

Does Context Matter? Governance Models in Local Administration

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Over the past decades, public administration scholars and practitioners around the world have experimented with various administrative reforms to design governance models suitable to fulfil the tasks of public administration. Amidst this ongoing debate, (at least) three different and competing governance models can be distinguished: New Public Management, New Public Governance, and the (Neo) Weberian model. Despite each of these models claiming universal legitimacy, specific administrative branches in different administrative systems operate in unique contexts and handle varying tasks. The article delves into the question of whether and to what extent different branches of public administration within the same administrative system adopt global public administration ideas in a similar fashion.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The article employs a comparative design to analyse the adoption of global public administration concepts across different administrative branches. Given their shared rigid Weberian tradition but divergent tasks and context, the study uses the German financial and social administrations as examples. The findings are derived from a survey of local agencies.

Findings: The study reveals a persistent influence of strong Weberian traditions on the structural and operational makeup of both branches, indicating a significant path dependency in governance understanding. The characteristics of New Public Management and New Public Governance are comparatively more prominent in social than in financial administration, which can be attributed to differences in tasks and relations, especially with political actors.

Academic contribution to the field: In addition to supplementing existing detailed analyses of the (non-)success of specific public administration reforms, the study takes a comprehensive view of the long-term development of public administration structure and perception, spanning multiple reforms. While acknowledging the formative influence of administrative tradition on the entire public administration system, the focus is on the nuanced effects of administrative traditions on diverse organisations, encouraging future comparative research.

Originality/Significance/Value: In addition to the contribution to the field, our comparative methodology and empirical study makeup show the advantages of concentrating on a minimal number of paradigms that can be delineated as clearly as possible, instead of operationalising public administration reforms with a multitude of (potentially country-specific) indicators. With this approach, we lay the groundwork for the extension of the comparative design to other countries and administrative systems.

Keywords: financial administration, social administration, local governance, administrative culture, path dependency

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1 Introduction

There is an ongoing debate among scholars about why public administrations repeatedly come under strain and how governance models in public administration (need to) change over time (Pierre and Peters, 2020; Kuhlmann and Wollmann, 2019; Lægreid and Christensen, 2017). In the past decades, governments around the world have experimented with various administrative reforms aimed at keeping pace with the dynamic socioeconomic environment, increasing productivity and efficiency, and improving collaboration with the private sector and civil society (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017; Wegrich, 2021).

In line with existing scholarship, we observe three main paradigms of public governance models: (1) the *Weberian model* of hierarchical and bureaucratic public administration (Weber, 1921/22) as the longest standing doctrine, prevailing for most of the twentieth century (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994), (2) the *New Public Management model* (NPM) of a market-based public administration

which had its heyday from the late 1980s to the late 1990s (Lapiente and Van de Walle, 2020) and (3) the *New Public Governance model* (NPG), which has drawn the attention to a plural and pluralistic state since the early 2000s (Osborne, 2010; Torfing and Triantafyllou, 2014). There is no doubt that the administrative paradigms associated with those reforms have to be understood as ideal types. As administrative reforms are multifaceted and highly presuppositional, they create different governance practices among organizations, policy fields and countries (Christensen and Lægreid, 2011; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017).

However, it is hard to ascertain – let alone predict – in what way reforms interact with existing logics and how administrative structures and processes align with these paradigms in practice. It has been acknowledged that the diffusion of reforms can vary among countries and hindered by path dependences, engrained traditions and persistent administrative cultures (Peters and Painter, 2010). This facilitates a mismatch between reform objectives and factual administrative practices.

The German administrative system can generally be characterized as a legalistic Weberian *Rechtsstaat*, with a strong public law tradition (Kuhlmann et al., 2021) that has seen dynamic developments and several ambitious administrative reforms over the last decades. In comparison to other countries, NPM oriented reforms have so far been considered to have had rather modest impact on the bureaucratic and legalistic tradition, with great heterogeneity of reform priorities, implemented elements, and effects (Wegrich, 2021; Hammerschmid and Oprisor, 2016). While the impact of the NPM model on local administration in Germany has been studied from different comparative perspectives (comparing local administration within Germany (Kuhlmann et al., 2008) and comparing local administration in different European countries (Kuhlmann, 2010; Kersting et al., 2009), similar studies for the NPG model are still lacking. However, there are studies that discuss particular elements of NPG and assess their impact, such as remunicipalization (Wollmann, 2016) or co-production (Loeffler and Timm-Arnold, 2020), or contributions on coping with recent local policy challenges, like critical infrastructure resilience (Monstadt and Schmidt, 2019; Knodt et al., 2022) or migration (Martins and Davion, 2023).

Taking these previous results as a starting point, we aim to identify to what extent public administrations, namely the local financial administration (FA) and social administration (SA) in Germany, conform to the different administrative paradigms, taking into consideration the allegedly rigid administrative culture that might implicate a strong path dependency. In addition, we ask whether different branches of public administration within the same administrative system show conformity to reforms in the same way, independent of their respective tasks and context.

Studies looking at the practical impact of several governance models on administrative procedures in specific policy fields are so far missing. Local governments are an especially interesting research object in this regard, as this level of administration is the most diverse and the most reactive to reforms.

Against this background, the article conducts a survey among agency heads of local financial and social administration in the five largest municipalities of each federal state and in the three city-states of Germany. The paper analyzes to what extent core principles of the Weberian, NPM, and NPG models are engrained in current organizational structures and operating procedures as well as in cooperation and co-creation ambitions.

