

BETWEEN NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AND NEW PUBLIC GOVERNANCE:

THE CASE OF MEXICAN MUNICIPALITIES ¹

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the academic debate on the real and symbolic effects of New Public Management (NPM) has been intense. Some maintain that we are facing a new paradigm (Barzelay, 1992). Others question its significance and insist that it is only a revision of old approaches concerned with the technical qualities of public administration (Hood, 1991; Arellano, 2002). In this respect, there are those who believe that the results have been fundamentally positive, (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992) those who argue that the effects of this government reform trend are not yet clear (Lynn, 1996a, Kettl, 1999) and even that they might be questionable (Pollit, Birchall and Putnam, 1998). In this article, I intend to stimulate this discussion by arguing that the NPM is neither a positive or negative strategy by itself. It is more an approach with both achievements and failures. From my point of view it is necessary to analyze the conditions in which the potential of these types of reforms would seem to be greater, as well as those situations in which they can be innocuous or even contradictory to reform processes of other natures.

INTRODUCTION

Most contemporary processes of government reform are inspired by the ideas, techniques, and methodologies postulated by the New Public Management trend. This wave of government reforms that has recently dominated the international scene, is based on the conviction that governments evaluated on results, that work on quasi-market situations, that are agile in performance, able to adopt private sector administrative techniques, and focused on client-citizen, are capable of obtaining better results and greater legitimacy.

Some successful experiences and the persistence of international organizations to adopt these types of strategies, have undoubtedly contributed to an “imitation effect” or isomorphism, which has reached a great variety of countries. Nowadays, developed and emerging countries, as well as those buried in underdevelopment, equally aspire and strive to adopt “prescriptions from the North” in order to find a faster and more effective path to build “less expensive and more efficient” governments.. This seems to be reinforced on a context where political ideologies keep on losing strength and continue to subordinate to the simple balanced of results offered by political parties in power.

In recent years, the academic debate on the real and symbolic effects of New Public Management (NPM) has been intense. Some people maintain that we are facing a new paradigm (Barzelay, 1992). Others question its significance and insist that it is only a revision of old approaches concerned with the technical qualities of public

administration (Hood, 1991; Arellano 2002). In this respect, there are those who believe that the results have been fundamentally positive, (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992) those who argue that the effects of this government reform trend are not yet clear (Lynn 1996a; Kettl, 1999) and even that they might be questionable (Pollit, Birchall and Putnam, 1998).

In this article, I intend to stimulate this discussion beginning by arguing that the NPM is neither a positive or negative strategy by itself. It is more an approach with both achievements and failures. From my point of view it is necessary to analyze the conditions in which the potential of these types of reforms would seem to be greater, as well as those situations in which they can be innocuous or even contradictory to reform processes of other nature. In order to do so, I will go through some local (municipal) government reform experiences in Mexico. With this exercise, I intend to understand in what measure NPM has inspired local government reforms, and more specifically, to what extent are these reform strategies compatible with the Mexican reality, immersed in a process of transition to democracy.

To begin with, I will point out some of the current discussion around NPM. I will then move on by presenting thoughts on NPM influence at the local government level, and in particular, I will refer to the cases of some Mexican municipalities to illustrate the dilemmas, policies, and limitations faced. Later on, I will more profoundly analyze the Latin American scenario and I shall put forward some preliminary conclusions on the difficulties on making New Public Management compatible with the search for New Public Governance.

NPM - THEORY OR PRACTICAL SCHEME?

As is widely known, there are many points of view concerning NPM. Bozeman (1993) for example, sheds light on the fact that most of the bibliography that has been produced from this perspective is "common knowledge" in which experiences are related and teachings shared. According to this author, the "bibliography of wisdom" is small in quantity, that is to say those texts seeking to systematize a collection of experiences or to build a synthesis of teachings. Furthermore, the "bibliography in search of theory," are texts providing a hypothesis, accumulating and organizing analytical evidence, and that aspire to generalize the search for theoretical progress. The balance of this disciplinary development is still uncertain. Bozeman maintains that it has not even been proved that the theoretical advances of NPM are superior to common knowledge of professional practice.

Certainly, the difficulty of building theory from practice is substantial. In part, this dilemma has always been present in the disciplines of government and public administration, given that the practical government agenda frequently defines the research agenda. As Lynn (1996b) points out, the danger of focusing on distinguishing "best practices" implicitly recognizes that there are no solid concepts or recommendations to be derived from theory. According to Lynn, a "mandarinate anointed" setting is created. In other words, a model is promoted without accumulated proof or scientific validation (Overman and Boyd, 1994).

For these and other authors including Gruening (2001), at the present moment NPM cannot be conceived as a “new paradigm”, given that there is no set of fundamental principles or values sufficiently shared and integrated by a community of specialists so as to offer a correct representation of reality. From here emerges the difficulty of consolidating a theoretical perspective. Rather, it deals with knowledge accumulation or with a junction of various disciplinary perspectives, weapons of action, methods of analysis and ideas - some of which are innovative in relation to the public and strategies of governmental change. As Gruening maintains, innovation in this subject is due to the combination of elements and not to their nature. There is no doubt that in part, “new economic institutionalism” has inspired some of the concepts and strategies incorporated into NPM, in particular transaction costs and principal- agent theories. Also, in part “new sociological institutionalism” is present by means of interpreting institutions as legitimate behaviors in momentum, which are by nature resistant to change. Game theory, the theory of public choice, organizational theory, analysis of networks, even leadership models, equally inspire some of the methods and concepts adopted by NPM.

