line with the current situation.' 'Modern' in the sense of 'new' is surely not only an ambiguous, but also a highly ambivalent concept by now, after the experiences of the 20th century – would a totalitarian shift away from democracy be better because it was the new thing? What, if not 'appropriate for the circumstances of the times', could 'modern' mean except merely 'fashionable'? What would be bad about an appropriate, well-working, traditional solution? What is appropriate, however, depends on the times and the situation, and the problem is that the vast majority of claims in documents surrounding public administration use 'modern' to denote a concept that is exactly *not* in line with times and situation at all.

In addition, as in so many areas of the public discourse during the last decade or two, what we generally see is a very loose deployment of the concept of innovation. Innovation, however, has to be understood quite strictly – in a basically Schumpeterian sense (see only Schumpeter 1928, 374-385), of course with some modifications and additions – if the effects, the reasons why innovation is so important and central, not least for the Lisbon Agenda, are going to be harvested at all. Within and concerning the public sector, the use of the term is just that of wielding a cliché – it means 'something new', nothing more, interchangeable with 'modern'. Yet, again, in public administration, it is definitely enough if some arrangement works, or works well; there is no reason that it has to be new, let alone genuinely innovative, if this is possible at all. Surely, the public sector has to go with the times, it is not immune to the demands of the "new best practice" in organization (Perez 2002, 7-8, 15-16, 114), but this is vastly different from being innovative in itself. Innovation is about profit, and the task of the state is neither to make money, nor to save it, but – as one aspect – to see that it can be, and is, made.

In the public administration context, this is no light matter, *a fortiori* as far as the Lisbon Agenda is concerned, with its emphasis on an innovation-based economy. The problem is that within public administration, the paradigm, as has already been mentioned, has changed in the past few years, yet the Lisbon Agenda public administration discourse does not reflect that change. Rather, it is heavily retrospective and basically presents a public administration that is – not in specific areas, such as e-Governance, but in principles and structure – designed to solve the problems of the 1970s and 1980s, whose chance of coming back is very slight indeed.

4. The New Public Management and its demise¹

Within public administration, the most important reform movement of the last quarter of a century has been the New Public Management (NPM), the basis of all Lisbon Agenda public administration initiatives, as it seems. NPM is the transfer of business and market principles and management techniques from the private into the public sector, symbiotic with and based on a neo-liberal understanding of state and economy. The goal, therefore, is a slim, reduced, minimal state in which any public activity is decreased and, if at all, exercised according to business principles of efficiency. It is popularly denoted by concepts such as project management, flat hierarchies, customer orientation, abolition of career civil service, depolitization, total quality management, and contracting-out. Transparency, citizen involvement, and decentralization are not part of the original core of NPM, both theoretically – because the NPM's focus on the apolitical rule of the expert makes them more difficult and because they do not necessarily contradict previous forms of public administration at all – and empirically.

NPM comes from Anglo-America, and it was strongly pushed by most of the International Finance Institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF. It originates from the 1980s with their dominance of neo-liberal governments and the perceived crisis of the Welfare state and its financing, but it came to full fruition in the early 1990s. On the one hand, NPM was a fashion phenomenon within public administration scholarship and practice, which explains much of its power; on the other, it was a genuinely ideological concept.

As important and, though more rarely, as successful as several NPM-inspired reforms of the public sector might have been and still may be, what one notices first when looking at the public and private spheres is the difference, not the similarity. The state is denoted primarily by its monopoly of power, force, and coercion on one side and its orientation towards the public good on the other; the business world legitimately focuses on profit maximization. The use of business techniques within the public sphere thus confuses the most basic requirements of any state, particularly of a Democracy, with a liability: regularity, transparency, and due process are simply much more important than low costs and speed.