In doing so, we make not only a theoretical contribution to the question about the interaction of administrative culture and reactivity of local governments to reform, but also an empirical contribution to the discussion on the factual implementation of different governance models and their variation among administrative branches. Our methodological approach of defining a minimal number of abstract administrative paradigms that can be delineated as clearly as possible, rather than focusing on a more narrow understanding of reforms, provides a useful starting point for future comparative research: administrative models that are defined in more detail through specific reform trends and measures can be highly context-specific and might overlap or not be applicable in other (national) contexts. The definition of more abstract paradigms prevents this problem and promises more valid results.

The article proceeds as follows: In the next section, we first review the literature on principles and trajectories of the Weberian, NPM, and NPG model. Section three presents the institutional background and reform developments in the German local FA and SA. We argue that both cases are especially interesting as they are set in an administrative culture often described as idealtypically Weberian, but have undergone extensive reform processes in recent decades, each according to their specific function. This would suggest diverging manifestations and combinations of public governance models, which makes them a constructive starting point for comparative perspectives and for the evaluation of the impact of reform measures. In section four we analyze the perceptions of the heads of local FA and SA regarding the application and influence of governance principles and emphasize salient similarities and differences between the two administrative spheres. Based on the results, we discuss reasons that explain the specific similarities and variations in section five.

In summary, survey participants in both local FA and SA perceive their organizations to still operate mainly according to traditional Weberian principles, showing an overall low conformity to the administrative paradigms of NPM and NPG. Characteristics associated with these two paradigms are seen to be of higher relevance for daily routines in SA. We ascribe this result to the difference in tasks and context between the two administrative branches, which prevents a convergence of administrative branches under uniform reform paradigms.

2 Governance Models

In line with public administration literature (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017; Aristovnik et al., 2022), we differentiate three generic models of public administration: the Weberian model of hierarchical bureaucracy, the NPM model and

the NPG model. These models differ, among others, with regard to their predominant modes of coordination, their rules to divide work and assign responsibility, ideas of the role of citizens (citoyen, customer or partner), and their overall organizational objectives (focus on the rule of law, achieving economic efficiency or 'good governance'). It is not assumed that these models occur in their pure form in empirical reality. Therefore, it is all the more important to clearly define the basic building blocks of each model. This challenge can be approached in a first step by distinguishing waves of public sector reform which express specific (political) ideals. While criticism of bureaucratic governance is nearly as old as the model as such (Tomo, 2018), the Weberian idealtype has not been questioned as a guiding approach for governing the public sector throughout the twentieth century. Remarkably, it was not before the mid-1990s – Germany was a late comer in this respect (Hammerschmid and Oprisor, 2016) – that bureaucratic governance was supposed to be replaced by ideas of NPM. Only two decades later, however, an increasing awareness of the problems and pitfalls of NPM has fuelled a second wave of public sector reform and the evolution of what is called 'new public governance' (Osborne, 2010).

Public administration designed according to the Weberian model of bureaucratic governance is thought to operate outside the political sphere and constitute a regime in its own, with a respective set of rules and an according organizational culture. The main feature of bureaucratic governance is a strict system of super- and subordination. The hierarchical levels define responsibilities and obligations as well as strictly vertical lines of communication. Public servants are professionals who are selected due to a specific set of competences. They are expected to understand the importance of rule compliance, to exert them in an impartial and impersonal manner, and to make their decisions and activities transparent in detailed files. The internalization of rule-bound behaviour serves one objective: to establish and maintain rational-legal authority (Weber, 1921/22), which represents a clear alternative to the power-driven, 'irrational' interactions associated with the political sphere.

As both bureaucratic governance and the welfare state came under increasing pressure in the late 1970s, consequences of budgetary strain and administrative inefficiency gained importance. By following neoliberal and market-like beliefs, state failure became a compelling argument to change the public sector toward marketization and competition (Aucoin, 1990; Hood, 1991; Pollitt, 1990; Dunleavy and Hood, 1994). NPM as a set of primarily managerial and cost saving ideas dominated the administrative reform agenda in many OECD countries. Starting from its original movement in the Anglophone world, NPM later spread to other countries in different variations and gained steam during the 1980s and 1990s (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017). Most NPM reforms – whose conceptual roots lie in managerialism and new institutional economics – were aimed at transforming governments into leaner, but more effective administrative organizations with clearly separated responsibilities (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Klijn, 2012).

Although it is difficult to paint a unified picture of NPM, some general features serve to characterize key reform ambitions: public organizations are expected to improve effectiveness and efficiency of government performance, which requires the clear statement of strategic goals, the use of performance indicators and the control of outputs. Overall, transparency regarding the structure, performance and budget is to be enhanced. Another focus lies on the breakup of 'monolithic' organizational structures by using different forms of decentralization, delegation, and outsourcing. All these facets imply a shift to greater competition and the use of market or semi-market mechanisms in providing public services (Aucoin, 1990; Hood, 1991; Kickert, 1997). However, the implementation of NPM raised criticism and concerns, among others, regarding its short-term perspective, especially budget cutbacks, at the expense of quality standards as well as insufficient consideration of different values in administration and politics (Hood, 1991; Aristovnik et al., 2022).

