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We are proud to be the Editors of *Modernizing the Public Sector: Scandinavian Perspectives*, which was published by Routledge in 2017. The academic literature on public management has been dominated by Anglo Saxon perspectives on reforms since the seminal contributions by Hood (1991;1995). However, in our view, the experiences of Scandinavian countries have a lot to offer policy makers, researchers, public managers and other practitioners. This rich experience should be of interest to those active in public management in a range of countries, from those countries which tend to be regarded as 'early adopters' or at the forefront (including for example, New Zealand and the UK) and those countries across the spectrum of reform (including many continental European countries which grapple with heavy legal traditions and Eastern European countries and many African and Asian countries, which are often at the early stages of reform). Our view contrasts with the reaction of Patrik Hall, the reviewer of this book for SJPA. He is dismissive of the idea that Scandinavian countries, particularly Sweden, have something distinctive to offer the world. In other words, Patrik Hall sees Scandinavian public administration practices as boring.

This book offers readers a breadth of material from a variety of perspectives and traditions on practices and reforms in Scandinavian countries. The book scrutinises and comments on the managerialism which is endemic in public services. It locates this discussion within specific public services where possible. This book was a project over two years with a series of research workshops in which we identified key issues, commonalities and divergences in public services reform. This was a significant commitment from a large project team. There are chapters which may not register with locals, such as Patrik Hall, but which have the potential to be of greater interest internationally. For example, the chapter by Alexander Paulsson on unique identity numbers is taken for granted in Sweden but astonishes an international audience. This book is part of a highly prestigious portfolio of public management books at Routledge which are targeted at international audiences. This book has been recognised by the doyen of public management books, Professor Christopher Hood of Oxford, as an important contribution to the literature.

An important feature of much Scandinavian practice, particularly in Sweden, reveals a willingness to experiment with reforms in a politically neutral way. It is hard to overstate the importance of this in an area which is often dogged by

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political dogma. Unfortunately, the reviewer of this book, Patrik Hall, is a political scientist with a narrow perspective and understanding of many reforms in the public sector. Indeed, his viewpoint is exacerbated by an unwillingness to consider the Scandinavian practices in this book as being of potential interest to anyone outside Scandinavia. An observation that *de facto* means that Scandinavian practices are not particularly interesting but just boring. In his review of the book we edited, Patrik Hall expressed confusion over its aims. We devised this book to be challenging and provocative. It has certainly provoked Patrik Hall! A major aim of this book was to take the Scandinavian experiences to a wider, international audience. But Patrik Hall was too introspective to even consider that possibility.

Before engaging with Patrik Hall's review we should note our prior contact with him. As one of the four guest editors of a special issue (of *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift*), Irvine Lapsley was the keenest guest editor on the inclusion in the special issue of an article by Fred and Hall on projectification in Swedish municipalities (Fred and Hall, 2017). The idea of temporary projects as vehicles for service delivery is inherently interesting to Irvine Lapsley. But, surprisingly, that paper was not the kind of empirical paper that Patrik Hall expects chapters in this book to look like.

In terms of the review, Patrik Hall starts by summarising a century of Swedish history in four lines. An example of breath-taking arrogance. This contrasts with typical Swedish behaviour of politeness and consideration. But that was not the mindset with which he approached this review. Indeed, Patrik Hall's style of writing in his review is reminiscent of a distinctive style in English literature – 'Outraged of Tunbridge Wells' (Cawthorn, 2013). In the pre-digital era, hard copy newspapers were very important in everyday life. This was the hunting ground for the disgruntled and disaffected who wrote coruscating Letters to the Editor. Here was an opportunity for the expression of disgust, outrage, sarcasm: outpourings of negativity and insouciance in a barrage of invective.