This is why respective economic and especially management-theoretical insights could only establish themselves after the end of the dominance of the NPM, which as genuine ideology was not open even for arguments stemming from its own leading method. NPM reforms created, for instance, quasi-markets within administrative organizations in order to create market behaviour: yet, such behaviour can only develop in genuine and not in quasi- (i.e. pseudo-) markets. (See König 2001, 6-7) Another example is the problem of the concept of performance pay vis-à-vis the demands of multitasking and motivation through identification with the organization (Akerlof and Kranton 2003, esp. 9-11, 27-29); as Lawrence Lynn, Jr., has recently

¹ A substantial part of this segment has already been published in this very *journal*, if in a longer version and regionally specific, within an earlier essay of mine (Drechsler 2005a); it is retained here so as to retain context and argument. I have developed the same thoughts, and often the same formulations as well, in Drechsler 2005b and 2008a.

pointed out (see Drechsler and Kattel in Pollitt et al. 2009), if any concept in the social sciences is disproved, it is that of performance pay – and yet it is politically pushed and implemented – also very frequently within the Lisbon Agenda context, at least in theory.

In advanced public administration scholarship itself, then, especially – but not only – in Europe, NPM is heavily on the defensive by now, if taken as a world view (i.e. an ideology), rather than as one of several useful perspectives for public administration reform (i.e. a tool box). What was an option ten years ago is simply not an option anymore today. One could say that in public administration

- around 1995, it was still possible to believe in NPM, although there were first strong and substantial critiques
- around 2000, the year of the Lisbon Agenda, NPM was on the defensive, as empirical findings spoke clearly against it as well
- around 2005, the year of the mid-term review, NPM was not a viable concept anymore

In other words, it has become quite rare in the last five years, and is becoming rarer still, to see articles in the very top journals, or essays and keynote addresses by the very top public administration scholars – especially in Europe, but also in the United States –, based on, or implicitly assuming the validity, of NPM. Yet, in many areas, both of scholarship and of the world, and particularly in policy, NPM is very alive and very much kicking (i.e. the farther one is from academe, Europe, or international and central government, the first element being the most crucial). This is also true on the level of the EU and many Member States, where it fits some strings of the dominating world view(s). Nevertheless, especially on the local and regional level, many communities have in recent years, and after careful deliberation, acted against NPM reforms, even in traditional NPM strongholds. The justification for stopping the NPM reforms by the city of Dübendorf, Zürich, Switzerland, sums up the reasons very nicely: “no improvements of efficiency, effectiveness nor quality could be attributed to NPM reforms.” (Noordhoek and Saner 2005, 38)

5. The Neo-Weberian State

The counter-model to NPM, indeed its *bête noire*, is what is called ‘Weberian public administration’. This label is highly problematic, as NPM presents a caricature of it and thus builds up a paper tiger. Apart from the caricature, for Weber, the most efficient public administration was a set of offices in which appointed civil servants operated under the principles of merit selection (impersonality), hierarchy, the division of labour, exclusive employment, career advancement, the written form, and legality. This increase of rationality – his key term – would increase speed, scope, predictability, and cost-effectiveness, as needed for an advanced mass-industrial society. (Weber 1922, esp. 124-130)

It seems that fundamentally, with all its weaknesses, the Weberian model still seems to be the best around, and it is certainly superior to the NPM – it is, to borrow

the Churchillian phrase, the worst form of public administration except all others. The connection between Weberianism and economic growth seems, in any case, very close. (See Evans and Rauch 1999) Nevertheless, the optimal administrative structure of our times does not consist of a simple rehash of the organization principles of the mass production paradigm, whose weaknesses are amply known – from excessive legalism via genuine bureaucratism to genuine antagonism to innovation and the economy. NPM also offers quite some – i.a. managerialist – elements and even larger principles which ‘as such’ could be judged positively, as long as they do not form the basis of the system, and there have to be some adaptations for the current times and their different challenges, demands, and socio-intellectual context.