When looking at recent public governance scholarship, a variety of models be named, such as digital-era governance, good governance or collaborative governance (Peters et al., 2022; Ansel and Gash, 2008; Dunleavy et al. 2008; Kooiman, 1999). Although all concepts have their *raison d'être* and enhance our understanding of important facets of public governance models, we argue that they are all understood as 'post-NPM' (Reiter and Klenk, 2019) and have some shared ideals and building blocks that can be used to construct a basic model termed NPG. In contrast to the Weberian and the NPM model, NPG is defined by networks that allow – and even encourage – collaboration and mutual adjustment through horizontal lines and trust-based interactions (Peters and Pierre, 1998). Networks to organize public service provision are characterized by a plurality of actors: public and private (for-profit and non-profit) actors as well as individual citizens, interest associations, and politicians participate in less formalized negotiations to achieve consensus about public services and the modes of their implementation. As a result, the boundaries between politics and administration, which had been demarked clearly by the 'steering and rowing'-metaphor of the NPM model, have become blurred and the role of elected politicians and administrative leaders have changed (Peters et al., 2022). Political and administrative leaders are perceived as 'metagovernors' (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009) that employ indirect means of coordination to influence and shape decision-making and implementation processes. Instead of exerting direct political and bureaucratic control or supervising performance management contracts, leaders use discursive framing or institutional design to smooth the process of consensus building and to facilitate service provision. However, this is not considered as a weakness, but as strategic means to increase the democratic legitimacy, the effectiveness and innovativeness of public governance.

3 The Case of German Local FA and SA

The German public administrative system has often been characterized as an ideal example of a bureaucratic legal state (*Rechtsstaat*), whose functioning

is strongly influenced by a public law tradition, combined with an orientation to professional and legal accountability and compliance. In line with the trend in most OECD countries, the call for a stronger results orientation and managerial culture and control emerged in the early 1990s and resulted in corresponding management reforms, especially by introducing the 'New Steering Model' at the local level (Proeller and Siegel, 2021). In Germany, the local government level plays a significant role in implementing public policies and providing citizen-oriented public services (Kuhlmann and Wollmann, 2019). It has been the major arena of public sector reforms, modernization, and outsourcing in recent decades (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017).

This is especially true for local financial management and social policy. Both policy fields are subject to complex and specific legislation (e.g., the codification of social law in the form of Social Codes), while at the same time having passed through extensive reform processes (e.g., new financial management or hybridization of welfare state services) (Grohs, 2014; Proeller and Siegel, 2021). This intertwining between a traditional administrative system on the one hand and the experience of various public sector reforms on the other is an ideal breeding ground for shedding light on how different governance models shape the functioning and organization of public service delivery.

Approximately 11,000 municipalities and about 295 counties are responsible for a broad range of public services. On the one hand, they perform administrative tasks that are devolved by the federal government and the German *Länder*. On the other hand, local authorities deliver services as part of their constitutionally protected local self-government (Kuhlmann and Wollmann, 2019).

Within the broad range of local public services, independent budgetary policy and financial management are traditionally core elements of German local self-government. In times of growing budgetary constraints and austerity, financial management takes on a central role in ensuring administrative capacity. Its routine contact with the supervisory authority endows the FA with a high degree of influence (Geißler, 2014). Usually organized as a cross-sectional administrative department, it is concerned with the management of assets and liabilities and the procurement and distribution of financial resources to specialist administrative units. Local financial management practices follow a strictly formal and legal orientation. The municipal budget law of the German *Länder* which is regulated in the local government constitutions clearly prescribes balanced budgets, control and enforcement instruments as well as a strict structure of supervision (Person et al., 2021). Since it is the task to ensure compliance with the principle of economic efficiency and to consider this principle in preparing and implementing local budgets, FA is essentially dedicated to internal coordination tasks and acts as the interface of all actors involved in municipal budget policy. A decade ago, Geißler (2014) concluded that despite new reform approaches towards participatory budgeting, the expectations of greater openness towards citizens and their integration in budgeting and consolidation processes remained unfulfilled. However, there is a need for further empirical studies to determine whether this assumption still holds true.

Social policy is one of the most significant policy fields at the local level. A large share of local public expenditure and employment is devoted to the provision of social services (Federal Ministry of Finance, 2022; Federal Statistical Office of Germany, 2023). Budgetary constraints as well as socio-economic and demographic challenges make this field the primary object of consolidation and cost-cutting efforts in many municipalities. The range of tasks which is fulfilled by the local SA is extremely diverse and must be differentiated into completely municipally financed voluntary responsibilities where local authorities can decide whether and how to provide (e.g., social housing, establishment of nursing centers), mandatory tasks, primarily financed by local governments, where they are only allowed to decide on how to provide (e.g., child and youth care, social assistance) and delegated responsibilities with only little autonomy and which are funded by the federal and *Länder* level (e.g., housing benefits, health surveillance). Due to the codification of social law in the form of Social Codes the execution of tasks is embedded in a comprehensive legal framework, regulations for the various areas of responsibility are significantly complex (Schimanke, 2021). Another specific element of local social policy is the close interconnection between the public and the third sector, with voluntary organizations providing social services alongside the public sphere. The production of public goods was traditionally shaped by a specific kind of local corporatism representing a division of labour between public bodies and huge welfare associations. However, these rather solid relationships have been under considerable pressure to change for years (e.g., in the direction of marketization and managerialism), which has led to a very heterogeneous landscape of service providers (Evers, 2019; Bönker et al., 2018; Grohs et al., 2017).

In the context of the ongoing debate on the factors that shape governance models, we may offer divergent expectations regarding the governance models of local public administration (Kuhlmann et al., 2022). An approach informed by path-dependency and historical institutionalism would imply a continued prevalence of the Weberian model as history, in a simple way, matters a great deal (Greener, 2005). Conversely, a neo-institutional perspective, highlighting the influence of global ideas, would imply a situation in which national structures and their embeddedness into particular historical, cultural, and normative settings are progressively losing their impact, thereby revealing the emergence of global patterns in public administration, such as NPM or NPC, and a greater fragmentation of generally accepted traditional administrative styles (Welch and Wong, 1998; Howlett, 2003). A third perspective would emphasize the significance of tasks and context as crucial factors for determining governance models. Embracing this perspective would entail recognizing notable and persistent differences between the governance models of the two branches of local administration, with very specific manifestations emerging (O'Toole and Meier, 2015).

