After NPM?
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When Christopher Hood coined the (critical) term New Public Management (NPM) in 1991, he was trying to summarize and describe what was taking place in the public sector of western countries during the 1980s. Reagan in the USA and Thatcher in the UK started a new era in the development if the welfare state in the 1980s. Private corporations became the model of governance and management, to be emulated by public administrations all over the (western) world. State governments in the 1980s and 1990s declared that continued growth in public expenditure is incompatible with national competitiveness in an era of globalized economic relations and integrated financial markets (see e.g. Pollitt and Dan, 2011). The size and scope of the public sector had to be reduced, and this change can be achieved by the introduction of the business-like management discourses, strategies and practices into public administration. The hierarchical bureaucracy, which was felt to be inefficient, was to be replaced with market logic, which was assumed to contribute towards efficiency (Power, 1997); responsibility and control were to be decentralised. It is this assemblage of reforms that Hood named New Public Management.

The NPM reforms have focused on methods of organising, governing, controlling, and reporting activities rather than on products and production process of the public sector. In the early 1990s, the reforms consisted of attempts to create more delimited and governable organisations, for instance through the introduction of profit centres and performance evaluation (Power, 1997). Thus NPM introduced several new concepts to characterize public administration, such as performance management, competition, and offering quality and choice to citizens. The idea was to combine accountability and efficiency in public administration. The "business" aspects of activity became more prominent and it was assumed that the application of NPM would result in a public administration becoming "cheaper, more efficient, and more responsive to its 'customers'" (Pollitt and Dan, 2011: 7).

New Public Management has now been around for several decades and may be described as a "global reform movement … inspired by a broad neo-liberal ideology" (Christensen and Laegreid, 2007: 4-8). It is one of the most frequent used terms among researchers of public administration organizations but also among politicians, civil servants and various professional groups. The usefulness

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of the label NPM, argued Hood in 1991, "…lies in its convenience as a short-hand name for the broadly similar administrative doctrines which dominated the bureaucratic reform agenda in many of the OECD group of countries from the late 1970s …" (Hood, 1991: 3-4).

In a meta-analysis (based on 520 relevant studies) of the impacts of New Public Management in Europe, Pollitt and Dan (2011) showed that such impacts are paradoxical, to say the least. On the one hand, there is an "ocean" of studies of NPM-reforms and techniques reporting on changes in in processes and activities. On the other, they argued, "…our solid, scientific knowledge of the general *outcomes* of all this thinking and activity is very limited."(p. 52). Bejerot and Hasselbladh (2013) observed that NPM-studies tend to lack a systematic description of "…what dimensions and at which levels new practices, discourses, logics or policy networks influence public sector organizations" (p. 1362). Moreover, after two decades of research on NPM, Hood concluded that: "Indeed, what will surprise many readers is how little we seem to know after decades of research about whether and how far NPM 'worked' in what is commonly said to have been its main original concern, namely to cut costs and improve efficiency" (2011: 738).

Since 2000, an intense debate regarding the status of NPM is going on. Dunleavy and his colleagues declared that NPM was dead (Dunleavy et al. 2005) while Pollitt (2003) argued that NPM was by no means over, but was challenged by new types of reform efforts. Christensen and Laegreid (2007) suggested that one needs to look beyond NPM and focus attention to what are the main features of the on-going public sector reforms. The debate about the contents, effects and outcomes continues. Proponents of the so-called "Post-NPM" have accounted for the shortcomings of NPM-attempts such as weaknesses produced by specialization, fragmentation, and marketization (Lodge and Gill, 2011). In response to the shortcomings they have emphasized the availability of new technological and participatory tools to advance public management (e.g. Dunleavey et al., 2005; Stoker, 2006; Christensen and Laegreid, 2008).

In this special issue we are interested in if it possible to discern a new trend or trends that will replace NPM in the public administration in Scandinavia. Maybe is it time to break free from the label NPM and focus attention to what is actually going on in public sector organizations today? All the contributions address contemporary developments of public administration activities, be they connected to NPM or not. By focusing on processes and activities, such studies provide what are really needed – detailed accounts of what is going on in practice.

Wällstedt and Almqvist suggest that NPM is followed by a new era – an era of paradoxes. They show in their article how contradictions, complexities and paradoxes are kept alive rather than being solved in practice. Yet some other authors show solutions to such paradoxes emphasizing different aspects of coordination and collaboration: on a national level through common IT solutions (Erlingsdottir and Lindholm), on municipal level through projects (Fred) or through evidence-based practices (Johansson, Denvall and Vedung). Such de-

velopments may be seen as efforts to cross boundaries between public and private, and to solve the problems that cannot be solved within the demarcated organizations and units, but also to introduce standards of performance which are valid beyond the local context.

Several of the articles point out to the emergence of values and philosophies opposing NPM: setting people, and relationships between people and groups, in the forefront, rather than focusing on efficiency and control only. These values are expressed in a discourse that places employees in the center (Thedvall and Thamm Hellström), through focus on knowledge and experience of practitioners (Johansson, Denvall and Vedung), and by increasing the freedom of employees to independently define their performance (Svärdsten).

Public sector organizations have for long been, and still are, "hot beds" of reforms and changes. In order to understand the reasons for, and the consequences of these changes, it is necessary to remember what has been done before, that is, to take the history into account. Yet there is little to be won by trying to position today's changes as NPM or post-NPM. The editors of this issue suggest instead that the researchers focus attention on what is going on and follow these initiatives into the future.

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