As for the intervention tools that NPM has integrated, the list is extensive. Various contributions of managerialism have been incorporated into the public sphere, goal-oriented administration, strategic planning, management control, base zero budget, reengineering methods, or total quality approach, to name a few. Additionally, other contributions from the governmental sphere like budget based on results, contracting out, the quasi- markets created through voucher systems, incorporation of regulatory organizations, or e-government, amongst others complete the set. Starting from this point, we have reached the integration of administrative reform “packages” that are being adopted indistinctly by highly developed economies (OCDE, 1995), as well as in poor countries (Hope, 2001), by consolidated democracies as well as by those in transition to democracy, by central governments as well as by decentralized organisms and sub-national governments.

The balance of NPM’s successes and failures is still uncertain. Lynn (1996a) affirms, for example, that differences between governments that promote reforms inspired by NPM and those that do not, are still very slight. Furthermore, the natural delay in implementing reforms makes it difficult to evaluate their impacts. However, the problem is that reality cannot wait for the proof of evidence. There is not enough time to wait for theoretical recommendations be developed. For that reason, the impulse and need to reform does not allow the necessary experiments and diagnosis to be carried out before prescribing the medicine. On the other hand, it is unquestionable that this type of reform embellishes any sub-national or national government that considers itself a change advocate in harmony with the ultimate courses of public action. If they do not yield the promised results, at least they will benefit from the prestige of attempting change with internationally accepted tools and techniques of reform.

NPM WITHIN THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SCOPE

NPM is conceived as being universal and useful in any type of government institution and it does not claim to be particularly orientated or inspired by any specific government level. On the one hand, there are examples of national governments that

have adopted this reform vision, such as New Zealand, Australia and Great Britain. On the other hand, there are also examples of regional and local concentrations. In fact, a great majority of the examples and references of best practices come from local governments. Some examples of these are Barzelay's (1992) previously mentioned work on Minnesota's reform model, or the cases that inspired the government reinvention model of Osborne and Gabler (1992), as well as the several programs referred to Massachusetts, Washington, or California among others. Additionally there are those which Borins (1998) refers to in his study on "innovation with integrity", or a great number of those registered as examples by the OCDE (1995) that also stem from local government level.

There is a substantial input of NPM change at the local governmental level. This is clearly logical in a way, given that local governments are more likely to observe evidence of change in the short and mid-term, due to a matter of scale. Furthermore, local governments are particularly orientated towards public service benefits, which are clearly identifiable in their operation methods and results, as well as their direct link with specific clients. This facilitates the adoption of NPM tools which are precisely characterized by a concern for defining the reform's field of action, by focusing the intended effects, and by carrying out a systematic measurement of results. All of this becomes more feasible on a local scale than on a national one, in which, as Donahue (2001) notes, innovation is not impossible but certainly faces highly complex challenges of great magnitude, greater terms of accomplishment, and indirect accountability, all of which do not facilitate the task.

In this way, some studies focus on understanding the way and degree in which local governments adopt NPM strategies. For example, Naschold's (1997) study reviews international examples of local government' reforms. He identifies three dimensions in which the aforementioned processes develop: (i) reforms orientated towards internal modernization (evaluation of management and its results, management of human resources, and budgeting systems amongst others); (ii) reforms orientated towards the market (benchmarking, outsourcing, accomplishments- based management agreements and privatization, amongst others); and (iii) reforms directed towards municipal management democratization (the participation of social representatives in decision-making). The first two examples are strongly influenced by NPM. In the aforementioned study, Naschold also discovers that underlying these reforms are political motivations or motivations that derive from the governor's character.

Concerning the question of what motivates reforms Walters' (2002) analysis of local government experiences recognized in the Government Innovation Program organized by the JFK School of the Harvard University and the Ford Foundation is also worth mentioning. Through analyzing more than two hundred programs recognized as successful, the author distinguishes that among the factors that motivated the reforms were: the need to respond to internal political crises, the requirement to achieve goals, and the necessity to adopt new technologies, all of which could naturally lead to the adoption of NPM strategies.

Gelöscht:

Similarly, a useful reference is Steiner's study (2000), which analyzes the impact of NPM in Swiss municipalities. Steiner observes that one in every four Swiss municipalities' reform processes is inspired by NPM. He also finds that in municipalities of less than a thousand inhabitants, NPM inspired solutions are less

frequent, while in cities with 5000 inhabitants or more, these measures are recurrent. In fact, in these latter cases, the first phases of NPM orientated reforms have already begun. A similar tendency in relation to the size of municipalities is noted by Moon and deLeon (2001) for the US. Another interesting finding from Steiner's study is that the propensity for adopting NPM instruments depends on regional and cultural factors. The author discovers that in the Swiss-German municipalities there is a greater propensity to adopt these types of reforms than in the Swiss-French or in the Swiss-Italian municipalities

Borins (2002) carried out an investigation using a sample that includes the same US local government cases that Walter studied, as well as others derived from similar programs in Canada and in the various countries in Great Britain. In this study, Borins identifies first that most reform cases are concerned with problems of internal coordination or with coordination among other services provided. Second, that these cases are concerned with improving implementation processes or with adopting new information technologies. Third, that some cases are directed toward empowering the citizen. This study illustrates once again that most of the reform processes are orientated towards NPM although some also reflect worries about local government democratization.

Similarly, in a study of New Zealand, Pallot (1998) analyzes the development of local reforms that were generated from the Central government's initiative to enable local governments to extend their autonomy and carry out their own reform processes. The author observes that as a consequence of such a process, at least two models were derived. One was inclined more towards adopting market solutions such as contracting-out or deregulating, e.g., that used in Papakura, which was strongly influenced by NPM. The other model which favored development of new modes of local governance by means of consulting mechanisms and citizen participation was used in Christchurch. As we can see, even when the wave of reforms began in this same national context, development methods were different, in some cases they stuck to NPM and in others they took a different direction.