4 Methods

To identify which governance models are prevalent in German local FA and SA, we revert to the 'basic building blocks' of governance models as outlined in section 2. These building blocks concern organizational structures – such as hierarchies or the allocation of specialized tasks –, operating procedures – such as the extent of the delegation of responsibilities within the organization –, and the interaction of local government with its environment, namely political decision-makers, clients, and citizens. For this reason, we conducted an online survey addressing the heads of agencies in charge of administering social and financial services asking them to assess their own organization in view of these basic characteristics.

The survey included a total of 75 items designed to shed light on a variety of questions. These items consisted of statements that the respondents were asked to express their (dis-)agreement to and are the result of a comprehensive review of the literature that was identified in the Scopus database as being particularly relevant to this topic (Aristovnik et al., 2022). Before conducting the survey, the statements were extensively tested in a pretest with several German administrative experts and scholars. For this paper, we included 15 items, which can be grouped into three batteries with five statements each, in our analyses. The selection aimed to exclude duplicates and to avoid ambiguous statements that cannot clearly be associated with either the Weberian model of public administration, NPM, or NPG. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'disagree' to 'agree' or from 'always' to 'never'.¹

The clear association of each item with a governance model means that a high average agreement to a battery of statements can be seen as an indicator for the prevalence of the respective model as perceived by the agency heads. We tested the internal consistency of the batteries using Cronbach's alpha. All Cronbach's alpha values are > 0.7 (Weberian model: 0.711, NPM: 0.721, NPG: 0.729), suggesting a very high consistency of the item selection.

Since the size and population of German municipalities – and, accordingly, their organization, tasks, and resources – differ widely, the complete survey included the five largest municipalities of each federal state and the districts (*Bezirke*) of the three city-states Berlin, Bremen, and Hamburg. The aim of the selection was to create a data set which facilitates both aggregated analyses of cases that are similar in their context (largest municipality within a state) and differentiated analyses that can account for the heterogeneity of German states and municipalities (e.g., differing population size, former East or West German state)². For each municipality or district, we determined the abovementioned heads of agencies responsible for FA and SA. Though the de-

1 All items refer to the present state of the organization. An exception was a battery of items concerning changes necessitated by having to cope with the COVID19 pandemic. The analysis of this item battery is not included in this article.

2 Analyses of governance models show no noticeable differences between large and small municipalities, their location in former East or West German states and between federal states and city states. The article, therefore, neglects these criteria and focuses solely on differences between administrative branches.

nomination of these positions varies (adjunct mayors, heads of department, heads of office), functional equivalents can be identified in all municipalities. The survey population includes 293 respondents, ranging from two to four people per municipality. 89 respondents completed the survey, amounting to a response rate of 34 per cent including all federal states and the city states. The response rate in the two branches of administration was almost identical, with 44 respondents from FA and 45 respondents from SA, which creates the ideal prerequisite for a comparison.

Our analyses base on a two-pronged approach. First, we use descriptive statistics to determine the overall evaluation of the item batteries associated with each public administration model, respectively. For this step, we assigned each answer category a numerical value ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 representing the response 'never' or 'disagree' and 5 being the highest category on the affirmative side of the scale. A high average value for the items in a battery expresses a prevalence of the governance model as perceived by the respondents. A low standard error suggests a high consistency in response behavior throughout the group of survey participants. Second, we compare the levels of agreement to single items within the models to uncover nuances in the administrative branches' self-evaluation.

5 Results

Our analyses show that the statements concerning organizational features associated with the Weberian model meet a very high level of agreement among the respondents in our sample as a whole (see table 1). The NPM and NPG models are less pronounced with an average difference to the Weberian model of 0.6 points for the financial administration and 0.5 points for the social administration. Referring to our expectations described in section 2, these results suggest that administrative traditions override conformity to administrative reforms and that local public administrations continue to adhere to long established principles rather than being characterized by reform models in their present state. Even though an overall persistence of the Weberian model could have been expected considering the strong *Rechtsstaats* tradition of the German case, it is nevertheless surprising that the battery of items associated with the Weberian bureaucratic model scores noticeable higher than both NPM and NPG.

Table 1: public administration models, average values and standard deviation.

	Total Sample	Financial Administration	Social Administration
WEBER	3.8 (0.73)	3.7 (0.94)	4.0 (0.39)
NPM	3.3 (0.78)	3.1 (0.89)	3.5 (0.59)
NPG	3.3 (0.75)	3.1 (0.89)	3.5 (0.52)