It may seem harsh to place Patrik Hall in this genre of writing, but the tone of his comments resonates with the eccentric writers of these Letters to the Editor. There are certainly academics like this on the conference circuit – the angry people most conference participants avoid. We do not know Patrik Hall and do not know if he is like this – but the tone of his comments suggest that he could be. 'Outraged of Tunbridge Wells' was also about humour. The writer is intended to make fun of his target for the amusement of readers. But there is another twist to this very English humour. It is also an opportunity to laugh at the writer as someone who is decidedly odd and eccentric. This certainly was the effect on us as Patrik Hall's comments did make us laugh out loud.

In terms of the specific comments made by Patrik Hall, he uses the first challenge in the handbook of criticisms to level at books of readings. Specifically, the comment that there is some unevenness in the various chapters. This comment has all the gravitas of an observation that the sun is in the sky. Of course, scrutiny of Patrik Hall's publications suggests that he has never attempted to compile a book of readings himself. This is a case of 'do as I say' not 'do as I do'. A little hypocrisy is fed into his critique.

Patrik Hall's limited knowledge of the area of public sector reform is revealed by his *ex cathedra* bombast that the premise of this book was wrong and

could only be undertaken as an international comparative study. He does cite one classic international comparative study, then takes a swipe at it, in his typical fashion. This position adopted by Patrik Hall ignores a series of international comparative studies of public management reform. This includes the seminal paper by Hood (1995) and books by Pollitt and Bouckaert (2000, 2004) also Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) and Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017). The intriguing aspect of all that prior research is that Scandinavia surfaces as an area of interest. There are tantalising glimpses of public management reform in Sweden, but this is not considered in depth. Our book addresses this gap in the literature. We give greater prominence in our book to Sweden which is the early adopter within Scandinavia.

In his comments on the first chapter (by Irvine Lapsley) Patrik Hall observed that that this chapter lacked substantial argument. Now the author of this chapter has written a series of contributions on the phenomenon of NPM (Lapsley, 2008; Lapsley, 2009; Hellstrom and Lapsley, 2016; Hodges and Lapsley, 2016; Hyndman and Lapsley, 2016; Bergstrom and Lapsley, 2017). And there are other scholars in our team who have contributed to the NPM literature (Karlssohn, 2017). Hall fails to comprehend that the initial chapter in any book of readings is often an introduction to a set of ideas rather than the kind of empirical paper which he is fixated on.

This uni-dimensional perspective is evident in Patrik Hall's comments on other chapters in this book. He offers idiosyncratic interpretations of Michael Power's work on the Audit Society. He offers a very narrow interpretation of what NPM is. His political science background betrays a lack of awareness of extant literature in the public management field. He portrays his ultimate accolade as affixing the descriptor 'critical' to a given chapter. Now these days, critical scholars are well represented within the ranks of academe. But this fixation with critical literature as the single reference point is evidence of narrow thinking. There are tribes within academe who take comfort in occupying the same space as other like-minded people. They retreat into the box of self-absorption. But we are convinced that other perspectives, including positivists, action researchers and interdisciplinary researchers all have a lot to offer. The essence of the public sector with its landscape of multiple professions makes it a natural study setting for a broader, more holistic approach.

To return to Patrik Hall's thesis that Scandinavians are boring, it is interesting that he slips inevitably into a discussion of what Scandinavia is. He observed the prominence given to Sweden. And what about Finland? He refers to a Nordic interpretation of certain phenomena. We know these elements of a discussion are often found in the literature from this part of the world. We do understand that Finland is not part of Scandinavia. We know that Nordic countries should be the term used when Finland is included in a discussion. While we understand and recognise this, sadly this is an accurate but parochial and navel gazing perspective on this geographical area. This is a boring argument. The rest of the world thinks of you as Scandinavia. And Scandinavian countries may be small, but they are not boring. In our view their practices and thoughts deserve much greater attention internationally.

We like the pragmatism of the Scandi reformers. Patrik Hall dismisses this but no doubt he would be impressed if we called the Scandi reformers

bricoleurs and observed that their practices of improvisation were examples of bricolage as first articulated by the French savant Levi-Strauss (1966). But the preoccupation of critical scholars with the savants may be pretentious, Patrik. Only use the savants when they are necessary for the research in hand.

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