Through their analysis of more than one thousand two hundred municipalities in the US Moon and deLeon (2001), that in local reforms, those arguments closely related to NPM and those related to the strengthening of democratic local management do coexist, though not always amicably. The authors also observe that there is an important discrepancy between the discourse of adopting NPM and the daily facts. This final aspect is clearly evident in some other case studies like Weikart's (2001) on New York. This study shows that while NPM strengthens relations with private institutions and promotes de-bureaucratization, it also strengthens centralized decision making by the mayor and results in a reduction of programs for marginalized populations in order to fortify those programs with greater electoral profitability. In a French example, Thoenig (1995) also found that the managerial governmental vision inspired by NPM has frequently centralized the decision-making capacity of mayors.

From previous studies, we can see that local governments are excellent observation laboratories for understanding the extent and modalities of NPM. On the one hand, it shows us that there is a great discrepancy between the reform discourse of NPM and its implementation. On the other hand, it proves that occasionally there are reform processes of a nature different than NPM and that do not use NPM reform strategies. This is the case for reforms seeking to strengthen democratic action in local

governments. In these situations, the NPM and democratization processes coexist problematically and have difficulty not obstructing each other. A complex task is what Kettl (1995) calls the formation of a “glue” which holds together the mix of NPM values, of government reinvention, of accountability and of democratic modernization. Below we will pose such questions to the case of local Latin American governments, and in particular the case of municipalities in Mexico.

NPM AND GOVERNMENTAL REFORM PROCESSES IN LATIN AMERICA:

THE MEXICAN EXAMPLE

Several years ago, governmental reforms inspired by NPM were introduced to many Latin American countries. Upon this movement, the *Centro Latinoamericano de Administración para el Desarrollo* (CLAD) (the Latin American Centre for Development Administration) (1998) declared that NPM measures should be adopted in the Latin American perspective. There is recognition of the usefulness of these reforms in the case of Latin American countries to recuperate the capacity of government management and to offer better results to rebuild social confidence in government. Furthermore, these types of strategies will strengthen a professional and technical focus in administration, which will improve regulation and control systems, therefore giving more transparency and clarity to government action.

However, the CLAD warned of the necessity of moving away from rigid methods, which meant not to seek efficiency at any cost, to leave behind technocratic approaches, and to maintain cooperative practices that broaden public spaces. This introduction of reforms aims to give advice concerning social and political costs that NPM could generate in the Latin American reality. Unfortunately, the CLAD's outlines do not thoroughly examine practical strategies that should be adopted to protect these countries from such risks. This is an expected consequence given that there are few studies containing empirical evidence on the Latin American reality in these types of processes. It is fundamental to develop applied studies on Latin America to understand the impact, influence and methods of NPM reform processes in the region. Today, there are only a few studies from this point of view, such as Ospina's (1998), Spink's (1999), and Arellano et al (2000). With this set of circumstances as a background, the author outlines below a study currently carried out that looks at the characteristics of reforms in a set of Mexican municipalities.

In this regard a brief outline of the situation of municipal governments in Mexico would be helpful. In Mexico, there are 2427 municipalities, 7% of which contain more than fifty thousand inhabitants, 13% between ten and fifty thousand, 19% between two thousand five hundred and ten thousand, and finally 61% have less than two thousand five hundred inhabitants. This indicates a reality in which the contrasts are great. For example, the bigger municipalities have an average of one thousand six hundred people working in municipal administration, while the smaller ones have an average of seventy employees, although there are some with less than twenty. As we will see, almost all large municipalities follow a development program, while less than a fifth of small municipalities do. Similarly, the degree of autonomy of municipal governments is very different; in large municipalities the collection of taxes and local rights makes up almost

half of their income, the rest are transfers from the federal government. In small municipalities, only a fifth or less of income is their own; the rest account for federal government transfers (Cabrero and Orihuela, 2002). Next are some detailed facts that give an idea of the contrasting administrative capacities in Mexican municipalities.

(a) The majority of Mexican municipalities are characterized by a weak normative and compulsory framework:

64% of the country's municipalities do not even have basic internal by-laws.

Nearly 80% of municipalities do not have regulations for planning.

52% of municipalities do not have regulations for public services.

20% of municipalities do not have strategic planning.

(b) Obsolete administrative systems dominate the municipal scene:

60% of the country's municipalities do not have an administrative area specialized in expenditure evaluation and supervision. .

Almost half of the municipalities recognize having a goal-fulfillment level of less than 75%.

65% of municipalities do not have a Department of Personnel.

Most municipalities recognize having collected taxes and duties 75% below the estimations.

17% of municipalities still do not have a single computer for administrative work.

(c) Mayors and civil servants are of a weak professional level:

18% of local government leaders do not have middle or higher education studies in any professional field.

Half of local government leaders do not have any previous experience in public administration.

Executive civil servants³ in municipal administration have little accumulated experience in their jobs: 30% have been working in their jobs for less than one year, 55% for less than three years; only 5% have been working for more than five years in their job.

Like local government leaders, half of the civil servants of primary level do not have any previous experience in public administration either.

As can be seen, most Mexican municipalities, have weak administrative capacities. However, in larger urban municipalities these capacities may have developed in the last few years. Furthermore, independent of the type of municipality discussed, modernizing administrative programs have been developed in the local sphere.