Source: own data

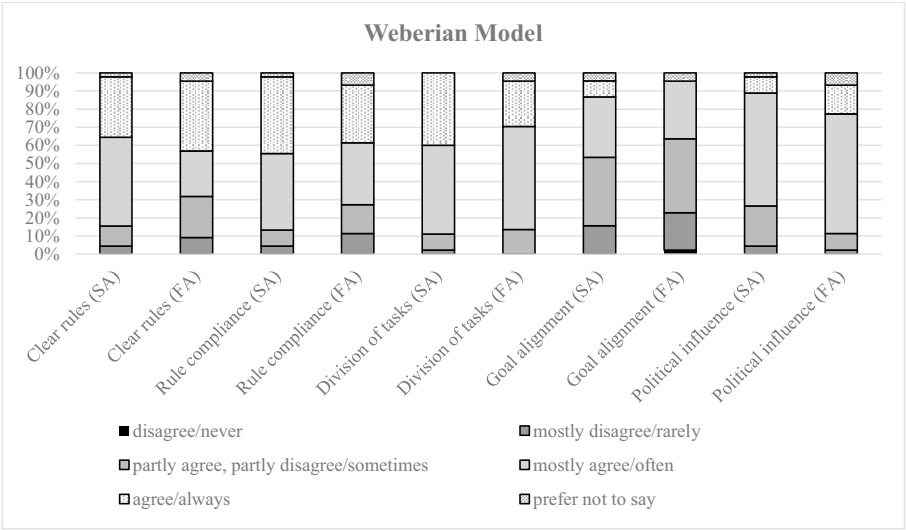
At first glance, it is difficult to come to definite conclusions regarding the differences in self-conception of the respondents from different administrative branches, as all average values are higher in SA. However, compared to FA, the standard deviation for all models is lower in SA, suggesting an overall higher homogeneity in the responses from this administrative branch and an absence of outliers, which might have skewed the accumulated results for FA. Although the small number of respondents call for caution in the substantial interpretation of standard deviations, this result hints at a greater contextual and institutional complexity in SA, which interacts with a wider variety of administrative, political and societal actors and, therefore, has to fulfill several different roles and tasks simultaneously, such as the hierarchical imposing of sanctions, the efficient use of limited financial resources as well as acting as co-creator and contracting authority.

Analyses of the individual items show overall similar tendencies in the administrative branches (see figures 1-3). This is especially noticeable when simplifying the scales and pooling the categories 'agree' and 'mostly agree' or 'disagree' and 'mostly disagree' respectively. This would speak to the interpretation that prevalent governance paradigms in both FA and SA develop along a similar path dependency and/or respond equally to global paradigm shifts rather than following a paradigm dependent on their task and context. Taking into account the results in table 1, path dependency seems to be the strongest determining factor, explaining the continuous dominance of the Weberian model.

At a closer look, however, we can see noticeable differences between the administrative branches which hint at a significant context sensitivity. Although FA scores higher for the item "Our organization's operating procedures are based on clear rules.", which is a core principle of Weberian administration, respondents from SA more often agree to the statement "As executive director, I pay attention above all to rule compliance.", stressing the individual's role and hierarchical understanding in a Weberian bureaucracy (see figure 1). The respondents from SA also score higher on the remaining Weber-item that

focuses on the individual's role in the organization: The perception of a clear allocation of tasks and competencies to the employees is more pronounced in SA.

Figure 1: Responses to Items associated with the Weberian model. Item 1: "Our organization's operating procedures are based on clear rules.", Item 2: "As executive director, I pay attention above all to rule compliance.", Item 3: "Tasks, competencies, and responsibilities of employees are clearly defined.", Item 4: "The goals of individuals, teams, and organizational units are fully aligned.", Item 5: "Our work is influenced by political considerations."



Source: own data

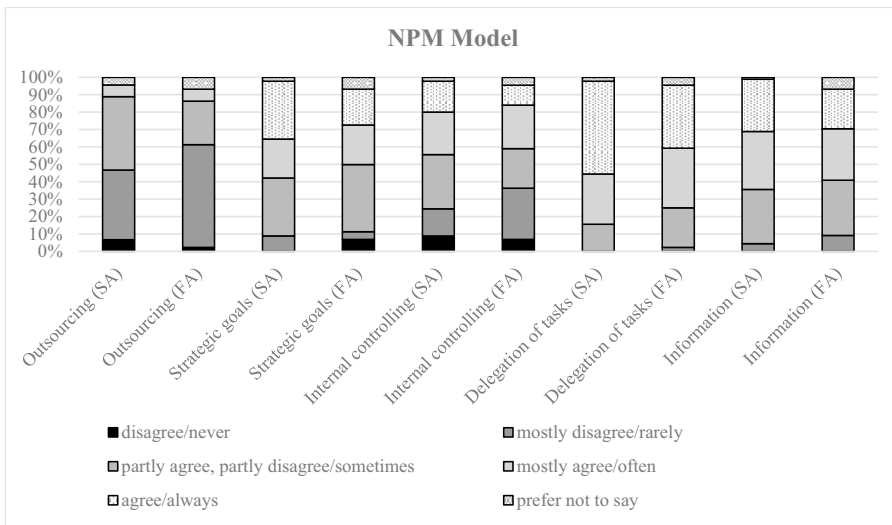
A strong specialization of units and tasks is a fixture of the Weberian model of public administration. A high degree of specialization necessitates a clear alignment of all units with the organization's goals. Goals of individuals, teams, and organizational units seem to be less aligned in FA: Here, 56.3 per cent of the respondents say that alignment is lacking, compared to 43.8 per cent respondents from SA. This could be explained by the differences in complexity and diversity of tasks in the two administrative branches. FA interacts with different administrative units, but its tasks remain usually the same (budget control). A dedicated specialization and goal alignment seem to be less important for the functioning and organization of local financial management. SA, on the contrary, has to satisfy different stakeholders and fulfills comparatively divers tasks in a dynamic environment which requires a more intense specialization of the staff and a full alignment with the overall organizational goals.