This is why the currently most discussed model for the administrative paradigm that follows NPM, i.e. ‘post-NPM’, is not a return to the previous one, but according to the concept of Pollitt and Bouckaert of 2004, the so-called Neo-Weberian State (NWS), a fortuous metaphor describing a model that co-opts the positive elements of NPM, but on a Weberian foundation, i.e. that both are asymmetrically *aufgehoben*. (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004, 96-102) One can briefly sum up the NWS as follows:

Table 3: The Neo-Weberian State (summary)

Neo-	Weberian
Shift from an internal orientation towards bureaucratic rules to an external orientation towards meeting citizens’ needs and wishes. The primary route to achieving this is not the employment of market mechanisms (although they may occasionally come in handy) but the creation of a professional culture of quality and service	[but:] Reaffirmation of the role of the state as the main facilitator of solutions to the new problems of globalization, technological change, shifting demographics, and environmental threat
Supplementation (not replacement) of the role of representative democracy by a range of devices for consultation with, and direct representation of, citizens’ views (...)	[but:] Reaffirmation of the role of representative democracy (central, regional, and local) as the legitimating element within the state apparatus
In the management of resources within government, a modernization of the relevant laws to encourage a greater orientation on the achievements of results rather than merely the correct following of procedure. This is expressed partly in a shift from ex ante to ex post controls, but not a complete abandonment of the former	[but:] Reaffirmation of administrative law – suitably modernized – in preserving the basic principles pertaining to the citizen-state relationship, including equality before the law, legal security, and the availability of specialized legal scrutiny of state actions
A professionalization of the public service, so that the ‘bureaucrat’ becomes not simply an expert in the law relevant to his or her sphere of activity, but also a professional manager, oriented to meeting the needs of his or her citizens / users	[but:] Preservation of the idea of a public service with a distinct status, culture, and terms and conditions

(Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004, 99-100)

The NWS was intended as an empirical-analytical, not as a normative model, and one of its creators, Pollitt, is quite self-critical about several of its aspects (see Pollitt in Pollitt et al. 2009), but it stands so far as one explanatory model of what is going on in Europe, and it does not throw good managerialist – and participatory – babies out with the NPM bathwater. It does still form a research agenda, but in lieu of anything better, it significantly helps our understanding of contemporary public administration.

6. The Neo-Weberian State and innovation

But why is the NWS so particularly appropriate for the Lisbon Agenda? This is because it is the perfect match for an innovation-based society, contrary to NPM. When dealing with innovation-based economics, the foundation, after all, of the Lisbon Agenda,² what none of the papers and documents mentioned seem to see is the immense push-pull function of what is after all a state-based socio-economic development programme that asks for, draws upon, and requires a highly competent, long-term-oriented, dedicated and enabled civil service to implement it – “the Lisbon strategy does not happen by itself” (Määttä 2006, 52; see 59) – not without the societal actors either, but certainly not without public administration. To say that “Empirical research indicates that modern and efficient public administrations have a positive impact on productivity and growth” (Initiatives 2007, 3) is by far too little; it is *effective* public administration that has this effect, and it is more than a positive impact, but rather a *conditio sine qua non*. Innovation in the general interest, rather than that of an individual entrepreneur, is a question of successful innovation policy, and who should implement that if not the administration? *L’innovation, une affaire d’état*, as Claude Rochet puts it succinctly. (2007)

If we follow Carlota Perez’ great surges theory and her model of Techno-Economic Paradigm Shifts (2002), we can also observe that, as we are in the middle of the ICT paradigm and heading towards a new one in the distance, at this moment, after the collapse and before heading towards “synergy”, state and administration are expected to take up their great tasks again, and the anti-state climate of the earlier installation period of ICT is, or should be, over. And whatever the new leading technology will be – nanotech, biotech, convergence or something completely different – its setup will require a particularly capable state actor and a science and technology policy implemented by a civil service that is denoted by long-term thinking, high competence and tolerance for mistakes – the opposite of NPM. (Drechsler 2008b)