To develop some idea of what kinds of strategies for administrative modernization are being adopted in Mexican municipalities, an analysis of a set of reform processes was carried out by the author. This analysis concentrated on a group of 141 reform programs in government municipalities. These programs in the opinion of their promoters promised successful results, which is the reason why they were displayed in *Premio de Gobierno y Gestión Local* (Government and Local Management Award), a study carried out since 2001 by the *Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas* (CIDE) and the Ford Foundation.⁴ It must be noted that all programs analyzed in that study had been running for a year.

The review of programs indicated three modernizing strategy types in the municipalities. One type, which we can call *post-bureaucratic*, is clearly inspired by and orientated to NPM postulations, including programs that aim to diminish procedures and excessive regulations through innovative control mechanisms, programs that incorporate information technology in public attention services, actions that aim to improve strategic planning systems, and evaluation by results, among others. A second group of strategies identified as *bureaucratic*, was orientated towards traditional administrative improvements such as: elaborating basic by-laws, and organization or procedure manuals, adopting formal systems of budget control or planning, improving accounting systems, creating Administration, Finances, and Human Resources Departments, or improving the property owners' lists, services etc. The final group of programs can be called *pre-bureaucratic* which refer to administrative reform processes that are simply orientated towards fundamental adjustments of internal organization. They are frequently linked to traditional forms of local government (distribution of functions among city council members), to action coordination within communities (which include municipal delegations, and vice-mayors offices), or simply to the organization of traditional local government services.

Firstly, we can observe that of all the reform programs analyzed, 34% were inspired by the NPM, 49% were orientated to the second type of strategies, and finally 17% were concerned with carrying out fundamental functions of municipal administration. It is clear that in a country like Mexico most local governments' reforms are mainly concerned with the construction of essential elements in order to organize the municipal administration and to clarify the local government functions. That is that in many cases, traditional administration is only just in a phase of construction and consolidation. This was the situation in 66% of the analyzed programs (table 1).

Regarding the first group of strategies (48 *post-bureaucratic* programs), a certain correlation between the examples of administrative modernization, inspired by NPM, and the nature of large urban cities was observed. In this sense, these municipalities tended to present comparatively a great financial self-sufficiency due to their tax revenue, as well as lower indicators of poverty and marginalization. Therefore, there is a similarity with the results of the studies that we have already mentioned (Steiner, 2000; Moon and deLeon, 2001) in the sense that the size of a local government is a good way of determining the tendency to use NPM tools. However, for the Mexican case, these

tendencies do not seem to be so dominant. It is worth pointing out as a relevant fact that more than a third of these (17 programs) do not come from large, urban municipalities, which means that there are municipalities that attempt to adopt NPM avant-garde models despite having modestly sized administrations and staff members. This aspect will be discussed later.

In the set of *post-bureaucratic* examples inspired by NPM, it was also observed that about half were concern with simplifying form-filling procedures and approval in quality control systems. Another group of programs aimed to incorporate information technologies (e- government) for a more efficient communication with citizens on municipal services and procedures. Slightly more than 10% of the programs were directed towards improving planning systems; some towards evaluating results in areas of municipal administration; others to reducing the municipal administrative apparatus; others to promoting incentive systems for staff control; and the rest to improving regulations and tax collection systems.

Other characteristics observed with relation to post-bureaucratic programs, tended to appear in municipalities located in the North and centre of the country (85%). The only exceptional cases were found in the South. This fact coincides with the importance of cultural factors in adopting NPM which other previously mentioned studies have observed (Steiner, 2000).⁵

It is also worth mentioning that post-bureaucratic reforms, in accordance with the results of the analysis, tend to be implemented more frequently in local governments where the Mayors possess higher levels of education, and where mayors come from an executive position in the private sector (66%). As for the civil servants in these municipalities, they also have a better education record and mainly come from the private sector (70%).

Finally, it is important to note that from these reforms inspired by NPM, slightly more than half were part of or coexisted with a wider reform process that intended to fortify the democratization of the municipal government's structure; namely it promoted a new form of local governance. Examples of these types of reforms refer to the incorporation of citizen councils in municipal government decisions, or to the promotion of citizen participation in the districts, neighborhoods, or communities' agenda, or to the creation of non-governmental committees for social control of municipal government actions.

We must highlight that in these situations of coexistence, difficulties in harmonizing both processes were observed. Occasionally, the democratic reform program for the municipal government was postponed in order to give priority to modernization actions of local administration, or to replace some actions that formed a part of the initial democratic reform with NPM tools. One example is the case of a municipality in which a program to promote community committees and citizen assemblies for public services was deliberately abandoned, and substituted by a program where once a week the Mayor offered "personal attention" with the intention of personalizing the interest on the client-citizen. Another example is the cancellation of "social inspection" committees that deliberated on municipal government actions, which were substituted by information system via the Internet made available to the population at large that enlisted municipality actions and public accounts of the local city council.

However, this substitution of programs or actions to strengthen local democratic life through NPM methods was not given in all cases. In some situations it was possible to harmonize both processes, and in these the strategies inspired in NPM were complementary to other reform processes. This was the case in a municipality which sought to strengthen their information system through citizen satisfaction surveys on public services. It relied upon citizen advice on decisions related to assignment of resources and public works. Equally, we could mention the case of another municipality in which the evaluation of management results was not only carried out by the municipal administration, but also by a citizens' advice council that included entrepreneurs, professionals and local community leaders. Similarly, we could mention the case of a municipality that incorporated a system of strategic planning, which not only resulted in a tool of higher public management in municipal government, but also in a tool for integrating citizens' advice boards and councils, as well as several NGO's, by constituting networks for deliberation of local public policy agendas. Certainly this type of "harmonious mix" in reform processes was the least frequent (7 cases), and even when there are factors which seem to explain these resulting situations, like the determination of mayors, and the history of non- government coalitions (Cabrero, 2004), the complexity of completing such a task of harmonization is still unquestionably high.