In line with the classic argument of administrative neutrality, we consider political influence on decision-making, interpreting a low political influence as an indicator for the prevalence of the Weberian model. The survey shows that political considerations play a very important part in the decision-mak-

ing of both FA and SA with almost two thirds of the respondents choosing the category 'often' and no respondents opting for 'never'. However, political considerations are noticeably more important for FA than for SA: 15.9 per cent of the respondents from the financial administration state that political considerations influence all their decisions. Respondents from SA rather opt for the category 'sometimes' (22.2 per cent), implying a higher degree of autonomy in this respect. Overall, respondents from SA seem to perceive their organization as more clearly structured, but in their inner workings largely independent of political consideration, whereas respondents from FA see their organization as more strongly politically influenced.

Turning to NPM, we regard outsourcing of supporting tasks as a central consequence of NPM reforms. Although respondents from both FA and SA state that some supporting tasks remain within the organization, outsourcing seems to be more common in SA, with almost half of the respondents from this group choosing the option 'sometimes' as their reaction to the corresponding statement. Overall, however, this reform element is perceived as comparatively less relevant (see figure 2).

Figure 2: Responses to Items associated with the NPM model. Item 1: "We are outsourcing supporting tasks.", Item 2: "Our organization drafts strategic goals.", Item 3: "We use indicators to review goal achievement and internal controlling.", Item 4: "I delegate tasks to subdivisions.", Item 5: "We publish extensive information about our organization."



Source: own data

The analyses show that the formulation of strategic goals is common, but that performance indicators or similar instruments to assess the organization's work play a comparatively less important part in day to day-business. The use of indicators is more prevalent in SA than in FA, where only about a tenth of all respondents agree to the given statement (11.4 per cent vs. 17.8 per cent

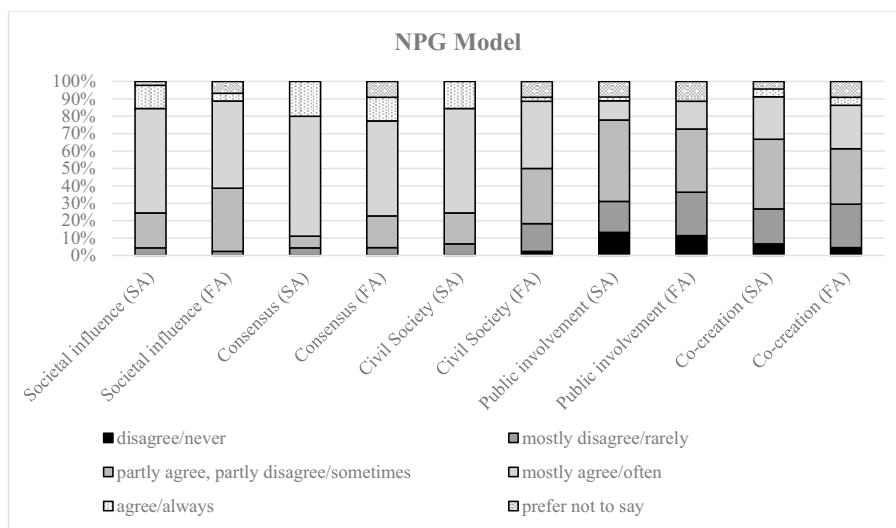
in SA). We suggest that both efficiency and effectiveness are expected more from the SA than from the FA. Especially in times of growing budgetary constraints and a simultaneous increase in the scope of social tasks, our result indicates that SA, to which a large share of public expenditure is devoted, is under even stronger pressure from politics and external stakeholders to provide services more effectively and efficiently.

We see the delegation of tasks as an expression of the efficiency principle, which is a central paradigm of NPM. Interestingly, there are obvious differences between respondents in FA and SA regarding the extent to which tasks are delegated: 53.3 per cent of the respondents from SA fully support comprehensive delegation practices, compared to only 36.4 per cent respondents from FA.

Lastly, the statement “We publish extensive information about our organization.” is an expression of the costumer orientation associated with NPM. SA seems to be slightly more open in this respect, seeing more than 60 per cent of the respondents choosing an affirmative answer as compared to 52.2 per cent of respondents from FA. Again, this is readily explained with context-sensitivity: As SA interacts with a wider variety of actors, especially with regard to the public, extensive information conforms with (societal) demands towards SA.

Focusing on NPG principles, such as possible influences from the organizations’ social setting and role in the community, the results confirm the assumption that SA feels a higher impact of (changes in) societal expectations on their work. About two thirds of all respondents chose an answer on the affirmative side of the scale when asked about the influence of societal expectations on their work (see figure 3). Interestingly, respondents from FA were either more unsure of their answers or more reluctant to share their views. We see several cases of non-response for all items in the group of FA survey participants, whereas all SA participants gave their view on the second and third item and non-response behaviour for the remaining items is lower in comparison.

Figure 3: Responses to Items associated with the NPG model. Item 1: "Our work is influenced by societal expectations.", Item 2: "We aim to solve conflicts between stakeholders in a cooperative and consensus-orientated manner.", Item 3: "We cooperate with civil society organizations.", Item 4: "The public is involved in important decision-making processes.", Item 5: "We encourage co-creation."



Source: own data

There are differences in the patterns of how the branches of public administration deal with external stakeholders. 20 per cent of SA respondents (compared to 13 per cent from FA) express that they always strive for consensus when it comes to interest conflicts with external stakeholders, 56.4 per cent (compared to 43.6 per cent from FA) say that they often try to come to a consensus. Conversely, 18.2 per cent of the respondents from FA (compared to 6.7 per cent from SA) argue that they sometimes aspire to reach a consensus.

