

Special Issue

Neo Weberian State: From Theory to Practice?

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Even at a time when NPM (New Public Management) had not been fully implemented in non-Anglo-Saxon countries, it became clear that the application of performance driven market-type-mechanisms in the public sector in such countries could not really yield something that lined up with continental European administrative law-framed systems or even systems with historical and cultural antecedents in Asia. Furthermore, it became clear that trying to realize sustainable development goals and ensuring inclusive service delivery, effective crisis governance, and functional innovation in Asian countries required an approach that went beyond what NPM can offer (Kattel et al., 2022). The question is which type of governance can realize these imperatives and also which type of governance cannot. So-called neoliberalism seems to be in decline, and new competing governance models grounded in collaboration and participation, digital transformation and public value have emerged.

While one reform agenda adopted to transform the hierarchy-driven system common in Asian countries into a market-driven system focused on shifting activities from the public sector to the private sector, resulting in a “minimize” reform strategy, a second one that centered on changing the governance driver in the public sector yielded a “marketize” reform strategy that relied on a comprehensive toolkit of market-type mechanisms such as tenders, benchmarks, and vouchers that pushed public sector organizations to split providers and users by creating quasi-markets for supply and demand of goods and services in public sector. The combined “minimize” and “marketize” reform strategies were based on economic neoinstitutional theories regarding best practices that sought to address perceived dysfunction in bureaucracies. Ultimately, reliance on these strategies resulted in a governance space that was driven by market.

NPM was the purist version of this model, which was promoted by OECD. However, several countries did not fully embrace NPM, were slow adapters, or decided to keep or modernize their public governance systems (see the four Ms in Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). New realities challenged the capacity of NPM to be the solution or to be a significant part of the solution. Policies such as realizing sustainable development goals by 2030 made it harder to combine ‘minimize’ and ‘marketize’ principles. The degree of wickedness of problems required an equal degree of wickedness of solutions, which the market could not supply.

Social and digital networks became an important addition and amendment to markets. Participation, deliberation, and collaboration became keywords in keeping or rebuilding citizens’ trust in existing systems. Network theories and related research on how networks could and should function provided theoretical support to this growing interest in collaboration, while case studies demonstrating the effectiveness of networks and of collaborative, deliberative, and participative governance offered practical support. The four Ms of maintaining, modernizing, marketizing, and minimizing were complemented by a fifth one of mediating within and between groups and networks.

Social networks were especially helpful at the local level during the pandemic, while digital networks were more useful at the central level. However, it became clear that neither networks alone nor a combination of markets and networks were enough. The hierarchy of the state, with its administration, was crucial in handling the pandemic (Kuhlmann & et al., 2021).

Governance spaces are thus best understood as consisting of three dimensions: hierarchies, markets, and networks (HMN), and so next to the NPM and NPG (New Public Governance) models can be placed a third pure or “ideal” model: the neo-Weberian state (NWS) model that features a well and redefined hierarchy based on the rule of law and democratic decision making.

an “Ideal Type,” or “Pure Type” is a “construction” obtained by “heightening” conceptually specific aspects of reality, e.g. relationships. A Type helps us understand and think about reality by constructing relationships that exist in reality but which are emphasised in the constructed Type. Ideal Types are therefore “pure constructs of relationships.” The requirements for an acceptable emphasis are that they are ‘sufficiently motivated’ and “objectively probable.” This makes them sufficiently “adequate” to “heighten” a causal process of mechanism. Although these constructs need not be proven, there is a need for evidence in support of this objective probability. (Bouckaert & Halligan, 2008, p. 211).

Ideal types are representations of modeled behavior reduced to its essence, which therefore have a “pure” flavour, and could be considered as pure types with features of models such as modules and verifiable causal links. But they are more than common denominators of reality because of their intrinsic causal coherence. Their purpose is not to feed a praxeology but to help interpret complex realities. Ideal types have scientifically acceptable value because they

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add to knowledge of ‘concrete cultural phenomena in their interconnections, their causes, and their significance’ (Weber, 1904). Obviously the construction of ideal types is inspired by existing theories, praxeological models, and experienced realities. This brings us to the need for country case studies.

The NWS as a Pure Type in the HMN Governance Space

The idea of an HMN governance space is relevant at the level of policy fields, countries, and even beyond countries (for the European level, see Drechsler, 2009). To move from an ideal type to reality, NWS needs to combine hierarchy, markets, and networks, as Johan Olson also confirms: “Bureaucratic organization is part of a repertoire of overlapping, supplementary, and competing forms coexisting in contemporary democracies, and so are market organization and network organization” (2006, p. 18).

Even though there are significant differences among continental European, American, and Asian countries (Im, 2014, 2017, 2021), the NWS ideal type has several fundamental elements (Bouckaert, 2023):

- a democratic state as a frame for governance and decision making;
- the rule of law as the supreme principle, resulting in hierarchy as a dominant organizing driver, which in turn produces an open, accessible, participatory, affordable, transparent, sound and trustworthy bureaucracy and public sector for all citizens;
- a responsible and accountable hierarchy that proactively directs markets and networks adopting a whole of government point of view in the use of market and

network mechanisms that supports private for-profit, civil society not-for-profit, and public sector actors.

These components should yield a functional combination of guaranteed and inclusive routine service delivery, effective handling of chronic crises of governance, and constant innovation, which in turn should give the NWS more legitimacy and make it more trustworthy compared to alternative models like NPM and NPG.

The question that this and the next issue of *JPS* explores is whether the NWS is a model that can be applied in different parts of the world. The issue is the result of a seminar organized by the Graduate School of Public Administration of Seoul National University at which scholars from 10 countries—Australia (Andrew Podger), Brazil (Alexandre Gomide and Gabriela Lotta), Canada (Evert Linquist and Jonathan Craft), France (Jean-Michel Eymery-Douzans), Germany (Sabine Kuhlmann), Italy (Greta Nasi and Edoardo Ongaro), Japan (Koichiro Agata, Hiroko Shimada, and Dimitri Van Overbeke), Mexico (Diego Galego, and Fernando Nieto Morales), Romania (Marius Profiroiu and Calin Hintea), South-Korea (Tobin Im and Seyeong Cha)—discussed the extent to which the NWS pure model was practiced in their countries. This issue of the journal covers five of the countries (Canada, Germany, Brazil, Mexico, and South Korea), while the next issue will cover the other five (Australia, Japan, France, Italy, and Romania).

Each chapter outlines public sector reforms in the last decade in the country under discussion, the specific cultural features of which affect the efficacy of such reforms (Ho & Im, 2013) and examines how challenges such as the pandemic impacted them. The purpose of these analyses is to trigger a global debate on what kinds of governance models are best suited to our future societies.



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