It is worth pointing out that in reference to strategies of *bureaucratic reform*, it can be observed that approaches center on traditional administration models in order to clarify procedures and norms. Bureaucratization is still necessary in a large number of municipal governments across the country, because they strengthen and clarify a formal point of reference of local administration. Again, these types of reform strategies comprise almost half of the set of the programs analyzed, and were most frequently found in municipalities in the centre and South of the country (88%).

Finally, processes of *pre- bureaucratic construction*, are present in circumstances barely aware of the need of minimal administration order, with clear structure and basic operation set up. Of the analysed set, municipalities which display this type of programs tend to be small (62%), tend to be situated in the centre or the South of the country (96%), with very low levels of self-sufficient financing systems (80%), and where Mayors and civil servants tend to have a lower education level in comparison with the other municipalities.

Concerning the "co-inhabitation" of *bureaucratic* and *pre- bureaucratic* reform strategies, with other reforms orientated towards municipal democratization, tensions would seem to be fewer than with NPM inspired reforms. That is because there is a less defined competition between both processes. In these cases, *bureaucratic* reforms are directed towards internal local government life and do not seem to interfere nor try to replace reform processes for democratization of local public sphere.

It is highly probable that in the Mexican municipal future scenario, NPM inspired administration reforms will continue to be implemented little by little, becoming increasingly the most attractive reference strategy for local governments, as it has been the case in other countries. According to the study of this set of municipal programs, not only urban municipalities are inclined to implement this type of strategies, but also medium and smaller municipalities (38%), can attempt to adopt a management vision as a desirable or acceptable path of modernization. It is for this reason that it is important

to take time to reflect on the difficulties and contradictions which can arise at any given moment when viewing NPM inspired management reforms as the only path, or the most desirable course for municipal administration modernization. I will elaborate further on this aspect in the following section. In table 1 the principle tendancies discovered in the analysis of 141 reform municipal administration reform programs are synthezised.

TABLE I

**MUNICIPAL CHARACTERISTICS AND TYPES OF ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM
IN A COLLECTIVE SET OF 141 ANALYZED PROGRAMS**

Type of reform executed		Post- bureaucratic Reforms	Bureaucratic Reforms	Pre- bureaucratic Reform
Characteristics		NPM (34%)	(49%)	Fundamental (17%)
Size (1)	Large	62%	42%	38%
	Small	38%	58%	62%
Región	North	31%	15%	8%
	Central	54%	62%	46%
	South	14%	22%	46%
Political Party (2)	PRI	34%	58%	70%
	PAN	40%	19%	8%
	PRD	20%	11%	14%
Financial Self- sufficiency (3)	High	52%	29%	20%
	Low	48%	71%	80%
Mayor's Background (4)	Public Sector	34%	46%	52%
	Private Sector	66%	54%	48%
Civil Servants'	Public Sector	30%	48%	52%
	Private			

Background (5)	Sector	70%	52%	48%
Civil	High	68%	50%	43%
Servants'				
Education		32%	50%	57%
Level	(6) Low			

Source: Drawn with data from (*Local government and management*), *Gobierno y Gestión Local* (2001); INEGI; Censo Indesol 2000.

- (1) Large municipalities are those with more than 100 000 inhabitants. Small have less than 100 000.
- (2) To simplify the table, a small percentage of municipalities governed by other parties, or by coalitions, as well as those ruled by practices and customs, was omitted.
- (3) To simplify the table, refer to *Financial Dependancy*), *Dependencia Financiera* (Cabrero y Orihuela 2002) as an indicator, which implies the percentage of budget transference from other levels of government. The autonomy is 'high' when the mentioned indicator is less than 50%; it is low when the mentioned indicator is higher than 50%.
- (4) To simplify the table, only refer to the immediate post and term prior to the mayors appointment.
- (5) To simplify the table, only refer to the immediate post and term prior to the post presently occupied.
- (6) To simplify the table, Higher Education accounts for a completed professional degree with some type of additional course, and Low, for a degree or less.

REFORMS INSPIRED BY NPM: A TOOL OR OBSTACLE FOR DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION?

To what extent are NPM approaches and strategies compatible within the Latin American perspective, and particularly, with the Mexican case? From the previous analysis on Mexican municipalities, we could suggest at the least three possible scenarios where NPM strategies would be in disagreement with the present local government situation. (i) First, “premature adoption” of NPM management initiatives in places without required conditions; (ii) Second, “pretend adoption” of the discourse and strategies derived from NPM, conserving the previous administrative structure and traditional values; (iii) Third, “disarticulated adoption” of NPM strategies, where often they do not achieve integration with other government reform processes. Next are some ideas concerning each of these situations.

(i) “Premature adoption” of a NPM inspired vision

The wave of NPM reforms emerges in countries where problems are associated with evident rigidity in traditional administrative government structures. There is an attempt to modify budget structures that, beyond technical order and transparency qualities, should supposedly be developing a rationality based not only on historical criteria that often causes vicious inertia, but on public policy priorities and results. These reforms intend to transform excessively stable bureaucracies –based on civil service systems established over the years- by launching a new scheme of incentives that promotes creativity, competence and innovation as new qualities to complement the conventional requirements of responsibility and compliance to the rule of law. Equally, changes directed towards the citizen, do not solely concern meeting their demands and providing services, but to respond to their expectations in terms of service quality and individual satisfaction.

In other words, NPM was born out of response to traditional government structures that were running dry. They did display important qualities, but required a new appearance to make them agree with the new role of State, and a society which needed – beyond the already existent democratic institutions- a new, more direct and interactive relationship with government structures. Not only a professional administration with testing mechanisms was required, but also a dynamic enterprising government attentive to the people's needs..