Cooperation with civil society organizations is more common for respondents in SA than in FA, where only one respondent states that such a cooperation is the general rule (vs. 15.6 per cent in SA). Regarding the specific role that is assigned to citizens in decision-making processes, 46.7 per cent of SA respondents express that the public is sometimes involved in decision-making beyond a purely consultative function. For FA, the share of affirming responses is 36.4 per cent, which at first glance indicates a more extensive involvement of the public in FA. This conclusion changes, however, when the other categories are considered as well. When focusing on the overall positive side of the scale, slightly more respondents from FA state that they often involve the public (15.9 per cent vs. 11.1 per cent in SA). At the same time, marginally more respondents from SA opt for the answer category 'never' when asked about the public's involvement, largely levelling out significant discrepancies. According to our respondents, co-creation is slightly more common in SA than in FA.

6 Discussion

The results suggest that core aspects of the classic Weberian model are firmly rooted in both types of administrative branches, suggesting a strong path dependency and firm administrative culture which shape governance paradigms in German local administration, independent specific tasks. However, there are differences in the perception of the individual's role within the organization. In SA, compliance with the complex social legislation seems to have a dominant influence on operating procedures and individual decision-making, as a large part of implementing social policy at the local level relies on the execution of federal law. In contrast, the financial sovereignty as a core element of local self-government forces FA to align its processes with clear procedural rules, but at the same time allows structural flexibility and autonomy in procuring and distributing financial resources. Response behavior of public managers in FA, therefore, suggests larger discrepancies between their individual self-conceptions and the evaluation of their organization within this battery. Compliance appears to be perceived differently by financial officers, as it seems to be an outward-looking task rather than an inward-looking one. Another point of interest is the comparatively strong perceived political influence in FA. In our view, this does not contradict the overall dominance of the Weberian model. It merely underscores the fact that especially budgetary processes, while rule-based, are to some extent the outcome of political struggle between conflicting priorities and alternative programs (Greenwood et al., 1974).

If we look at the core elements of the NPM paradigm, all principles are considered to be more important for operating processes and decision-making in SA than in FA. In our interpretation, SA seems to be more open to the introduction and application of new management tools, which can be seen as consequence of context-sensitivity especially considering the variety of stakeholder with whom SA interacts on a daily basis. The challenge of meeting their expectations might prompt SA to implement politically promoted reforms more resolutely to conform with a high pressure to demonstrate legitimacy. Contrary, the diffusion and implementation of NPM measures especially for internal performance and managerial control is still in its infancy for FA. These findings are consistent with insights from prior studies: Although instruments, such as accrual accounting, have been introduced in many cases, it is hardly used for the purpose of strategic alignment (Proeller and Siegel, 2021). Looking at the impact of financial management reforms in German municipalities, this 'gap' also exists for the implementation of product budgets, which are largely informational in nature but do not contain a systematic link between performance information and financial resources (Weiss, 2017). In this vein, our cases in FA underscore what has been noted in international literature: NPM reforms are less fundamental or revolutionary than originally expected regarding their practical impact (Lapiente and van de Walle, 2020) and can be seen rather as an addition to previous concepts than a surrogate.

The NPG model of public administration sets the aim to move away from a "unicentric" government or "multicentric" market towards "pluricentric" net-

works (Sørensen and Torfing, 2018, p. 302). According to our results, local SA is more strongly embedded in their public environment than local FA. This should be attributable to the nature and diversity of their tasks, which place high demands on cooperating with external actors. FA, on the other hand, acts mainly as an internal service provider, making external cooperation and participatory practices a subordinate factor, which speaks for a context-sensitive prevalence of NPG rather than a neo-institutionalist dissemination of an international trend. What is more interesting is that cooperation ambitions of SA are mostly restricted to organized actors and interests. At a first glance, this seems unexpected, as there has been a “substantial growth in participatory innovation in recent years” (Fung, 2015, p. 514; Jäske, 2019) creating a diverse range of opportunities to involve citizens in local decision-making. In our cases, these opportunities do not seem to play a decisive role even for an administrative branch with such an immediate impact on citizens’ every-day life. Rather, it is apparent that traditional welfare corporatism is still the cornerstone of implementing social policy in Germany (Grohs, 2014), highlighting the role of path dependency for German local administration which has already been visible in the strong Weberian orientation. In addition, our results line up with prior studies that observe not only that instruments for individual citizen participation are infrequently used, despite ample opportunities, but that the development towards direct public involvement increasingly loses momentum. Instead of an expansion of public participation, we can detect a trend leading away from participation towards consultation (Roth, 2022). An important reason for the stalling or even retreat of participatory practices in local government lies in the moderate active exercise of respective opportunities by citizens which has been falling well short of expectations.

Overall, our results provide a clear answer to the initial research question: at least in the German case, context and task determine the prevalent governance paradigm in public administration. A uniform conformity to international trends or political propagation of administrative reforms cannot be assumed, refuting a base assumption of neo-institutionalism. A certain degree of uniformity stems from a strong path dependency that can be traced back to a firm administrative culture as a distinctive of the German case. However, context-sensitivity can be seen as the most important determining factor.