Finally, it should be emphasized for the current paradigm, that of ICT, that e-Governance and NPM are actually not related, as is usually assumed because they seem to share certain features. (See Dunleavy et al. 2005) Even almost none of the traditional Weberian categories become obsolete through ICT (potentially, exclusive employment does, which may be a problem for the nucleus of civil service), some – such as the written principle and division of labour – are actually enforced. In the

² In that sense, I see things the other way round from Erik S. Reinert’s, who sees in the Lisbon Agenda “the Schumpeterian icing on a solidly neo-liberal cake” (2006, 128); I see neo-liberal icing on a Schumpeterian cake, but I agree that for some time, to stay with the metaphor, the icing has started to suffocate the cake.

most prominent case of hierarchy, there are mixed dynamics, as it is weakened by network models of organization but strongly enforced via the extreme control and coordination capabilities of ICT. But in sum, e-Governance and the NWS can reinforce each other, and in fact seem to do so.

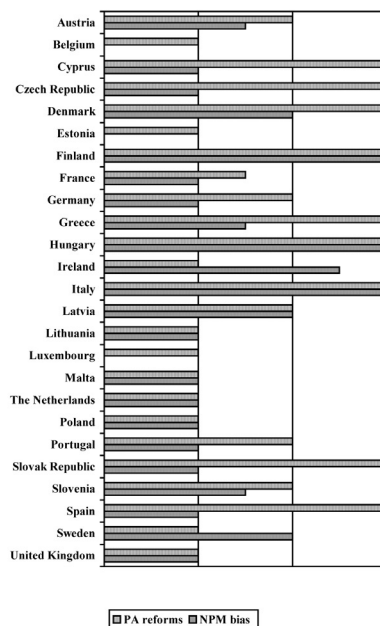
7. Public Administration and Lisbon Agenda

And yet, in the papers mentioned so far, as we can see, NPM is clearly still the basis of all public administration considerations, if often already in a weakened form (such as in Määttä 2006 and Initiatives 2007), but a reorientation towards the NWS, or toward any post-NPM paradigm, has not taken place yet.

7.1 In the Member States

But what do the public administration reform initiatives in the Member States look like? While the “Initiatives” paper gives some descriptions and a narrative list of the measures (2007, 4-10, 13-14), a more comparable list would be helpful to see what happens, and thus, Thomas Duve has investigated this³ with the following results:

Table 4: **Public administration reforms and NPM bias in Member States’ National Lisbon Programmes, 2006**



(Duve 2008, based on National Reform Programmes 2006)

³ Duve 2008; quantitative-qualitative study (in the context of the Estonian Science Foundation project, “Public Administration and Innovation Policy”, Tallinn University of Technology), looking for the frequency of general public administration reform keywords and then NPM ones in the 2006 National Reform Programmes (most recent available data, estimate for France, as the French programme is not available in English).

Contents-wise, e-Government initiatives (against which really nobody will put up resistance anymore) and one-stop shops (which are, in the end, NPM tools but good ones, if rather obvious and simple) as well as the reduction of bureaucracy are the dominant features. We do see, however, some tendency that countries with strong public administration reform activity also verge towards NPM.

The strongest NPM protagonists according to this study, Finland, Hungary, and Italy, are interesting in that they are very different. The Finnish model is to a large extent *sui generis* and happens on a very solid basis that can 'afford' NPM; also, in the Finnish scholarly public administration discourse, the end of NPM is very well understood, and the tendency, except perhaps on the municipal level, is ending – Finland is not for nothing by most indicators the most successful country in Europe, if not the world.⁴ As regards Hungary and Italy, further studies are necessary, but it may not be too far off the mark to lump these initiatives under the heading of politics and rhetoric; both have very strong, classical systems (in the case of Hungary, consciously created after Weberian models; Italy, rather pre-Weberian) which do not seem to give way to fundamental reforms at the moment.