As the Mexican example shows, public administration in the majority of Latin American countries, seldom find themselves in a phase where traditional governmental structures seem exhausted. This is particularly evident in local governments. In many cases governmental administrative systems find themselves static, still under the construction of traditional structures. From another perspective, there are very few Latin American countries with a highly professional civil service. Generally the problem is that public administration is a space of constant movement (people enter and leave recurrently), often ruled by administrations out of compliance, highly susceptible to political lobbying, and without a clear merit and recognition scheme that rewards professional competence.

Is it necessary, therefore, to make civil service systems more flexible in order to avoid the rigidity NPM proposes? Or, on the contrary, should these systems be built and equipped with the necessary stability while promoting commitment and compliance with the Law?

The same could be inquired in relation to budget-centred reforms. Should the budget be necessarily redirected under a new structure based on specific results? Or, should it first be rearranged, and equipped with transparency and public discussion that are essential features in formal democracies? We could also question client-oriented reforms. Should quality programs for government services be developed intensively? Or, is it necessary to urgently cover the deficit in services for the totality of the population? Are quality improvement costs justified before having universal coverage in services? In some of the municipal programs analyzed, we could notice that occasionally, citizen-client systems are improved before guaranteeing service coverage to diverse groups within the community.

All of them are problems with no easy solutions, they are, therefore, “temporality gap” dilemmas. It is evident that in many cases the cures arrive before the disease shows up. Managerial reforms inspired by NPM appear and are adopted as new discourse and/or strategy of change without sufficient reflection on the situation’s similarities or differences, and on, in this case, the Latin American municipal administration insufficiencies. Treatment applied ahead of time can be not only innocuous, if not also a generator of secondary unforeseen effects. For example, should bureaucratic structures become more flexible before achieving systematic law compliance on behalf of the officials? Could increased flexibility extend corruption? Should municipalities be endowed with budgeting autonomy before refining control mechanisms and accountability measures? Should individual client attention be promoted before having strengthened citizen participation in public policy design and supervision of government action?

The main dilemma is that it hardly concerns decisions that could be left out. The current context does not allow for the reproduction of administrative history in high developed countries. That means that a civil service that follows the European or North American tradition cannot be initiated, and wait for it to become too rigid so that after NPM reforms could be adopted to make it more flexible. The whole experience cannot be followed through from beginning to end. The challenge consequently is to retain the traditional civil service remaining virtues, such as compliance with the law and recognition of individual merits, and, at the same time, integrate mechanisms to flexibilize the system making it capable of facing the new government challenges.

As observed, it is not so much about simply adapting the treatment or reform proposals, rather it implies something far more complex: *innovate* on the aforementioned reform strategies and seeing it through to the end. It is possible to take inspiration from original NPM models, but they must be combined in a marginal way or occasionally, be completely different. A mix of “old” and “new” solutions which must be applied simultaneously.

The Latin American drama of “delayed with history” would seem to repeat once again, and now having to do with developing government reform strategies. It is clear that there will not be enough time for the pre-modern administration, which characterizes

many fields of government action in Latin America, to catch up with the traditional modernization period so that a post- bureaucratic model like in developed countries could be established afterwards. However, evidence of no time left for such trajectory does not justify ignoring differences in facts, or forgetting that these public administrations never managed to consolidate a degree of sufficient responsibility and professionalism. From which they are labeled as “poorly institutionalised”.⁶ Neither must we disregard the fact that the evolution of Latin American public administration was not accompanied –as in other countries- by the strengthening and maturity of democratic institutions. Today, in some countries with a greater tradition of compliance with the norms it is possible to evaluate the government for its results because the new administrative processes barely dissent with the law. In those cases, it is also possible to treat the citizen as a client, since other institutions offer the opportunity for citizen participation, deliberation on policies, and demand for accountability. In countries where NPM emerged, the idea was to improve the government’s role, rather than reconstructing it from its foundations, as the majority of Latin American countries require. NPM promotes government improvement reforms, not necessarily the construction of democratic institutions -- at least that is not its main concern.

It is clear that innovation and creativity are the only possible paths for solving challenges in an intelligent way. They are the only means to find a shortcut in the curve of experience, and to discover suitable conditions to configure governmental structures that would simultaneously be more efficient, more democratic in essence, and more legitimate as government institutions. These should be strategies capable of promoting governments that run better, and at the same time are more responsible and democratic. However, it is evident that NPM was not created for this purpose and we should not responsabilize it for everything. As some authors have indicated (Brugué 1996; deLeon and deLeon, 1997), NPM is not so much concerned with introducing democratic elements into its tools of action. This might be owed to the fact that they are not part of its original concern, which is to provide the administrative apparatus with tools to make a government already supported by democratic institutions perform more efficiently. The problem arises when these devices are used on a government that is still not entirely supported by democratic institutions. Upon failing to fulfill the assumptions implied in NPM, the model can lose force and consistency.

The dilemma is clear. In the Latin American context, the premature adoption of NPM prescriptions does not ensure the improvement of public administration, because the type of problems faced are often not the ones NPM can resolve. However, ignoring the need to improve efficiency in contemporary governments is not a good solution either. Still NPM has much to offer. How can we find a “point of equilibrium”? It is clear that only an applied research agenda can provide elements to reveal in which situations NPM is useful and in which it is not worth adopting. Perhaps in Latin American countries more than in other backgrounds, implementation of NPM solutions must go hand in hand with monitoring systems and permanent follow ups, with the objective of carrying out appropriate adjustments, and of being able to identify in advance anti-intuitive and detrimental effects that some tools could generate.