The interaction of path dependency and context-sensitivity implies that governance models – whether they originate in administrative culture or political reform – in local FA and SA do not supplant one another. Rather, NPM and NPG form complements to the contemporary Weberian tradition. This is consistent with findings from southern European countries by Ongaro (2009), which observe a similar processes in which newer managerial reforms have supplemented previous administrative traditions. We find indication that in both administrative branches, ideas of a more managerialized service delivery are combined with the ideal of a plural and pluralist state as well as inter-organizational processes. Nevertheless, we note differences between FA and SA. Depending on tasks and context, NPM and NPG seems to play a different influential role in the two branches. In FA, NPM and NPG principles appears to

have a less dominant effect on operating processes and decision-making. We suggest that FA continues to be fairly rigid in its practices due to the routine patterns of actor constellation, interaction and coordination as well as the comparatively uniform range of tasks. SA tends to be more flexible and open for innovation within their scope of action. At the least, public managers in SA seem to try different newer approaches to respond to complex environmental dynamics and changing stakeholder expectations, even if their interpretation of public participation is limited.

There are factors that might restrict the persuasiveness of these conclusions. It is possible that the answers given by our respondents do not wholly reflect their actual perception, if they felt “self-presentation concerns” (Krumpal, 2013, p. 2025). Although this effect is usually associated with questions about personal behavior and sensitive information, respondents might see the need to paint a positive picture of their organization in light of reform efforts. However, the impact of this possible incident should remain low, because a social desirability bias presupposes that respondents know of specific assessment criteria against which their answers will be judged (Stocké, 2004). As the introductory text to the survey did not mention the compliance with specific political reform ideas and the items we use to analyze the prevalent public administration model are part of a larger survey covering many different aspects, the respondents should not have such perceptions.

In addition, the design of the survey disregards the possibility that the prevalent model might not be primarily influenced by the tasks formally ascribed to an organization, but by its specific environment, as organizational theory and the contingency approach would suggest (Valeri, 2021). As we included only the largest municipalities into our survey, aiming to control for factors of a specific environment, we cannot say whether the mixture of models found here will hold true for all local FA and SA in Germany. Although the general uniformity of German public administration based on its extensive administrative law makes a compelling case for the transferability of the results, this limitation calls for an expansion of the case study congruent with a different theoretical foundation.

Our discussion begs one follow-up question: are there ways to predict the further development of the prevalence of a particular governance model or the combination of all three models? It seems unlikely that the Weberian principles are steadily losing their influence on local administrative structures and processes to a similar extent as characteristics of newer governance models are implemented. When taking into account the overall low direct and individual citizen involvement in active decision-making following an initial enthusiasm, the rise of NPG to the marked detriment of the Weberian model and NPM seems – at least for the German case – just as improbable at this point in time. Instead, our results suggest an intermixture of ‘new’ public administration models overlaying a strong Weberian tradition that remains, in its core, largely untouched.

Within this mixture, some observations suggest a waning relevance of NPM. After an ambitious and optimistic start, seeing NPM principles as a remedy to

many of the Weberian shortcomings, it has so far not managed to achieve all its goals and rather “seem[s] to have lost the initial enthusiasm” (Lapiente and Van de Walle, 2020, p. 462). Instead, NPM has shown some weaknesses of its own and further reforms can be seen as “rebalancing existing administrative systems” (Christensen, 2012, p. 8). A shrinking element of NPM in the overall mix of governance models could lead to a stronger role of NPG; whether NPG reforms will indeed experience this development, however, cannot be determined yet. Alternatively, the ‘void’ that NPM leaves behind might rather be filled by reinvigorating the Weberian principles, by increasing its relevance within the complete governance model. The linguistic recourse in the form of ‘Neo-Weberian state’, which has been established as a negative reaction to the faults perceived in NPM, would lend itself to this assumption. But as the concept of ‘Neo-Weberian state’ shares several characteristics with both NPM and NPG, such results orientation or citizen involvement (Dunn and Miller, 2007), this is hard to detect. Consequently, the topic calls for further research in the form of repeated surveys and longitudinal observations.

7 Conclusion

Years after NPM reforms aimed to re-orient public administration towards managerial principles, research shows that – although there are major differences between states – hierarchical structures have to some extent been watered down, horizontal coordination has increased, and privatization has become more common over time (Common, 1998; Hyndman and Lapsley, 2016). Furthermore, network collaboration and the involvement of civil society have changed the way administrative organizations interact with the public, coining terms such as NPG (Torfing and Triantafyllou, 2014).

Though new trends in public administration do not necessarily substitute established practices entirely, dominant views may be “supplanted” (Bryson et al., 2014, p. 445) and case studies show that more clear-cut models change towards hybrid forms of governance. As administrative structures are shaped by the administrative cultures in which they evolve (Dan and Pollitt, 2015), it is interesting to analyze the empirical reality of (mixed) governance models in a system that is characterized by a traditionally rigid administrative culture with a strong Weberian history while, at the same time, being subjected to several reforms.

Our survey of German local FA and SA shows that public managers perceive their organizations to still work mainly along the principles of the Weberian model of public administration, implying a stronger impact of administrative culture and traditions rather than reforms. Although some features of NPM and NPG can be found, they do not predominate. Therefore, we inferred a layering of these governance models atop a Weberian base. Within this upper layer, we observe a blend of NPM and NPG, with a slightly higher relevance of NPG characteristics in SA.

The article contributes to the literature in several aspects. First, it expands on studies on the (non-) success of administrative reforms by observing not just the characteristics of one, but of several governance models stemming from very different points in time. It identifies factors which can be seen as determinants for a specific intermixture of models, focusing foremost on administrative culture. Second, it deliberates differences between forms of hybridity such as layering and blending. As a concluding remark, the article calls for an expansion of the design in future research, including repeated observations to validate the assumptions regarding temporal development. Additionally, the presented study is an enlightening starting point for comparative approaches, contrasting the idealtype of a Weberian centered national setting with examples of different or more dynamic administrative cultures.

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