One should generally consider that (a) these are, again, programmes and not actually implemented reforms, which tend to be very different in public administration, that (b) it is never clear which kind of public administration reforms were already pursued and then written into the Lisbon Agenda reports, and that (c) the reports are usually compiled decentrally by all national ministries, so that in countries where no ministry is in charge of public administration, nothing will be listed either. Nonetheless, what we do see, no doubt, is an influence – if perhaps only declarative and performative – of the EU, via the Commission, on national administrations on the basis of the Lisbon Agenda. The ample literature on the Europeanization of national administrations has not touched this matter yet, but this may only be a matter of time. If we look at our matrix, we see that the focus was mostly on category 1, public administration as such on the Member States' level; the issue of specific Lisbon Agenda administration, category 2, is not really considered yet, either.

7.2 In European Union administration

But if category 1 is neglected, we do not find anything about public administration reform on the EU level, i.e. as regards the administration of the Lisbon Agenda by the Commission and the EU administration itself. (From the Commission's point of view, while categories 1 and 2 do not have a responsible Directorate General; 3 – practically to a very small extent – and 4 are located in the DG Admin, the DG for Personnel and Administration; responsible Commissioner is Vice President Siim Kallas.)

⁴ For me personally, it was clear that NPM had ended when a leading civil servant in the Finnish Ministry of Finance emphasized to me that Finland would use NPM tools rather than the ideology, and when a PhD student from the University of Helsinki referred to certain faculty members as holding "traditional" views, with which he meant NPM.

We may say that there is no thinking about Lisbon Agenda administration within the Commission, category 3, at all, or at least it is not visible – except the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) –, but that category 4 has been a subject of great attention, especially because this is also a popular issue (in the sense of a genuine general popular animus against “the bureaucrats in Brussels”). It is well-known, or at least the general opinion, that basically, the EU staff formed a Continental civil service system, even among French lines, and proverbially bureaucratic. Partially to cater to fashion and driven by scandal, partially for serious reasons, there have been serious reforms, especially under the previous Commissioner in charge, Neil Kinnock, in 2000. (Kinnock 2004) More or less, these were managerialist reforms along NPM lines that were imposed from above. (Bauer 2006, 276-277; see Kassim 2004) EU scholarship has basically praised the Kinnock reforms, either as a success or, if not, then as well-intended. (See, e.g., Bauer 2006, Kassim 2004, Stevens and Stevens 2006, more cautiously Levy 2003)

But by now, some shift, if not explicitly, towards the NWS is visible here as well. Commissioner Kallas, historically very sympathetic to NPM reforms, has recently emphasized that at least the senior civil service of the EU will remain a career system and will be, in fact, even more so than it has been in the past, with a strong emphasis on career advancement, identity, motivation, and precisely not recruitment from the Member States which has led to all kinds of problems, including cultural adaptation. (Kallas 2008; cf. Bauer 2006 for the previous situation) In part, this is seen as a reaction to the problems of the Santer Commission’s stepping back after the Cresson scandals in 1999. In spite of all the NPM tools tried, what we can see here is a return to classically Weberian patterns (also echoing Akerlof) with a clear goal in mind, never mind what tools it takes to accomplish it. A transfer from these insights to the Member States may, however, take a while, because this could look to some not as a genuinely progressive shift from NPM to the NWS but rather as a turn backwards to bureaucratic rule.

8. Prospects

In sum, in spite of a change of focus for the good, we may say that the public administration context of the Lisbon Agenda is still not adequately represented. What is necessary, first of all, is to realize the importance of public administration for the Lisbon Agenda – it cannot succeed without high-quality public administration. Then, it needs to be clear that public administration is not policy, that it is not there to save money but, if anything, to enable the creation of wealth, and that ‘modern’ should mean ‘appropriate for the times’. If one then considers the advances of public administration scholarship, it will be very clear that what is needed for the Lisbon Agenda is a kind of public administration that is NWS-based – on the EU level as well as on the Member States’ one.