(ii) "Simulated adoption" of a NPM inspired vision

Since the 1980s, Latin American countries have been adopting rigorous programs to order public finance, to liberalize the economy and to modernize government mechanisms. It is clear that most countries in this region adopted as well a discourse on government modernization inspired by NPM. That is how diverse reform programs emerged embracing almost the whole continent, from the Cardoso initiative in Brazil (Bresser, 1999) up to administrative modernization promoted by Zedillo in Mexico (PROMAP, 1995). Moreover, beyond central government programs, a good number of state and regional, as well as local governments, have been adopting the NPM reasoning discourse and language. Speeches on result-based budgets, *contracting-out* or *downsizing* schemes, and total quality and re-engineer models, to mention some, are all part of Latin American public administration rhetoric.

However, there is a significant discrepancy between rhetoric and action. As it was already mentioned in the previous section, this is true of NPM all over the world. Until now the impact has been a greater one on the degree of discourse and symbolic references, than on the amount of extensive implemented reform actions (Lynn, 1996; Kettl 1998; Christensen y Laegreid, 2001). In Latin America, this large discrepancy between rhetoric and action is particularly present. Every government wanting to “become modern”, and willing to send signals of being on course with world wide government reforms, adopts NPM discourse.

This generates a variety of effects that are sought by the promoting governments: on one hand international bodies see such governments in a better way, which facilitates support and generates trust. On the other, national and international businessmen presume that such efforts will result in governments that cost less and which support investment more effectively. At last, public opinion assumes that tools to improve government performance are adequate, and despite meagre effects, that NPM experts really now “know what they are doing”. Therefore, NPM has found a use in the Latin American countries as a protective discourse for current governments. “Incipient results can be questioned, but not the fact that we have been seeking for improvements with the appropriate tools”. That is how the myth sets in little by little: “the important detail is the quality and recognition of reform tools, even when results do not appear”. As new sociological institutionalism has explained (Meyer y Rowan, 1977), legitimacy is established through symbolic mechanisms and not necessarily through actions, or even less through results. It is a similar process to that studied by Tolbert y Zucker (1983) on British local governments, in which civil service reforms were adopted to improve their image through promoting “appropriate” recognized changes independently of possible advantages and disadvantages that these reforms could have on the government’s efficiency. Results turned out to be second priority.

The major risk of this phenomenon in the Latin American context is that NPM rhetoric can easily be converted into a “protection shield” to reinstall old practices under a new disguise. In search for greater flexibility and autonomy in government decision making, it is possible to strengthen governors’ and officials’ discretionary power. Equally, by arguing in favor of moving towards *contracting-out* schemes or public services privatization, it is most likely that disagreements between public and private interests will be encouraged. Another example could be the adoption of sophisticated language associated with NPM which excludes a large segment of society from the discussion of public matters, which at the end leads to the acceptance of “government experts” as the only people capable of making decisions. In this case, in the name of NPM, technocracy

would tend to isolate from the rest of society. Again, as some Mexican municipalities prove, justifying a better relationship with the client runs the risk of fracturing collective action in society as well as social capital construction. That is, this measure fragments citizen deliberation, generating the illusion of personalized attention. In the long term, a rhetorical reform program that does not yield results will be undoubtedly questioned by the electorate. However, it is also true that in situations of “poorly institutionalized” democratic transition (Linz, 1990), like most cases in Latin America, there are abundant shortcomings inside the democratic system, so that the distance between discourse and results cannot necessarily be sanctioned by the electorate, in the short term there exists substantial inertia and lack of trust in sanction mechanisms.

How and in what measure is it possible to distinguish between the use of NPM “rhetoric” and of discourse genuinely associated to real reform actions? There is no easy answer. We cannot condemn NPM discourse only because on occasions it can serve to obscure standstills in democratic transition. But, caution on this matter must always form part of the permanent discussion concerning government reform options. Only through a really public policy of government reform, can we be attentive to avoid these sorts of diversions. Maybe in Latin American countries more than in other contexts, NPM inspired government reforms should be “closely and strictly supervised” by external observers, legislators and common citizens. Only in this way can we avoid the persistence in the use of NPM “rhetoric” to reinstall old or new centralized practices.

(iii) "disarticulated adoption" of NPM inspired strategies

As previously mentioned, NPM can be understood as a collection of methods and tools to improve government performance. We cannot suppose that this type of reform strategy will solve all government action challenges, and even less, that it will also resolve larger challenges, like building democratic institutions such as transparency, accountability, and permanent interaction with society. These are processes essentially different. Actually, we could think that in theory we would first require to create an specific institutional framework particular of democratic regimes (State reform). Then, we could start thinking of secondary reforms related to government performance, incentive methods, and relationships with the market and with the citizen (government and public administration reform).

However, as mentioned, Latin American governments can hardly be transformed sequentially and with a logical order. The current situation does not allow a chronological process, so a simultaneous transformation, across various fronts is required. Regime institutions and government structures should be reformed. At the same time, there must be an advancement in respect to liberty, rights, legality and democratic practices, as well as an improvement in management of government agencies that offer services and develop public policies. Expressed in another way, and to use Nachold and Daley (1999) terms, it is necessary to build *New Public Management* under *New Public Governance* (NPG).