As regards the latter, again, this is a contentious subject because the field is seen, partially rightly, as a national specific that should not be interfered with by the EU. On the other hand, if the success of the Lisbon Agenda hinges on high-quality public administration, then this is an issue that concerns the entire EU, and therefore there is a certain mandate as an outcome of the Portuguese presidency as mentioned

above (Preparing 2007, Main Outcomes 3), even if listed under ‘modernization’, stating that public administration reform should “undergo regular analysis and exchange of best practices in particular in the context of the Lisbon National Reform Programmes.”

Yet, there is a genuine ambivalence as to whether one should not rather be happy that the Lisbon Agenda did not contain any reference to public administration reform. By and large, the impression one gets when reading those texts is that even many of those who supported the Lisbon Agenda favoured NPM, while depicting classical, ‘Weberian’ public administration – to which they inevitably belonged – as the enemy, partially for lack of information regarding public administration, but often with the best intentions. But only if proper attention to public administration specifics is guaranteed, then an OMC-like process regarding Member States’ public administration would make some sense. If so, it would therefore be important to coordinate it at the top with an office that has the capacity to deal with and focus on public administration, viz. with the commissioner in charge of public administration.

The Lisbon Agenda both requires and supports, in the sense of push/pull, the NWS and needs to change into this direction. This may be all the easier as NPM is not ‘cool’ anymore, but it requires a certain shift in emphasis and understanding. For the sake of the latter, the following development of concepts can be suggested:

Modern	⇒	Appropriate
Innovative public administration	⇒	Innovation-enabling public administration
Saving money	⇒	Return on investment

The key to the success of any strategy like the Lisbon Agenda is to have the administrative capacity and competence of the responsive and responsible state actors to implement it. The optimal solution for this today is a genuine post-NPM system, Weberian-based but with the lessons from NPM learned, which – and this is not less right for being a cliché – puts the human person into the centre of administrative decision-making, i.e. one that is in line both with the Lisbon Agenda and its goals, with the final goal of the Good Life in the Good State. (See Drechsler 2001) Whether it is the Neo-Weberian State itself or some modification thereof, or another model altogether, remains to be developed. “Putting knowledge into practice” (2006, 2) makes the one positive reference in our context to the EU’s “tradition of a strong and responsible public sector, which should be capitalized on.” For the sake of the success of the Lisbon Agenda and of Europe generally, it is time that this insight is acted upon.

9. Postscript

As this article goes to press, in mid-February of 2009, the global financial meltdown, of which we have not seen the worst yet, has radically altered the context in which both Lisbon Agenda and Public Administration in Europe take place. The return of the state into the economy, on a scale unimaginable when this paper was

delivered, has strongly corroborated and reinforced its basic tenets but has also made them somewhat trivial and superannuated. However, there are still those who believe that a state with so many additional tasks in the economic sphere can do so without a genuinely competent and motivated civil service, and that cutting public expenditure at least in this realm is still a good idea (and this seems to include, more's the pity, some of the institutions charged with containing the crisis). Naturally, however, whether one likes the new big state or not, it is not only inevitable, but it is already there – and it is in the interest of everyone, anywhere (excepting a few profiteers) that it is well-administered. This good administration, I think, clearly needs to be built along Neo-Weberian lines, both on the EU and the Member States' level, and most certainly cannot be based on NPM, which in addition to everything else is the PA ideology that represents the thinking which has substantially contributed to bringing the current crisis about to begin with. In fact, the best hope for managing both the crisis and later recovery well on all levels is the 'Return of the Mandarin', i.e. of a highly capable, responsible, motivated, long-term-oriented senior civil service, among other Neo-Weberian and indeed classical Weberian institutions. Why this is so is, it is to be hoped, still shown in a relevant way by this article.

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