The challenge is not only to synchronize both processes, but also to harmonize the development while avoiding dissonance and contradiction. As has already been pointed out, there are many situations in the Latin American reality were, in support of NPM

measures, the progress of democratic institutions can be obstructed. Favoring the internal discussion of budget assignment based on results can damage or “procastinate” the opening to public discussion over budget issues. Decentralization and government institution autonomy can hinder civil servant responsibility and compliance with the Law. Elimination of subsidies and assigning tariffs to real prices can harm those sectors from the general population that are excluded from welfare opportunities. Promoting client satisfaction systems can delay the opening of government institutions that favor citizen involvement and accountability. The previous examples do not imply that these types of contradictions are always present, they simply suggest that they can lead to situations where several processes coincide (NPM and NPG) in which, even though seeking complementary objectives in the longterm, they can generate competition among themselves and can also exclude each other in the short term.

Some studies have obtained similar evidence to that in our analysis on how NPM oriented reforms have survived and on occasions replaced reforms that look forward to a new type of democratic governance. Naschold and Daley (1999), in an extraordinary study of six outstanding local governments, internationally recognized for their reform processes, observe that aspects of reform directed towards administration improvement under agendas inspired by NPM, were the most easily strengthened; while political modernization processes (local government democratization) that simultaneously were part of the initial reform, were put aside and forgotten. Only in two of the six cases studied the authors found a “co-evolution” of both processes. Inquiring on the explanation about the ability to harmonize the processes, the authors discovered that the combination of administrators and local politician leadership in coalition with several interest groups, allowed the continued regulation of both processes without neutralizing each other. Similarly, in a recent study on Mexico (Cabrero, 2004), where four local governments throughout a decade are observed, one particular case stands out in which it was possible to rally local public action in co-evolution, what permitted administrative and political modernization in the local district. Cases where this ingredient was absent were not able to carry any element of modernization, or they simply retained the administrative component. In one case, administrative modernization unravelled attempts to democratize the local government.

We could think that as far as we find ourselves in a context of democratic transition, it is more likely that NPM might interfere with the construction of a new democratic governance. For this reason, perhaps in Latin American countries more than in other situations, it is necessary to carefully connect NPM reforms with other types of measures concerned with strengthening democratic institutions. A possible course of action seems to be the integration of public policy networks comprised by governmental and non governmental actors, capable of maintaining a balance, converging the processes’ direction, articulating the rhythm and harmony in the short term, and occasionally opting to suppress actions which could honestly be counterproductive. NPM runs the risk, because it is usually conceived and implemented only by civil servants, of losing sight of its impact on developing mechanisms of democratic governance. That is why, only through plural coalitions and networks of public policy, it is possible to find a combination that harmonizes, does not interfere with, and dampens forces encountered in both processes. The problem is that usually it is considered little useful or unnecessary to involve non governmental actors when it concerns administrative modernization policies.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In the last few years the preferred strategy for administrative modernization in the government domain has been NPM. After nearly three decades of its conception, its virtues and limitations are still being intensively discussed. It is unquestionable and there is enough evidence to support that NPM offers useful tools for government reform processes in local districts. However, it is also undeniable that although NPM tools may be necessary, in no case are they sufficient, at least not in the context of Latin American governments. Further, these strategies can occasionally delay or hinder wider strengthening processes of new local democratic reform.

For that reason, NPM must be visualized from the Latin-American point of view, particularly from the municipal domain, as a list of options and reform methods that do not constitute an infallible prescription, and even less a set of actions totally compatible with the requirements of the region. It is necessary to formulate clear diagnostics of the structures and processes needing reform in advance, to selectively and critically choose the tools and apply them in an increasing way, while observing preliminary progress and results. Furthermore, such tools must be selected understanding the necessity for articulation along with wider processes of democratic transition. If in the longterm there are compatible solutions, the medium and short term reveal reform processes which compete with each other, a situation which shows NPM will replace actions working towards building NPG.

Adopting NPM tools in local Latin American governments, particularly Mexican ones must abide by at least three aspects: not resorting to them too soon, whilst many government spaces are still building the essential foundations for a traditionally ordered and responsible government administration; neither allowing NPM rhetoric to take hold, opening the way for backtracking, nor for new expressions of centralisation in decision making and technocracy as a form of government. Finally, it is necessary to safeguard NPM inspired reforms so they do not become obstacles or resources for deviating attention from the most important reforms from the Latin American viewpoint, that is to say reforms seeking to strengthen democracy and forming new institutions for local public action.

For this reason a “public accompaniment” is required for NPM inspired reform programs, namely professional external observers to analyse and monitor the scope of the reforms. In this way, networks of political and social representatives can influence the articulation of these processes with wider reforms. We are falsely led to believe that administrative reforms must be built and resolved from within the government body. Nowadays, more than ever, it is necessary to promote this type of politics as being truly public, open and deliberative. If not the strengthening of local public action can be subtly dismantled. Only through this type of mechanism can we succeed in alleviating tensions between reform processes which Mexico and other Latin American countries face, to allow a harmonious co-existence between the search for *New Public Management* and the building of *New Public Governance*.

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NOTES

1. The title of this article and the topic discussed are inspired by the trilogy of the articles published by Naschold and Daley (1999). The article is modestly dedicated to the memory of F. Naschold, whom I never had the pleasure of meeting, only of reading his work.
2. Executive civil servants refer to Directors and Assistant Directors in administration areas, the highest level of decision above the Mayor.
3. In the first edition of these surveys, 470 municipal programs were received. Only 141 of these programs, which referred specifically to programs of administrative reform, were used to carry out the objectives of this study.
4. In addition it is also worth mentioning that programs inspired by the NPM emerge with most frequency (40%) in municipalities governed by the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) (the National Action Party), a right wing party. Although programs presented by el Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) (The Revolutionary Institutional Party), the traditional central party, also have a great influence (34%). The emergence of programs is less frequent (20%) in municipalities governed by the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) (the Democratic Revolution Party), a left wing party.
5. Paraphrasing the idea of "poorly institutionalised democracies" from Linz (1990).

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